STUDIA TERRITORIALIA

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2**

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Thank you for checking out the latest issue of *Studia Territorialia*.

This issue, 2/2025, is a carryover from our past issue entitled "Borders in Motion." It features three original articles that discuss some highly relevant yet rather under-researched topics in the study of contemporary transnational history and developments in Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

The opening contribution is a study of nationalism and schooling in the Czech-German borderlands during the times of late Austria-Hungary and interwar Czechoslovakia. Based on his scrutiny of the local archives, Mikuláš Zvánovec shows how Czech and German nationalist associations in the Bohemian Lands utilized the growing school infrastructure to assert their identity and territorial control, first of all in the ethnically contested and linguistically mixed areas of that region. He traces the changing societal role of the schoolhouse from a site of instruction to a symbol-laden vehicle for promoting nationalism. He argues that schools were instrumental in the ensuing geopolitical expansion of nationalist ideologies.

Olga Dorokhina, for her part, analyzes Russia's conduct *vis-à-vis* independent Georgia following the 2008 Russian-Georgian War. She meticulously elaborates on Russia's routine, day-to-day border policies and practices in the former South Ossetian Autonomous District, a process that has become infamous as the "borderization" of the occupied territories. She situates Russia's conduct within its broader military-strategic designs aimed at crippling its most vulnerable neighbors. She conceptualizes borderization as part of a gray zone in Russia's war-making toolbox.

Finally, Patricie Ścibior examines the strategic narratives employed by Ukraine's wartime government to keep Russian-occupied Crimea on the

international agenda. In doing so, she analyzes three public diplomacy communication campaigns run by the Kyiv-affiliated Ukrainian Institute from 2020 to 2024.

Besides this, in the review section of the journal you will find a critical appreciation of a recent documentary film by Lívia Šavelková and Milan Durňak, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse*. In her extensive review, Monika Brenišínová offers an informed introduction and insight into the world of contemporary visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking.

Wishing you an enriching read,

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Lucie Filipová and Jan Šír
doi: 10.14712/23363231.2026.1

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ARTICLES

CONSTRUCTING THE NATIONAL TERRITORY OF THE BOHEMIAN LANDS: SCHOOLS AS OUTPOSTS IN THE NATIONALIST STRUGGLE (1880–1938)

MIKULÁŠ ZVÁNOVEC
UNIVERSITY OF HRADEC KRÁLOVÉ

Abstract

Between 1880 and 1938, schools in the Bohemian Lands became battlegrounds of nationhood and instruments of spatial control far beyond the classroom. This article explores how Czech and German nationalist associations turned education into a tool for asserting their cultural presence and redrawing territorial boundaries, particularly in linguistically mixed and contested regions. It traces the evolving role of the schoolhouse not only as a site of instruction but as a symbol of national sovereignty and a vehicle for geopolitical imagining. By examining the interplay between private activism, state policy, and cross-border networks, this study highlights how education contributed to the symbolic and material making of borders in East Central Europe.
Keywords: school politics; nationalism; border-making; Czech-German relations; minority question; Late Habsburg Monarchy; First Czechoslovak Republic
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Mikuláš Zvánovec, Ph.D. is a postdoc researcher at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové. Address correspondence to Univerzita Hradec Králové, Pedagogická fakulta, Rokitanského 62, 500 03, Hradec Králové III; E-mail: mikulas.zvanovec@uhk.cz.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1926/27 school year in Czechoslovakia, the German consulate in Košice reported to the Foreign Office in Berlin:

> The school year that resumed in September has – just as in other parts of Czechoslovakia – sparked lively newspaper debates about the language and minority question in the eastern regions of the republic. This is hardly surprising, as the school system is the primary space where the national character of the population is most visibly expressed. After all, those who control the schools wield the power to shape future generations in line with their national-political agenda."[1]

Such reporting confirms the very close relationship between schooling, language, identity, and political power, which are central pillars of modern nation-building processes.[2] Many such reports concerning school closures, enrollment patterns, and the state's approach towards educational policies[3] underscore the importance of national schooling in its political and spatial dimensions.

Schooling played a decisive role in territorial disputes arising from the ethnic ascriptions that profoundly shaped understandings of the Bohemian Lands' nationalisms between the mid-nineteenth century and the outbreak of the Second World War.[4] From 1867 onward, the question of national territory became a central concern in the "(multi)nationalizing" Habsburg Monarchy.[5] Political instruments alone often proved inadequate for securing or extending the influence of the nationalities that were competing for power.[6]

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[1] Political Archive of the Foreign Office Berlin (hereinafter PAAA), *Report of the German Consulate in Košice to the Foreign Office*, October 4, 1926.

[2] For the intersection of nationalism with intellectual and cultural dominance, as well as political power, see Miroslav Hroch, "Formování národa jako zápas o moc", in *Nacionalismus, společnost a kultura ve střední Evropě 19. a 20. století: pocta Jiřímu Kořalkovi k 75. narozeninám,* ed. Jiří Pokorný, Luboš Velek, and Alice Velková (Praha: Karolinum, 2007), 29–33.

[3] PAAA, Berlin, *Report of the German Consulate in Pilsen to the Foreign Office*, October 7, 1926.

[4] Rex Rexhauser, "Das Schulwesen nationaler Minderheiten in Estland, Lettland, Polen und der Tschechoslowakei zwischen den Weltkriegen," in *Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (1918–1939)***,** ed. Hans Lemberg (Marburg: Herder Institut, 1997), 283.

[5] A term based on Rogers Brubaker and used by Scheer/Stergar to denote the last years before World War I. Tamara Scheer and Rok Stergar, "Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal on Nationalism and Ethnicity* 46, no. 4 (2018): 576, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2018.1448374. See also Peter Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium im tschechischen politischen Diskurs* (München: Oldenbourg, 2010), 42.

[6] Mikuláš Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf in Böhmen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 182–188, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110723397.

While studies on nationalism in Central Europe have long emphasized the symbolic power of language and territory,[7] the practical role of nationalist schooling in this process remains a subject of evolving interpretation. Pieter Judson has shown how national identities in the Habsburg Monarchy were often unstable and strategically negotiated, challenging notions of fixed ethnic boundaries.[8] Tara Zahra, in particular, has highlighted the significance of schooling in shaping national loyalties, especially among children. She frames education as a contested site of identity formation and children as one component of nationalist capital.[9] Other scholars, such as Gary B. Cohen and Jeremy King, have traced the complex interactions between civil society, local activism, and state institutions in Bohemia's multiethnic cities.[10] Still, compared to memorials, street signs, and other visible markers of collectively claimed territory, the specific school activities tied to spatial ambitions and border imaginaries[11] remain to be explored in their complexity. This study links the growing body of nationalism studies with existing scholarship on schooling and education in the Bohemian Lands[12] and contributes to the debates on the role of schooling within the Habsburg state[13]

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[7] For a comprehensive overview see Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*.

[8] Pieter M. Judson, *The Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[9] Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801461910.

[10] Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914*, 2nd ed. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wq6hg. Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv346n6p.

[11] See Rudolf Jaworski and Peter Stachel, eds., *Die Besetzung des öffentlichen Raumes: Politische Plätze, Denkmäler und Straßennamen im europäischen Vergleich* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007). For the territorial dimension of nationalism, see mainly Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*.

[12] Most notably Peter Urbanitsch, *"... das Schulwesen ist und bleibet allzeit ein Politicum ..." Aspekte zur cisleithanischen Bildungsgeschichte 1848–1918* (Wien: ÖAW, 2025); Mirek Němec, *Erziehung zum Staatsbürger?: Deutsche Sekundarschulen in der Tschechoslowakei 1918–1938* (Essen: Klartext, 2010); Mirek Němec, "Ein umkämpftes Gebiet? Deutschsprachiges Schulwesen in der Slowakei der Zwischenkriegszeit (1918–1938)," in *Auslandsdeutsches Schulwesen des 20. Jahrhunderts zwischen "Volkstumsarbeit" und Auswärtiger Kulturpolitik*, ed. Hans-Werner Retterath (Münster: Waxmann, 2021), 145–162; Karel Řeháček, *Jménem národa a pro národ!: české školství v národnostně smíšených oblastech jihozápadu Čech v letech 1880–1945* (Praha: ViaCentrum, 2019); Johann Stefan Schatz, *Unterricht für die "Grenzlanddeutschen": das deutschsprachige Schulwesen im Reichsgau Sudetenland 1938–1945* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023). See also Machteld Venken, *Peripheries at the Centre: Borderland Schooling in Interwar Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), https://doi.org/10.3167/9781789209679.

[13] Peter Urbanitsch, "Das Schulwesen in Cisleithanien – Element eines kooperativen Imperiums?," in *Kooperatives Imperium: politische Zusammenarbeit in der späten Habsburgermonarchie*, ed. Jana Osterkamp (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 95–115.

and its relationships with its postimperial states.[14] It also examines the inter-play between state and private interventions in the field of national schooling and traces related financial ties after 1918 – a field first conceptualized by Rudolf Jaworski and Ronald M. Smelser, whose work has not been convincingly sur-passed to date.[15]

This article addresses the research question of how Czech and German nationalists mobilized emerging school infrastructure to redefine spatial sover-eignty in the Bohemian Lands between 1880 and 1938. Drawing on an extensive corpus of primary sources, including state-generated materials as well as records from private associations, it argues that schools functioned as critical vehicles of nationalism and played a decisive role in the geopolitical expansion of national-ist ideologies. These processes were sustained by substantial public and private investment. Through a comparative analysis of the discursive and performative practices of major Czech and German school associations, the study examines the strategies employed to consolidate control over linguistically mixed terri-tories, to construct "defensible" national frontiers, and to expand or safeguard imagined national spaces by schools as their "outposts." Finally, it traces the internationalization of these strategies after 1918 and situates them within the broader political dynamics of border revisionism, the minority question, and mass mobilization in post-imperial Central Europe.

Secularization and School Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century

After the introduction of compulsory schooling in the Habsburg Empire in 1774, education became a political matter. Maria Theresa sought to cultivate loy-alty to the crown by centralizing authority over education and extending access to broader social strata.[16] However, ongoing liberalization and secularization

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[14] Pieter M. Judson, "Die Habsburgermonarchie – neue Interpretationen," in *Kooperatives Imperi-um: politische Zusammenarbeit in der späten Habsburgermonarchie*, ed. Jana Osterkamp (Göttin-gen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 320. For further context of the debates see Jana Osterkamp, *Vielfalt ordnen: das föderale Europa der Habsburgermonarchie (Vormärz bis 1918)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

[15] Rudolf Jaworski, *Vorposten oder Minderheit?: Der sudetendeutsche Volkstumskampf in den Bezie-hungen zwischen der Weimarer Republik und der ČSR* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1977); Ronald M. Smelser, *Das Sudetenproblem und das Dritte Reich 1933–1938: Von der Volkstumspolitik zur nationalsozialistischen Außenpolitik* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1980). For a recent synthesis on this topic, see for example Miroslav Breitfelder, *Německá říše zasahuje: Úřady, spolky, instituce a čeští Němci: 1918–1938* (Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita, 2021).

[16] Pieter M. Judson, *Habsburg: Geschichte eines Imperiums 1740–1918* (München: C.H.Beck, 2017), 62–63.

in the nineteenth century truly reshaped educational access and purpose. Key turning points – including the 1848 revolutions, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867), and the Imperial School Act of 1869 – emphasized rationalism and civic virtue. The lifting of the forced use of language (*Sprachenzwang*) and official abandonment of bilingual instruction (*language utraquism*) reversed earlier assimilationist school policies.[17] The legislature expanded a dense school network that was completed by 1890, according to Heinrich Rauchberg.[18] As a result, local languages gained ground, aligning education with the Empire's multiethnic reality and broadening participation – but also sparking fears among German elites of a decline in their cultural dominance.[19]

These processes fueled what Pieter Judson calls the nationalists' "obsession with education and its physical embodiment – the schoolhouse."[20] After 1867, schools became sites of ideological struggle. Their role was magnified as national movements appropriated secular education to disseminate nationalist visions, often with quasi-religious zeal.[21] One German publication referred to the schoolhouse as the *Palladium des Volkstums* [22] – a sacred stronghold of national identity. No longer neutral, schools were symbolic battlegrounds in a nationalist holy war. As one Prague observer wrote, "For today's national parties, the school and its building represent what the church and its edifice represented for religious parties before the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War."[23] The new schools' mission came to center on cultivating the national spirit as a means of ensuring cultural survival.[24]

The decline of German liberalism in the late 1870s, along with the rise of Eduard Taaffe's conservative regime in Austria-Hungary, marked a retreat from formal political influence over the schools. In response to language ordinances favoring non-German languages,[25] German liberals turned to civil society

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[17] Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 13, 21–25. On the assimilationist language policy of Josef II, see Judson, *Habsburg*, 111–113.

[18] Heinrich Rauchberg, *Der nationale Besitzstand in Böhmen: Nach der Volkszählung von 1900 dargestellt* (Wien: Alfred Hölder, 1905), 398.

[19] Cohen, *Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 15.

[20] Judson, *The Guardians of the Nation*, 23.

[21] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 10.

[22] Alfred Fischel, *Die Minoritätsschulen* (Brünn: Verlag des Deutschen Vereines, 1900), 1; cited in Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 15.

[23] Joseph Spindler, *Die deutsche Schutzvereinsschule von Werschowitz: Geschichte einer deutschen Schule im tschechischen Sprachgebiete nach den Acten erzählt* (Leipzig: G. H. Meyer, 1898), 24; cited in Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf in Böhmen*, 15.

[24] *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Schulvereins* 24 (1887): 1.

[25] Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium*, 122–124.

for protection. This effort materialized in the Deutscher Schulverein (DSV), founded in Vienna (1880), followed by regional organizations like the Deutscher Böhmerwaldbund (1884) and the Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen (1894). Other national movements in the Monarchy adopted similar strategies: the Ústřední matice školská (ÚMŠ) (1880) became a foundational institution of Czech national education, while Polish efforts in Austrian Silesia coalesced around Macierz Szkolna Księstwa Cieszyńskiego (1885).[26] With these changes, the nationalization of schooling extended far beyond state policy into the fabric of everyday life. Schools became political instruments and contested public spaces, where communities not only engaged in crossing but also in upholding existing language frontiers.[27]

This mobilization of education took on a dramatic and even militant tone in the years leading up to World War I. One striking example of the discourse surrounded the founding of a small German school in the countryside, describing its establishment as follows: "The fortification of the southern gateway into the Schönhengstgau region has been further reinforced through the completion of our [school]house in Chrostau-Oelhütten."[28] Military metaphors – such as "Benecko has been saved"[29] or "Illemnik has been lost"[30] – became common in the nationalist language and influenced everyday school life even in small villages. It often escalated into confrontation, including physical attacks on schoolhouses.[31]

By the eve of the war, German municipalities were sending desperate financial appeals to the DSV in Vienna to support the local schools, often couched in the language of alarm. Letters signed with phrases like *eine Bitte in der Stunde der Gefahr* [a plea in the hour of danger] reflect the prevailing sense of insecurity and the heightened stakes of the nationalist struggle for power, with schoolchildren held hostage in the conflict.[32]

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[26] *Macierz Szkolna wczoraj i dziś* (Czieski Czeszyn: Wydawnictwa Polskiego Związku Kulturalno-Oświatowego, 1992), 6.

[27] Mark Cornwall, "The Struggle on the Czech-German Language Border, 1880–1940," *The English Historical Review* 109, no. 433 (1994): 914.

[28] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 6 (1914), 219.

[29] *Čas*, March 14, 1911, 5.

[30] Hubert Nerad, *Die Erinnerungen eines unpolitischen Wanderers*, ed. Hans-Hubert Nerad (München: n+p Werbeagentur, 2022), 76.

[31] Judson, *The Guardians of the Nation*, 61. (Regarding the violent attack on the German school in Stickau.)

[32] Österreichische Landsmannschaft Wien (hereinafter ÖLM Wien), carton Sprachinseln, fasc. Irschings, letter from the municipality of Irschings to the Deutscher Schulverein, March 25, 1913.

Private Schools Before World War I

The ultimate ambition of national school associations was the establishment of public educational institutions – primarily elementary schools and kindergartens – which would serve both pedagogical and symbolic functions in asserting national identity.[33] However, strategic nationalist aspirations often collided with legal and bureaucratic constraints, most notably §59 of the Imperial School Act (Reichsvolksschulgesetz) of 1869. This clause mandated construction of a public school only where more than forty school-aged children, averaged over five years, lived within an hour's walking distance and more than four kilometers away from an existing public school.[34] In many cases where attendance was weak, nationalist actors insisted on promoting it at all costs in order to maintain their influence. They financed all expenses ranging from the construction or rental of suitable school premises and the acquisition of teaching materials to the remuneration and pensioning of teaching staff. In some cases, even when enrollment was strong, conversion of schools from private to public could be denied due to spatial restrictions of the School Act. For instance, the German private school in Pilsen, founded by the DSV in 1884, rapidly grew to five classes and 275 pupils within three years, becoming one of the largest private national minority schools of its time.[35] Despite its success, the school was scaled back to three classes in 1899 because of the significant financial burden. In 1903, the Administrative Court in Vienna rejected the DSV's petition to convert the school into a public institution, citing the failure to meet legal criteria – specifically, the existence of another German school just 2 kilometers away.[36]

The issue of transforming private into public schools became a flash point in the nationalist school struggle, providing legal avenues of contending for

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[33] František Bělehrádek, "Školství menšinové a Ústřední matice školská," in *Česká politika. Díl pátý: Kulturní, zvláště školské úkoly české politiky*, ed. Jan Auerhahn (Praha: Jan Leichter, 1913), 416; Hannelore Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachengerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995), 90.

[34] § 59 Reichsvolksschulgesetz 62/1869, May 14, 1869, *Reichsgesetzblatt für das Kaiserthum Österreich*, https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=rgb&datum=1869&page=311&size=45.

[35] ÖLM Wien, carton Böhmen, fasc. Deutsche Schutzarbeit in Westböhmen, Deutsche Zeitung – Morgenblatt, September 16, 1886. Other notable examples of large private schools include the German schools in Prague. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv (hereinafter OeStA/AVA), Unterricht, KB, Deutscher Schulverein, carton 12 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Prag-Lieben, Letter from the District School Board to the Deutscher Schulverein, May 25, 1912.

[36] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 1 (1903), 9.

influence.[37] Municipalities often aligned with nationalist associations, exploiting every legal – and also extralegal – means to obstruct such transformations. This included the submission of formal complaints and the exertion of political and economic pressure on the parents of minority schoolchildren, including evictions from their homes.[38] Financial concerns were often invoked as a pretext: municipalities frequently used the alleged burden on local budgets to justify their opposition to private minority schools, even when the underlying motives were undoubtedly of a political nature.

Thus, private schools were perceived as footholds for establishment of future public schools and were met with proactive hostility, which became particularly visible after mandates for bilingualism sparked the Badeni crisis. In Prague-Vršovice (Werschowitz), for example, municipal opposition to a German private school escalated into street violence and the demolition of a part of the school building in 1898.[39] On the other side of the divide, Czech activists and Social Democrats protested against deteriorating conditions in Czech public schools in the German municipalities of Northern Bohemia, culminating in a boycott in 1908.[40] These actions politicized school safety, making it a potent rhetorical weapon. Soon, similar criticisms were leveraged against private schools, which came to be portrayed as dangerous or substandard. At the outset of the 1908/09 school year, the Czech municipality of Markt Türnau (Městečko Trnávka) ordered the closure of a newly opened classroom in the local German private school on the grounds of an unsafe fireplace.[41] This marked the beginning of a broad wave of closures across Cisleithania. In 1909, the municipality of Unter-Themenau (Poštorná) shut down a Czech private school run by the Komenský Association based in Lower Austria.[42] This episode unfolded alongside the failure of the Lex Kolisko-Axmann, a legislative initiative by German parliamentarians seeking to mandate German as the sole language of instruction in Lower Austrian schools.[43] This legislative

[37] Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 138.
[38] Mikuláš Zvánovec, "The Battle over National Schooling in Bohemia and the Czech and German National School Associations: A Comparison (1880–1914)," *Austrian History Yearbook* 51 (2020): 203–224, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237820000156.
[39] Josef Spindler, *Die deutsche Schulvereinsschule in Werschowitz*, 13–20.
[40] Národní archiv Praha (hereinafter NA Praha), Menšinové muzeum, carton 14, Provolání českému lidu o všeobecné stávce školské, December 1, 1908.
[41] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, carton 11 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Markt Türnau, document titled "Die Sperrung der deutschen Schulvereinsschule in Markt Türnau," dated September 12, 1912.
[42] *České slovo*, April 14, 1910, 1.
[43] Hannelore Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867–1918* (Wien: Verlag der ÖAW, 1995), 167–168.

defeat, coupled with increasing local activism, precipitated a series of school closures in Vienna in 1911.[44] This was soon replicated in the Bohemian Lands. One of the central figures in disseminating these tactics was Karl Pochlatko, a travelling teacher (*Wanderlehrer*) employed by the DSV.[45] With his help, school resistance efforts spread, as illustrated for example in the German school chronicle of Botenwald (Butovice): "The persistent resistance of the municipality prevented the opening of the Czech private elementary school, which led all those Czech girls who had received home instruction in the previous school year to enroll in the local German schools."[46] Between 1911 and 1913, Czech private schools were closed in multiple locations across Bohemia and Moravia. This included Ober-Johnsdorf (Horní Třešňovec), Friedrichdorf (Bedřichov), Böhmisch Bernschlag (Peršlák), Prödlitz (Předlice),[47] or Mißlitz (Miroslav).[48] This process triggered a chain reaction. Following the closure of a Czech private school in Hohenelbe (Vrchlabí) in July 1913, retaliation ensued with the closure of the German private school in Benetzko, which in turn provoked efforts to shut down the Czech private school in Harrachsdorf (Harrachov).[49] In anticipation of potential opposition, Czech activists adopted covert tactics, including constructing private school buildings disguised as residential homes, often registered under straw owners to obscure their educational function. In Thurmplandles (Věžovatá Pláně), for instance, the 1908 opening of a covert Czech school disguised as a villa led to physical altercations and attacks on the building itself.[50] Similarly, the Czech private school in Prödlitz (Předlice), secretly constructed in 1912, was quickly shut down by municipal authorities in its first year.[51] The DSV made efforts to monitor and suppress all initiatives undertaken by the Czech minority activists. As one of its internal reports lamented, "Every year, we have to spend considerable

[44] Vlasta Valeš, *Der Schulverein Komenský: 150 Jahre tschechisches Schulwesen in Wien* = *Školský spolek Komenský: 150 let českého školství ve Vídni* (Wien: Schulverein Komenský, 2020), 36.

[45] NA Praha, František Cajthaml-Liberté, carton 7, manuscript *Počátky českého školství v Podkrušnohoří*, [96–97].

[46] Zemský archiv Opava (hereinafter ZA Opava), *Kronika obecné školy Butovice – 1. díl* [online], https://digi2.archives.cz/da/vysledekDetail?page=33&actualDetailTab=attachmentsImg, 75 (accessed April 7, 2025).

[47] *Věstník Ústřední matice školské* (hereinafter *VÚMŠ*) 12 (1912): 180.

[48] *Čas*, October 3, 1913, 6.

[49] Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 148; see also *Podkrkonošský kraj*, September 19, 1913.

[50] Státní okresní archiv Český Krumlov, *Základní devítiletá škola Věžovatá Pláně 1905–1955*, 4–11, https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/801/3.

[51] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, carton 12 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Prödlitz, letter by the local DSV group to the DSV headquarters in Vienna, June 21, 1912.

time and resources tracing the concealed paths by which Czech agitators make their way into German-populated towns and markets, intent on 'blessing' them with Czech schools."[52] This complaint reveals how private schools functioned as strategic instruments for advancing nationalist goals extending beyond formal legal frameworks. The schools emerged as the tip of a broader movement, and were often viewed with deep hostility by the opposing side.

Public Schooling Before World War I

The establishment of public schools did not lead private nationalist associations to relinquish their influence – particularly in linguistically contested regions where their position appeared increasingly precarious. In 1912, for example, the DSV received a letter from the teacher of the public German school in Julienhain (Hranice), expressing concern that declining enrollment could prompt the Czech district school board to close the school's second classroom.[53] In response, the DSV intervened by relocating eight orphans from Vienna to the village, thereby ensuring the continued operation of the class. Controlling school enrollments became a key strategy for counteracting the erosion of national presence. As Tara Zahra has shown, such demographic concerns drove increasing nationalist involvement in social welfare projects, particularly orphanages.[54] The term *Kinderbesiedlung* (child colonization)[55] came to denote strategic resettlement measures aimed at preventing school closures, taken predominantly by German associations. The DSV itself recognized the political utility of these efforts: "There is no doubt that our settlement efforts now represent an instrument of power [*Machtmittel*] in national aspect – one that no other nation in Austria can claim to wield to the same degree. These efforts make it possible to safeguard the existence of every German minority school."[56] By the outbreak of World War I, nearly 1,347 German-speaking orphans had been resettled under this scheme.[57] Although the strategy provoked resistance from Czech

[52] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 12 (1914), 219.
[53] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 11 (1913), 8.
[54] Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 68, 50.
[55] See also Judsons findings regarding the Südmark associations. Judson, *The Guardians of the Nation*, 101.
[56] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 11 (1913), 8.
[57] The Czech associations also used this tool (e.g., in Prachatice), but the number of Czech orphans did not exceed 573. See Tara Zahra, "From Christmas Gifts to Orphan Pensions: How Nationalist Associations Created the Welfare State in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1918" in *Schutzvereine in Ostmitteleuropa*, ed. Peter Haslinger (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2009), 195.

municipalities, a 1902 ruling by the Administrative Court upheld the legality of enrolling resettled orphans into public schools.[58]

Compared to Czech nationalist efforts, which were stronger in the private sector, the DSV devoted more attention and resources to public schools. By 1912, the Czech ÚMŠ was operating 152 private schools in the Bohemian Lands, while the DSV managed only 145 across all of Cisleithania.[59] This imbalance cannot be attributed solely to German resistance to Czech public schools. Indeed, Czech efforts often succeeded despite very determined opposition by the municipalities.[60] The disparity was largely a result of a shifting administrative landscape, with many municipalities coming under Czech political control.[61] This transition compelled the DSV to offer both ideological and practical support in resisting the pressure on the local level. The dynamic elevated the stakes of local elections and censuses, which shaped the makeup of local school boards – positions that nationalist associations actively sought to occupy.[62]

The relationship between school associations and municipal councils was often cemented through subsidies for public schools. In Irschings (Jiřín), for example, the municipal council was unable to comply with the school board's order to rebuild the village schoolhouse after it had burned down. In 1913, a petition requesting 7,000 crowns in aid was submitted to the DSV, explicitly warning that, without such support, the municipality would be forced to "concede to Bohemian influence in local matters."[63] Financial constraints thus became a convenient justification for resistance and legitimated external intervention. The idea of funding a minority school from the

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[58] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 11 (1913), 8. The program was later incorporated into the wider agenda of economic nationalism promoted by the affiliated Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen. See Jitka Balcarová, *"Jeden za všechny, všichni za jednoho!": Bund der Deutschen a jeho předchůdci v procesu utváření "sudetoněmecké identity"* (Praha: Karolinum, 2010), 329.

[59] *VÚMŠ*, no. 9 (1912), 126. In absolute numbers, the difference in public schools supported was not that significant. For example, in 1906, the DSV supported 43 public schools in the Bohemian lands, while the ÚMŠ supported 30 public schools. See *VÚMŠ*, no. 4–5 (1907): 93. *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 5 (1907), 179–180.

[60] For example, in Seestadtl (Ervěnice), Zwodau (Svatava), Bilin (Bílina), Dux (Duchcov), and Brüx (Most). See Jan Auerhahn et al., ed., *Česká politika. Díl pátý: Kulturní, zvláště školské úkoly české politiky* (Praha: Jan Laichter, 1913), 401.

[61] For a recently researched example, Prostějov (Proßnitz), see Andrea Pokludová and Pavel Kladiwa, *The Czech-German Compromise in Moravia: The Cisleithanian Laboratory of the Ethnicization of Politics and Law* (Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2023), 37–38.

[62] Mikuláš Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 166.

[63] ÖLM Wien, carton Sprachinseln, fasc. Irschings, letter from the municipality of Irschings to the Deutscher Schulverein, March 25, 1913.

municipal budget, especially along the language frontier, was beyond the realm of political reality. In Unter-Leutensdorf (Dolní Litvínov), for instance, the ÚMŠ had established a Czech private school with over 100 enrolled children. The local Bund der Deutschen openly feared that the school would soon transition into a public institution – an agitation school (*Hetzschule*) – that would threaten the existing public (German) institutions. As one Bund member bitterly remarked: "It would be deeply painful for the local Germans if the rise of Czech minority schools were to spell the demise of the German kindergarten."[64]

In areas where Czech private schools diverted enrollment from public German schools, the DSV worked to reinforce the attractiveness of the public ones. It increasingly used financial leverage, offering interest-free loans to municipalities. For many villages on the language border, like Altbuch-Döbernei (Starobucké Debrné), a 3,000 crown loan was made on these terms: "As long as the German language remains the sole language of instruction at the school in Altbuch-Döbernei, the municipality (...) is under no obligation to pay interest on, nor to repay, the aforementioned loan."[65] By 1914, at least 181 municipalities had entered into similar agreements, effectively making German-language instruction a condition of financial support.[66] Apart from this, the association provided direct support to both teachers and pupils of public schools. Schoolchildren in these regions received Christmas gifts, warm meals through *Suppenanstalten* (soup kitchens), and access to scholarships. For children from poor families, school fee subsidies ensured continued attendance. Additional aid included funding for student residences (*Studentenheime*), the reimbursement of travel costs and language courses. These initiatives reflected a comprehensive strategy to make the national identity accessible to the masses.[67]

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[64] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, carton 11 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Nieder-Leutensdorf, letter from the local chapter of the of Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen in Brüx to the Deutscher Volksrat in Böhmen in Trebnitz, January 14, 1910.

[65] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, carton 8 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Altbuch-Döbernei, agreement between the Altbuch-Döbernei municipality and the Deutscher Schulverein, dated August 2, 1905.

[66] OeStA/AVA, Deutscher Schulverein, Unterricht, KB, carton 12 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Prag-Korrespondenz mit dem Deutschen Kulturverband in Prag, a list of claims by the Deutscher Schulverein against municipalities and other legal entities in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, May 17, 1922.

[67] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 12 (1913), 223.

Capitalizing the Nation – Privatizing the People

The availability of capital was a crucial prerequisite for private actors to continue and expand their activities in the school sector, and the associations were, therefore, constantly seeking new financial sources. Financing was derived from membership fees, donations, legacies, and proceeds from public collections. The "invention of tradition" served the associations as a practical tool for routinizing or even ritualizing the act of giving through the introduction of entirely new or redefined celebrations, events, and other social practices.[68] In the first few years of its activity, up to 1884, the local chapters of the ÚMŠ organized 47 events, mainly in bigger towns, known as "national celebrations," which were typically accompanied by a market. These events were regarded as highly effective in achieving "excellent results" in terms of fundraising.[69]

The national idea was to be disseminated into the households not only as a cultural and political message but also as an identity-forming brand. This strategy gave rise to a diverse range of relevant merchandise and the sale of these goods established a tangible financial link between national school associations and industry. A closer analysis of the merchandise offered by the ÚMŠ demonstrates that the product range was deliberately tailored for mass consumption, aimed at addressing practical needs both in the workplace and at home. In 1909, it offered a wide variety of items – including soaps, matches, cloths, paper products, pencils, toothbrushes and toothpaste, buttons, as well as tea and coffee – which generated highly lucrative contracts for industrial giants operating in predominantly Czech territories, such as the Solo match factory in Sušice (Schüttenhofen) and the Pilnáček soap factory in Hradec Králové (Königgrätz).[70] The threads of industrial and national aspirations came together at the bank Živnostenská banka, a pivotal institution in the growth of Czech industry and a patron of national associations.[71] For its part, the DSV offered an even broader range of products including pencils produced by the company Hardtmuth in České Budějovice (Budweis),[72] books, jewelry, stamps,

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[68] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For forms the events and rituals took, see Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 64.

[69] *VÚMŠ*, no. 1 (1885): 5.

[70] *VÚMŠ*, no. 9–10 (1909): 308.

[71] Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans: A Study of the Struggle in the Historic Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia* (London: Macmillan, 1938), 40.

[72] Státní okresní archiv Opava (hereinafter SOkA Opava), Deutscher Kulturverband, okresní svaz Hlučín, DKV price list, [n.d.], 5.

postcards, knives, cigarette holders,[73] and firelighters.[74] This extensive assortment reflects the organization's strategic integration into the consumer sphere, wherein national identity was actively promoted by offering material goods to be embedded in various aspects of everyday life. The use of these products was also intended to visibly demarcate the national sphere of influence and reinforce a shared cultural and ideological affiliation.

In addition to strategies aimed at securing financial resources while at the same time making the national brand appealing to the masses, the associations also employed direct forms of economic pressure. As Pieter Judson has shown, long before 1914 they leveraged access to employment and housing, and even offered financial incentives as means of encouraging or preventing attendance at local schools.[75] Evictions became an especially powerful but secret instrument to prevent the opening of new minority schools. From 1903 onward, the association Deutscher Volksrat für Böhmen assumed a central role in orchestrating the expulsion of individuals identified as Czech agitators or as parents who had requested the establishment of public Czech-language schools, with consistent support from affiliated organizations such as the DSV.[76] To facilitate these evictions, as the example of Ervěnice (Seestadtl) shows, the Volksrat offered financial incentives to landlords, aiming not only to remove the tenants themselves but also to suppress their school petition and diminish Czech school demands in the area. The ÚMŠ, which had organized the boycott of the local German public school, responded to the evictions by providing material support to the affected families and organizing alternative housing.[77] In doing so, it effectively made the Volksrat's strategy unsuccessful, as the local group of Volksrat complained:

> Although the Czech agitators – who for decades had lived off German money and eaten German bread – were swiftly evicted by our side and no German property owner would accept Czech tenants any longer, the displaced families found refuge with a Czech builder and owner of nine properties, who took in all the expelled Czech tenant households.[78]

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[73] *Kalender des Deutschen Schulvereines für das Jahr 1910*, 182–183.

[74] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 8 (1910), 168.

[75] Judson, *The Guardians of the Nation*, 104.

[76] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, Deutscher Schulverein, carton 8 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Dux, letter from the Ortsrat Dux to the Deutscher Schulverein, October 16, 1913.

[77] Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 155–157.

[78] Státní okresní archiv Chomutov se sídlem v Kadani (SOkA Chomutov), Archiv města Ervěnice, inv. no. 446, carton 87, appeal by the Ortsrat of Seestadtl to the Deutscher Volksrat für Böhmen, April 1907.

Contrary to the expectations of the Volksrat, its eviction strategy contributed to the acquisition of the nine properties by the ÚMŠ and secured the positions of the Czech workers by the time so that the Czech public school opened in Ervěnice in 1909.[79]

From the very beginning of the national associations' activities, the competencies of local municipalities were misused in the service of nationalist conflict, often with the associations operating behind the scenes. In Prachatice (Prachatitz), as early as 1884, the teacher of a private Czech school complained about the economic pressure exerted by the German municipal council and affiliated associations on poor Czech parents. He reported:

> They (…) dispersed throughout the town, targeting the poor population. The poor were primarily threatened with being denied access to the forest for firewood, which is a matter of survival here. Secondly, they were threatened with dismissal from work, then with the withdrawal of supports, and in old age with exclusion from poorhouses or hospitals. Those from outside the town were threatened with forced expulsion, eviction, or being driven from their homes. The Germans are striving to recruit as many children as possible to prevent the public opening of a Czech school.[80]

It was symptomatic of the political atmosphere that the associations' activities had to remain hidden from public scrutiny. They often came to light only in the press of the opposing national camp, where they were promptly dismissed as mere propaganda. The Czech nationalist press typically remained silent on the more questionable methods employed to establish Czech schools, including the recruitment of pupils and various forms of "corrupting" the people to encourage them to enroll their children in Czech schools. As one letter from a Czech teacher in Prachatice lamented: "We have to pay for flats, for wood, for books and equipment – if we don't do it, they threaten to go to the German school."[81] Conversely, the German press made no acknowledgment of evictions, threats, or other forms of retaliatory actions taken by the municipality in Prachatice.[82]

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[79] Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 157.
[80] Národní archiv Praha (hereinafter NA Praha), Ústřední Matice školská, carton 418, letter from a Czech teacher in Prachatice to the ÚMŠ, September 17, 1884.
[81] NA Praha, Ústřední Matice školská, carton 418, letter from a Czech teacher in Prachatice to the ÚMŠ, January 12, 1888.
[82] Regarding Prachatice, compare *Budivoj*, September 1, 1884, 2 and *Montagsrevue aus Böhmen*, September 15, 1884, 10.

The connection between the associations and the masses, rooted in financial distributions, grew even stronger during the First World War. Although German nationalists in Austria were initially pessimistic about the future,[83] the outbreak of the war offered them new hope. The DSV aligned itself fully with the war effort and – unlike the ÚMŠ – actively engaged in war propaganda.[84] In addition, the associations expanded into the area of youth welfare (*Jugendfürsorge*) and introduced a range of new social practices.[85] With the outbreak of the war, the products sold by the DSV became even more infused with narratives of the heroic German struggle against its enemies than before. The DSV actively promoted romanticism and national cults surrounding figures such as Bismarck, Schiller, and Goethe.[86] The war also increased the importance of the DSV's membership certificates. These were increasingly provided – for a fee – to parents of fallen German soldiers as a memorial for their deceased sons.[87] The certificates played a role of symbolic integration, linking individual life events to the broader narrative of German war sacrifice.

The wartime regime and the alliance between Berlin and Vienna brought a "fleeting moment of empowerment"[88] for German nationalists, enabling them to push back vigorously against the threats they had perceived for decades from other national movements. The traditional discourse of confrontation between Czechs and Germans quickly evolved into denunciation campaigns depicting the Czechs as traitors to the new wartime order.[89] The DSV participated willingly and actively in these campaigns. This development, in which long-opposed German pressure for assimilation was effectively incorporated into state doctrine, compelled prominent representatives of the ÚMŠ, including Přemysl Šámal and František Bělehrádek, to go underground. They immediately began to assist the national resistance and to coordinate with the Czech exile movement centered around T. G. Masaryk.[90] In 1917, after the new emperor, Charles I, abolished the military dictatorship,[91] these circles contributed significantly to the re-mobilization of Czech civil

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[83] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 7–8 (1907), 149.
[84] The Deutscher Schulverein magazine *Der Kampf ums Deutschtum* was renamed in *Der Große Krieg* in 1914 and served as a platform for war propaganda.
[85] Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 80–81.
[86] *Der Große Krieg*, no. 11 (1916), 23.
[87] *Wochenbericht des Deutschen Schulvereins*, September 19, 1918, 1.
[88] Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 104.
[89] Regarding denunciations of the Czechs during World War I, see Judson, *Habsburg,* 517–519.
[90] František Bělehrádek, "Z maffiánských a jiných válečných vzpomínek," *Naše revoluce* 6, no. 1–2, 1.
[91] Judson, *Habsburg*, 536.

society.[92] Whereas in 1914 the DSV had surpassed the ÚMŠ for the first time since 1897 in terms of financial resources, the changes of 1917 brought the ÚMŠ back into contention. By that time, both organizations – each managing nearly 1.4 million crowns in assets[93] – had resumed their efforts to mobilize capital as a weapon in their ongoing struggle for dominance.

Despite its many restrictions, World War I in fact boosted the associations' activism, placing new and heavier demands on the organizations amid widespread uncertainty about the postwar future and the solution of the national question. At the beginning of 1918, the DSV proudly proclaimed that many of its local chapters had achieved their "greatest successes" precisely during the war years.[94] Both the DSV and the ÚMŠ forged a strong symbolic and material link between the military and the home front by involving front-line soldiers and officers in their fundraising campaigns.[95] The financial networks reveal the division of soldiers within the Austrian army into different national camps. The Czech opposition to the wartime regime, later mythologized after 1918[96] – was rooted in the Czechs' unwillingness to fight for German imperialism.[97] This opposition was based in a vibrant, bottom-up association network including teachers and the underground resistance circles surrounding figures like Karel Kramář and Alois Rašín (both convicted of treason), as well as representatives of "high" Czech exile politics.[98]

On the other side, analysis of the discourse of the German nationalists does not necessarily confirm their loyalty to the Emperor; rather, they saw the war as a pivotal opportunity for advancing their vision of a distinctly German state defined by the war alliance.[99] Ultimately, the wartime experience not only exacerbated tensions among Austrian citizens serving within the same military structure, but also reinforced their social, financial, and ideological attachments to their national groups. The school associations grew into some of the most

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[92] See also Milada Paulová, *Dějiny Maffie, Díl 1: Ve znaku persekuce* (Praha: Čs. Grafická unie, 1937), 9.

[93] NA Praha, Ústřední matice školská, sign. 690, carton 60, Zápis z valné hromady spolku [1919], see also *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 1 (1918), 203.

[94] *Wochenbericht des Deutschen Schulvereins*, January 31, 1918, 1.

[95] Collections for the ÚMŠ, destined for the schools, were organized by the newspaper *Národní listy*. See *Wochenbericht des Deutschen Schulvereins*, July 4, 1918, 1; *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 6 (1918), 139.

[96] Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 85.

[97] Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, 70.

[98] Bělehrádek, "Z maffiánských a jiných válečných vzpomínek," 1.

[99] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (ÖStA/HHStA), Nachlass Gustav Groß, carton 4, letter from Gustav Groß to members of the Deutscher Nationalverband, August 23, 1914.

powerful mass organizations in Austria-Hungary, consciously seeking near-total influence, not only over schoolchildren – who were in some cases regarded merely as instruments[100] – but also over the broad masses. The process of shaping public loyalty was bound to imagined national territorial claims and the realization of an anticipated nation-state.[101]

The Minority School Question as State Policy after 1918

Already at the beginning of 1918, Gustav Groß, the leader of the DSV, saw the end of the old order coming:

> [We are still] facing a world of enemies who, under the sanctimonious and hypocritical pretense of fighting for justice, freedom, and civilization, pursue nothing less than the subjugation of the entire world to the Anglo-American money bag, the overthrow of the German Empire, and the annihilation and dismemberment of Austria-Hungary.[102]

But the creation of Czechoslovakia as part of the Versailles system in 1918–19 may have exceeded even the worst fears of German nationalists, who now found themselves at the mercy of an adversary they had long tried to defeat.[103] In essence, the establishment of Czechoslovakia represented the one-sided realization of a long-contested border concept. The Allies endorsed Czech claims to their historical lands and their borders, disregarding any notion of German national sovereignty within the new state. Moreover, prominent figures in the ÚMŠ, such as Přemysl Šámal and Jindřich Metelka, played a decisive role in policy-making in the new state.[104] The vision of the ÚMŠ was fully incorporated into the new country's school legislation – most notably the Minority Schools Act of April 3, 1919 (also known as *Lex Metelka*).[105] The Act directly addressed ÚMŠ's negative experiences with pressure and resistance from German municipalities by stripping them of all their authority over minority schooling and transferring those

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[100] ÖLM Wien, carton Mähren, fasc. Lodnitz, letter from the local chapter of the Deutscher Schulverein in Brünn to the main office in Vienna, March 25, 1918.

[101] NA Praha, Ústřední Matice školská, carton 417, appeal titled "Čechové," September 1918.

[102] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 16 (1918), 195.

[103] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 17 (1919), 107.

[104] Přemysl Šámal became Chancellor to the President of the Republic. Jindřich Metelka was appointed Chairman of the Provincial School Board.

[105] Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 167.

powers to the state, specifically the newly established Ministry of Education and National Culture. The new law was designed to guarantee the unhindered development of Czech schools, granting the (Czech) chairmen of the provincial school boards extensive authority to close or reduce the existing school network. Most importantly, section five of the Act permitted the construction of new schools regardless of whether all legal requirements had been formally met.[106] Moreover, the shortage of facilities became a practical excuse for seizing German school buildings and displacing their teachers.[107] Such seizures were legitimized by the law of June 11, 1919, which authorized the confiscation of private property.[108] The so-called Small School Law of 1922 dealt a further blow to German schools by prohibiting the effective practice of child colonization.[109] The language frontier began to disintegrate as a traditional battlefront as the new political organs, the Czech municipal councils and associations, resumed school closures. This affected mainly the private DSV-schools, which were seen as German national outposts.

By the end of 1919, ten German private schools and 12 private kindergartens had been closed and repurposed.[110] The private school in Oppahof (Dvořisko), which belonged to the DSV, was directly taken over by the ÚMŠ: "The National Committee handed over the first floor of the school building – including the classroom, teaching materials, and the administrative office – to the Czech school association, which used the premises to open a Czech private school."[111] The process evoked violent confrontations, as frustrated local Germans targeted Czech schools, seen by them as symbols of national conquest, breaking windows and defacing Czech-language inscriptions.[112] Resistance was particularly strong

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[106] Zákon č. 189/1919 Sb., o školách národních a soukromých ústavech vyučovacích [Law No. 189/1919 Coll., on National Schools and Private Educational Institutions].

[107] Státní okresní archiv Svitavy se sídlem v Litomyšli, chronicle of the Czech school in Chrastová Lhota, p. 3.

[108] Zákon č. 332/1919 Sb., o zabírání budov nebo jejich částí pro účely veřejné [Law No. 332/1919 Coll., Concerning the Requisition of Buildings or Their Parts for Public Purposes].

[109] Zákon č. 226/1922 Sb., o organizaci veřejné správy školské [Law No. 226/1922 Coll., on the Organization of Public School Administration], § 5, sub-para. 5, which stated that only pupils residing in the municipality were to be counted in school statistics. For the role of orphanages in the nationalist association activities, see Zahra, "From Christmas Gifts to Orphan Pensions," 195; Balcarová, *"Jeden za všechny, všichni za jednoho!"*, 329; and Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 144–145.

[110] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 17 (1919), 193.

[111] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, Deutscher Schulverein, carton 12 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Oppahof, letter from August Mohilla to the Deutscher Schulverein, June 14, 1919.

[112] Státní okresní archiv Domažlice (SOkA Domažlice), Chronicle of the Czech School Orlovice, 8, https://www.portafontium.eu/chronicle/soap-do/00322-skola-orlovice-1921-1935; Státní

in municipalities with German-dominated councils, where the establishment of Czech schools was perceived as a challenge to traditional local authority. In many cases, these councils refused to comply with state directives to provide space for Czech institutions.[113] In Tachau (Tachov), the local mayor himself even participated in the physical destruction of temporary premises designated for the first Czech school.[114] The escalating tensions surrounding the reduction of German schooling culminated in October 1920 with a two-day school boycott.[115] At that point, the German association circles even contemplated demolishing some of their own properties in order to prevent their transfer to the Czech hands.[116]

The Minority School Act may have initially raised hopes that the state would support all minority schools, including those of the German minority. However, in most cases this proved infeasible, as local schoolchildren were redirected to newly established Czech schools, effectively dooming the German schools to closure. In Prapořiště (Braunbusch), for example, the public German school, whose building was privately owned by the DSV, was forced to vacate the premises to make room for a new Czech school. The Czech district authorities made a conciliatory gesture by offering the displaced German school the opportunity to relocate to a smaller building nearby owned by the ÚMŠ.[117] The DSV had no choice but to accept the offer, which it likely would have rejected prior to 1918; it was an arrangement that offered little promise for the continued existence of the German school. The enrollment of German-speaking pupils in the newly established Czech school, along with its plans to open a second classroom, only accelerated the decline in attendance at the German school, which ultimately had to be closed.[118]

okresní archiv České Budějovice (hereinafter SOkA České Budějovice), Chronicle of the Czech School Německý Benešov, 6, https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/381444/6/1902/1884/21/0 (both accessed February 28, 2025).

[113] Státní okresní archiv Český Krumlov (hereinafter SOkA Český Krumlov), Chronicle of the Czech School in Dolní Dvořiště, https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/1214/7/1116/650/48/0 (accessed February 28, 2025).

[114] Hana Marková, "České a německé školství na Tachovsku" (M.A. Thesis, University of West Bohemia, 2019), 31, 43.

[115] SOkA Český Krumlov, Chronicle of the German School in Ernstbrunn, 82, https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/306265/82/1347/2266/95/0 (accessed February 28, 2025).

[116] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, Deutscher Schulverein, carton 14 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Selsen, letter from the headquarters of the Deutscher Kulturverband to the Deutscher Schulverein in Vienna, February 4, 1922. See also: List of the Real Property of the Deutscher Schulverein, May 17, 1922.

[117] ÖLM Wien, carton Böhmen, fasc. Braunbusch, letter from the district government in Domažlice to the Deutscher Schulverein in Vienna, March 31, 1920.

[118] Základní škola Prapořiště, "Historie školních budov," https://skolnibudovy.npmk.gov.cz/budova/619 (accessed February 28, 2025).

The erection of the new border following the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 had a profound impact on the DSV, which was forced to sever its ties with Vienna and was compelled to reorganize within the new state under its jurisdiction. As a result, a successor organization – the Deutscher Kulturverband (DKV) – was established on November 2, 1919 in Prague. It assumed responsibility for managing German minority schooling as well as the legal defense of the 87 properties owned by the DSV in the Czechoslovak Republic.[119] Ludwig Krieg, a lawyer and the founder of the DKV, filed complaints with the Ministry of Education and the Administrative Court against the mandated school shutdowns.[120] His efforts bore fruit in 1922, when the Administrative Court issued a landmark ruling in the case of the closure of the German school in Selsen (Želivsko), which established the precedent that premises once designated for a German private school could no longer be requisitioned for other educational purposes. This principle was subsequently reaffirmed in several similar cases.[121]

Whereas in the early 1920s the DKV filed one complaint after another against school closures along with requests to establish private schools as replacements for the closed public institutions, the Czech school association assumed the role of a proactive servant of the Czechoslovak state. Together with other national organizations such as the Národní jednota pošumavská, it actively promoted the establishment of new Czechoslovak state schools in predominantly German-speaking municipalities. These efforts often extended far beyond the language border, using state-sponsored education as a tool to seize control in those areas and secure the borders of the new republic.[122] New schools were established quite hastily and many of them were set up in unconventional spaces such as the taproom of a pub,[123] the waiting room of a railway station,[124] or even

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[119] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, Deutscher Schulverein, carton 13 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Korrespondenz mit dem Deutschen Kulturverband Prag, list of all claims asserted by the Deutscher Schulverein in Vienna against municipalities and other legal entities in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, May 17, 1922.

[120] Biographical information on Ludwig Krieg (born February 26, 1861, Tachau, died January 20, 1933, Prague), in Biographische Sammlung, Collegium Carolinum, Munich; see also *Volksdienst*, February 1, 1933, 1.

[121] Tätigkeitsbericht über das Jahr 1929, presented at the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Deutscher Kulturverband in Aussig, June 8, 1930, 9. (Mentions court cases on school closures in Benecko/Benetzko, Hlavnice/Glomnitz, Náhlov/Nahlau, Orlovice/Silberberg, Řeřichy/Röscha, Terešov/Tereschau, and Dolní Chrášťany/Unter-Groschum).

[122] *Sborník vydaný k 45. výročí založení Národní jednoty pošumavské* (Praha: Národní jednota pošumavská, 1930), 42–43.

[123] SOkA České Budějovice, School Chronicle of the Czech School in Dolní Chrášťany, 5, https://digi .ceskearchivy.cz/306292/5/1784/2258/34/0 (accessed February 28, 2025).

[124] Marková, *České a německé školství na Tachovsku*, 50.

a forester's house.[125] The very first modern Czechoslovak state minority school building was opened on 9 September 1923 in Dolejší Těšov (Unter-Teschau), initiating a tradition of providing modern school buildings "for a mere handful of Czech children."[126] These schools became a frequent target of criticism by the DKV and the German political parties, because such "school palaces"[127] were perceived as symbols of Prague's centralism and Czech nationalization efforts.

By the end of 1922, there were a total of 750 state elementary minority schools in the Bohemian lands located mostly in provisional premises, but only 18 of them used German as the language of instruction.[128] At the same time, an official complaint submitted by the Germans in Czechoslovakia to the League of Nations reported the closure of 144 German schools and 1,036 German classrooms.[129] The Czechoslovak state authorities typically justified the closures as a form of compensation for the obstruction of the expansion of Czech schools prior to World War I, arguing that "half-empty schools were maintained solely for the purpose of luring Czech children into them."[130] This reactive line of reasoning was typical of the Czech parliamentary deputies[131] and was clearly rooted in the logic of an ongoing nationalist struggle,[132] which had not ended with the war but merely taken on new forms. A significant wave of construction of architecturally valuable school buildings by the ÚMŠ, carried out in the interest of the state, was triggered by the tenth anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic. This jubilee was celebrated, among other things, by the erection of imposing Czech state school

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[125] SOkA České Budějovice, School Chronicle of the Czech School in Hrádek/Pěčín, https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/436618/5/1412/1684/51/0 (accessed February 28, 2025).

[126] Bývalá státní menšinová škola Dolejší Těšov, https://skolnibudovy.npmk.gov.cz/budova/636 (accessed on October 9, 2025); Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, 209.

[127] *Reichenberger Zeitung*, January 8, 1925, 3.

[128] Archiv kanceláře prezidenta republiky (Archive of the President's Office), Prague, sign. T 2150/21, Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty, no. I–II., carton 74. Exposé by the Minister of Education, March 8, 1923. The cited numbers revise upward the significantly lower numbers (40 schools until 1927) reported in recent historiography. Hildegard Schmoller, "Das zehnjährige Republikjubiläum in der Tschechoslowakei 1928," in *Zusammenbruch, Trauma, Triumph: Das Epochenjahr 1918 und sein Nachleben in Zentral-, Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa*, ed. Steffen Höhne (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020), 158.

[129] *Deutsche Parlamentarier an den Völkerbund: Eine Ergänzung der im Sommer 1922 dem Völkerbund überreichten Denkschrift deutscher Parlamentarier* (Prag: [n.p.], 1923), 80–81.

[130] NA Praha, Ministerstvo vyučování a národní osvěty, carton 1993, letter from the Presidium of the Moravian Provincial School Council to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, October 22, 1923, regarding complaints about the closure of German schools in Moravia.

[131] Speech by Czech Agrarian deputy František Hnídek during the Session of the Chamber of Deputies, September 29, 1925, https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/365schuz/s365005.htm.

[132] On reactivity as a strategic characteristic of the Czech school association Ústřední matice školská, see Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf*, 182.

buildings. In 1928, the ÚMŠ completed the construction of 16 new schoolhouses, while numerous additional schools were built by other associations as well.[133]

The existence of only 18 (and until 1927 only 14)[134] German-minority state schools was seen by the DKV as an abuse of state power by the Czechs. For example, in Grätz-Podoli (Hradec nad Moravicí – Podolí), the German state minority school was established after the expropriation of the DKV's building.[135] In Kumpatitz (Humpolec u Sušice), the DKV regarded the establishment of the state German school as merely an administrative maneuver aimed at "destroying the German school in [nearby] Albrechtsried."[136] The Albrechtsried school was considered more important because of its location on the language border. After 1919 it was replaced by a Czech school. Moreover, opening the German state school in Kumpatitz did not do justice to the concept of a minority school, as the new school was replaced from a linguistically mixed village to the hinterlands.[137]

While conditions for minority schooling varied significantly across the republic, the Czechoslovak authorities were notably more permissive in Slovakia and, to a lesser extent, in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where the Minority School Act did not apply and administrative barriers were fewer.[138] In contrast, the situation in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia proved far more restrictive, with repeated obstruction of efforts by the DKV to reconstruct the disintegrated German-minority school system. As a result, the issue often escalated to the parliamentary level. German deputies regularly intervened on behalf of the DKV, drawing attention to bureaucratic inconsistencies and delays[139] – most notably in the widely discussed case of the closure of the German school in Selsen (Želivsko), as can be seen on the following interpellation to the Ministry of Education:

> On June 14, 1923, it was shown that the provincial school board in Selsen had returned the matter to the district school council of Mährisch-Trübau, requesting that it should

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[133] Schmoller, "Das zehnjährige Republikjubiläum," 158–159.

[134] *Československé školy v republice Československé ve školním roce 1927/28* (Praha: [n.p.], 1929), 199. For criticism of the situation, see *Deutsche Parlamentarier an den Völkerbund*, 75.

[135] SOkA Opava, Chronicle of the German School in Grätz-Podoli 1920–1938, [1–2].

[136] Tätigkeitsbericht über das Jahr 1929, presented at the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Deutscher Kulturverband in Aussig, June 8, 1930, 10.

[137] Ibid.

[138] For the activities of the Deutscher Kulturverband in Slovakia, see G. Wilscher, *Das Schulwesen der karpathendeutschen Siedlungen im Gebiete der Tschechoslowakischen Republik* (Prag: [n.p.], 1928). See also Němec, "Ein umkämpftes Gebiet?"

[139] The inconsistencies and delays can be seen as reactions to perceived bureaucratic complications in the prewar era. NA Praha, Presidium ministerské rady (PMR), sign. 1910, carton 58, report from the Police Directorate to the Governor's Presidium, August 5, 1908.

submit a report. As of October 27, 1923, the file was still with the district council. During a meeting of the district council on October 31,1923, one of its members raised the issue of the delay in the matter. The chairperson refused to respond. Due to this delay, home-based private instruction had to be introduced in Selsen, but it faced significant difficulties. Registration of the home-schooling proposal was not acknowledged because it had been submitted in German. The parents of the privately educated children were penalized on the grounds that their children were neglecting their compulsory schooling. On November 23, 1923, during an intervention, it was determined that the provincial school board had finally instructed the district council to resubmit the file. On February 6, 1925, it was reported in Brno that the file had finally arrived at the provincial school board and had been assigned to the provincial school inspector. The latter had supposedly passed it on to the presidium of the provincial school board, but the file could no longer be found. The DKV was advised to resubmit its application to open a new school along with the required documentation.[140]

As this case illustrates, the difficulties with reopening German schools as private institutions led to the emergence of illegal home-schooling. In 1921, there were eleven locations where German teachers were conducting instruction for schoolchildren in private homes.[141] The issue of home-schooling became particularly contentious in the Hlučín (Hultschin) Region (which had been part of Prussian Silesia until 1919). There, the Czechoslovak authorities blocked all efforts to establish new German schools and later even prohibited the parents from sending their children to German schools in Opava (Troppau).[142] This policy led to the dismissal of German teachers, school strikes, and propagandistic activities from Germany.[143]

Internationalization of Minority Schooling and State Revisionism

Perceiving Czechoslovakia and its *raison d'étre* as hostile to German national interests in education from the very beginning, the DKV began to seek closer

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[140] Interpellation of deputies Dr. Spina, Dr. Schollich, Dr. W. Feierfeil, Simm, Dr. Kafka, and others to the Minister of Education and National Enlightenment regarding the alleged obstruction by school authorities in Bohemia and Moravia of the founding of German private schools, May 13, 1925, https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t5133_03.htm.

[141] *Volkskalender des Deutschen Kulturverbandes* 1922, 128.

[142] Táňa Klapcová, "Problematika školství na Hlučínsku v letech 1920–1930 jako námět pro projektovou výuku," (M.A. thesis, Masaryk University, 2020), 14.

[143] Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí České republiky (hereinafter AMZV), Prague, II. sekce, carton 299, document titled "*Irredenta na Hlučínsku. Spolek R.V.H.H.*", 68–73.

ties with Berlin after its forced separation from Vienna. In fact, these connections already dated back to 1881, when the Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein (after 1908 the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland, VDA) was established in Berlin to support the interests of the Viennese Schulverein. The VDA directly coordinated its agenda with public schools in the German Reich, which were made aware of the German national struggle in Austria and started to forward proceeds from public and school collections to Vienna.[144] When the school struggle resumed in 1917, efforts were made to strengthen the connections between Vienna and Berlin as much as possible in order to counter anticipated losses in educational opportunities. On November 1, 1917, for example, the VDA regional chapter in Breslau supported the construction of a new school building in Svinov (Schönbrunn) across the border in Austrian Silesia with a contribution of 3,100 crowns.[145] In this sense, not only financial ties, but also patronage over particular regions or schools, were in place long before World War I. For example, the VDA regional chapter in Saxony in Dresden regularly supported the German schools in Třebenice (Trebnitz) with more than 3,000 crowns a year.[146] World War I heightened the importance of minority schooling, as evidenced by the fact that, toward its end, Kaiser Wilhelm and Marshal Hindenburg assumed honorary chairmanships of the VDA.[147] Through this organization, the German emperor not only provided financial support to Germans living outside the German Reich, but also legitimized nationalist engagement in the eyes of the public, thereby enhancing its political and symbolic significance in the war effort. Machteld Venken says that once the state border line was drawn, decisions about the languages used in borderland primary schools became a prominent way of making the new border real.[148] Immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the VDA in the Weimar Republic aligned itself closely with the government. It took on the sensitive political agenda, while allowing the government institutions in Berlin to maintain official neutrality. In the VDA's budget plan for the 1919/20 school year, requests were submitted to the Foreign Office for the disbursement of funds to German schools in Czechoslovakia.[149]

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[144] *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Schulvereins*, no. 3 (1882), 17.

[145] OeStA/AVA, Unterricht, KB, carton 13 Böhmen und Mähren, fasc. Schönbrunn, confirmation to the Deutscher Schulverein, November 1, 1917.

[146] ÖLM Wien, carton Böhmen, fasc. Trebnitz. Accounting Civil School Trebnitz 1914–1915, attachment to a letter from the DKV to the DSV, dated November 25, 1922.

[147] *Der getreue Eckart*, no. 16 (1918), 217.

[148] Machteld Venken, *Peripheries at the Centre: Borderland Schooling in Interwar Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), 86.

[149] PAAA Berlin, RZ 508 1, R 63580, funding list of the Association for Germans Abroad, January 12, 1920. (Including mentions of Loděnice near Opava [Lodnitz] and Královo Pole near Brno [Königsfeld]).

In this context, the DKV, as the largest German organization in the Czechoslovak Republic, became the primary recipient of subsidies provided by the German Foreign Office and the Reich Ministry of the Interior and distributed through the VDA. From 1925 at the latest, it received an annual subsidy amounting to 60,000 Reichsmarks.[150] By the mid-1920s, these subsidies accounted for at least ten percent of the DKV's total income.[151] The VDA increasingly provided school funding to Czechoslovakia through new channels established after 1918 – mainly the German legation in Prague and German consulates throughout the Czechoslovak Republic. This included, for example, the aforementioned private instruction in the Hlučín (Hultschin) region, as well as several secondary schools that cooperated directly with Berlin, most notably the Volkshochschule in Brno and the Bauernvolkshochschule in Velké Losiny (Groß-Ullersdorf), founded in 1924.[152]

It became increasingly evident that Berlin was gaining growing influence within the German civic nationalist framework in the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy. A similar development was occurring in Austria at the same time, where by 1925 both major nationalist associations – the Schulverein and the Südmark – had come under the control of the VDA.[153] In contrast to Austria, however, the channels between Czechoslovakia and Berlin had to remain strictly clandestine. Especially after the enactment of the Czechoslovak Law for the Protection of the Republic in 1923, the Prague headquarters of the DKV came under intensified police surveillance. Hanns Prohaska, secretary of the DKV, is said to have complained about the severity of this scrutiny during a visit to Prague by the head of the VDA, stating that "all mail addressed to them from the Reich was being opened by the Czechs, making correspondence between the Kulturverband and the Reich virtually impossible."[154] To circumvent this surveillance, further correspondence from Berlin to the DKV regarding school support was

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[150] PAAA Berlin, RZ 508 1, R 63582, application of the VDA for the fiscal year 1925, attachment to the letter dated February 14, 1925. The Deutscher Böhmerwaldbund received 2,000 Reichsmarks; the Bund der Deutschen received 13,000 Reichsmarks.

[151] PAAA, Berlin, R 63583 Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (VDA), memorandum to Reich Minister Stresemann, August 30, 1926; Tätigkeitsbericht des Deutschen Kulturverbandes für das Jahr 1929, 45–46.

[152] Manfred Alexander, ed., *Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag: Innenpolitik und Minderheitenprobleme in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), 126, 371.

[153] ÖLM Wien, carton Gustav Groß. Nachruf auf Gustav Groß [1935]; see also *Allgemeiner Tiroler Anzeiger*, June 3, 1925, 5.

[154] PAAA Berlin, R 62448, Deutsches Schulwesen in der Tschechoslowakei, letter from the VDA to the Foreign Office, June 25, 1926.

henceforth routed through the diplomatic courier service of the German Foreign Office and the German legation in Prague.[155]

At secret Dresden meetings between the German associations in Czechoslovakia and the VDA, schooling was one of the central topics. During one such meeting, Josef Taschek, the head of the Deutscher Böhmerwaldbund and the last German mayor of Budweis (Budějovice) before 1918, remarked succinctly: "Czech schools are being built everywhere."[156] Indeed, the ÚMŠ and its partner associations were making significant efforts at the time to be visibly present along the state border, establishing state schools in very small and remote German villages. In the small German village of Plöß (Pleš), the ÚMŠ established a Czech school and a kindergarten after 1929, which were to be filled mostly by local German-speaking children. In order to keep their parents sending them there, the ÚMŠ district chapter in Pilsen (Plzeň) organized financial and material support for the parents.[157] These processes were not really successful, as by 1933 most of the children had returned to the German school. The local Czech minority teacher condemned them in a private letter decisively:

> You're probably glad to be gone from Pleš, that cursed nest – I fully understand it. I'm planning to get out of here myself as soon as possible, even if it means accepting a permanent position somewhere in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. (…) I hold very different views about the school in Pleš; in my opinion, it would be in the best interest of the state to shut it all down. It's nothing but a waste of money on the Germans – money that would be better spent on Czech children in the interior.[158]

Unofficial financial support for children and parents linked to Czechoslovak state minority schools was enabled through channels organized by associations like the ÚMŠ. In extremely impoverished areas such as Hurkenthal (Hůrka) near Markt Eisenstein (Železná Ruda), this support was, notably, often the only form of aid available to many poor German families.[159]

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[155] Ibid.

[156] PAAA Berlin, R 510 1, R 60328, Minutes of the Sudeten German Meeting in Dresden on November 22–23, 1930, 23–24. See also Jaworski, *Vorposten oder Minderheit*, 121–125.

[157] Státní oblastní archiv Plzeň (SOA Plzeň), Ústřední Matice školská (ÚMŠ), carton 6, fasc. Pleš, letter from the schoolteacher in Plöß to ÚMŠ Pilsen, August 6, 1933.

[158] Ibid., private letter of the schoolteacher Josef Pešek to a colleague, October 10, 1933.

[159] Chronicle of the Czech State School in Hůrka, 22–23, https://www.portafontium.eu/iipimage /30460685/soap-kt_02086_skola-hurka-1918-1938_0140?x=92&y=471&w=494&h=238 (accessed April 9, 2025).

Both the government in Prague and the Czech associations on the one side and Berlin with its associational network on the other focused their activities already far beyond the language border, where the confrontation originally took place before World War I. Berlin also extended its influence primarily through economic means. For this purpose, the brokerage and trading company OSSA (OSSA Vermittlungs- und Handelsgesellschaft) was founded in 1926 – later operating under the name Vereinigte Finanzkontore. Although formally a private capital company, the OSSA functioned as a tool of economic influence in German-populated regions beyond the former borders of the Reich, establishing "internally sound central money institutions for German economic activity."[160] The OSSA played a significant role by strategically acquiring key banks and thereby reinforcing the economic foundation of the German minority. By 1933, the OSSA had invested 13 million Reichsmarks in Czechoslovakia, making the region the second largest recipient of its funds after Poland.[161] The OSSA intervened, for example, in the restructuring of the Kreditanstalt der Deutschen. The purpose of these capital flows was not only to safeguard the purchasing power of the German population abroad, but mainly to make it resistant to the economic pressure of the Czechoslovak state.[162] Numerous other organizations from the Reich contributed to the growing dependence of German schooling in Czechoslovakia on Berlin. For example, the funding of homeschooling in the Hlučín (Hultschin) Region, including the teachers, as well as various propaganda activities, fell under the responsibility of the Reich German Deutsche Stiftung and the Reichsverband heimattreuer Hultschiner.[163] Contacts with these organizations, classified as irredentist under the Law for the Protection of the Republic of 1923, were frequently the subject of legal measures in Czechoslovakia, such as the refusal of visas to members of the irredentist organizations (1927),[164] the Jihlava Trial (1925), the Volkssport Trial (1932),[165] and the Patscheider Trial

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[160] Undated record taken by Reichstag deputy von Lindeiner-Wildau, Minutes of a Discussion on German-Bohemian Banks, April 21, 1927, in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945*, series 1925–1933 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1972), 219.

[161] PAAA, Berlin, RZ 214, R 100903, Volkstumsfragen, report on a review of the Vermittlungs und Handelsgesellschaft m.b.H., 57.

[162] Ibid. See also Ronald M. Smelser, "The Betrayal of a Myth: National Socialism and the Financing of Middle-Class Socialism in the Sudetenland," *Central European History* 5, no. 3 (1972): 259–264.

[163] ZA Opava, Pz Reinhold Weigel, inv. no. 30, carton 15, German Foundation to Reinhold Weigel, December 16, 1932.

[164] AMZV Praha, section II., carton 312, dispatch of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Presidents of the Provincial Political Authorities, April 26, 1927.

[165] Breitfelder, *Německá říše zasahuje*, 55–57.

(1936).[166] However, these trials failed to uncover the full extent of the operations and structures of the secret German operational networks.[167] Regarding the organization of homeschooling in the Hlučín (Hultschin) region, for example, the DKV's leader, Rudolf Funke, was reportedly the only person fully initiated into the inner workings of the entire system by the VDA.[168] The remarkable increase in the annual revenues of the DKV, which rose from 2.5 million crowns in 1920 to nearly 9 million crowns in 1937[169] – is linked to the intensively growing financial streams from Germany.

A decisive moment came in 1933, when Adolf Hitler seized power in Germany and the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront (after 1935 the Sudetendeutsche Partei, SdP) was founded in Czechoslovakia. The new party increasingly eclipsed the role of the DKV and, following its success in the 1935 elections in Czechoslovakia, became Nazi Germany's principal instrument for advancing its revisionist and expansionist agenda – which was also aimed at the sphere of education.[170] The SdP intensified and expanded upon existing criticisms concerning the establishment of Czechoslovak state schools for German children, making it an effective tool of pressure on Prague. The SdP's criticisms were not difficult to substantiate, as some of the issues they raised were already acknowledged by the Czechoslovak authorities.[171]

The DKV started losing its prominent political influence in Berlin, but still pursued its school agenda, mainly the creation of private schools in places where former public schools were closed after 1919. As the largest German organization in Czechoslovakia, the DKV came under immense pressure after 1933 from the Bund der Deutschen and the SdP, both of which sought the unification of all Sudeten Germans within ČSR. At a time when most nationalist organizations had already fallen under the influence of Henlein's followers, the DKV's leader, August Gessner,[172] remained committed to maintaining the

[166] BA Berlin, R 4902, 5714, fasc. Tschechoslowakei – Patscheiderprozess, März 1936.

[167] Jaworski, *Vorposten oder Minderheit?*, 137.

[168] ZA Opava, Pz Reinhold Weigel, inv. no. 20, carton 14. Letter to Reinhold Weigel, July 24, 1934.

[169] Tätigkeitsbericht des Deutschen Kulturverbandes über das Vereinsjahr 1937, 39.

[170] NA Praha, Sudetendeutsche Partei, carton 30, sign. 15 AA SF, correspondence of the Department for School Affairs of the Sudeten German Party, 1936–1937 (On the activities of the Schulabteilung der SdP).

[171] Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR (hereinafter MÚA Praha), Edvard Beneš, carton 73, position of the Presidential Office on German School Demands, [1936], 1–6. Notable examples include Těchlovice [Tiechlowitz], Ošelín [Oschelin], Chodová Planá [Chodenplan], and Hůrka [Hurkenthal]. See also Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, 209.

[172] Biographical entry for August Gessner (January 17, 1880 – November 2, 1944, Konstantinovy Lázně), Professor at the German Technical University in Prague, in Biographische Sammlung,

organization's autonomy and its democratic foundation. This stance even led to a temporary rapprochement with government circles in Prague. In the tense political climate following 1935, President Edvard Beneš began to pay closer attention to the needs of the DKV. During an audience on June 24, 1936, the Czechoslovak head of state even expressed a willingness to intervene on behalf of the DKV in response to delays by the authorities regarding German school requests. These included applications in Markt Türnau (Městečko Trnávka) and Jaronin (Jaronín)*, which had already been submitted as early as 1922. An important concern was also the legalization of private instruction in the Hlučín (Hultschin) region. While Beneš considered these issues "minor trifles,"[173] his intervention prompted a review of the Ministry of Education's previous handling of the matter. From the perspective of the President's office, the Ministry of Education had, under the pretext of serving the public interest, "failed to meet even reasonably justified German demands, allowing itself to be guided far too much by the views of local Czech minorities at the expense of state interests." The ministry's arguments were finally declared incompatible with the state's interest, and the Minister of Education, Emil Franke, was compelled to make concessions.[174]

Revisions to German minority schooling took place within the broader context of political negotiations with the German activist parties. In this phase, the government sought to secure their support against the SdP by conceding to several long-standing demands. The success of the February Treaty of 1937[175] was, however, very soon overshadowed by the forced *Gleichschaltung* of the DKV through manipulated internal elections. That same year, the DKV was transformed into a mouthpiece of the SdP,[176] and the SdP immediately presented its own demands, which already brought into question the territorial integrity of the Czechoslovak state.[177] In contrast, the ÚMŠ intensified its activities in defense of the Czechoslovak state, focusing particularly on the strategic expansion of Czech secondary education in predominantly German towns throughout the borderlands. By 1937, the ÚMŠ had established state-funded grammar schools in Český Krumlov (Krumau), Podbořany (Podersam), and Chomutov (Komotau), while others, such as those in Rumburk (Rumburg), Mikulov (Nikolsburg), and Cheb (Eger), were

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Collegium Carolinum, Munich.

[173] MÚA Praha, Edvard Beneš, carton 73, Position of the Presidential Office on German School Demands, [1936], 1–6.

[174] Ibid., 1.

[175] René Küpper, *Karl Hermann Frank (1898–1946): Politische Biographie eines sudetendeutschen Nationalsozialisten* (München: Oldenbourg, 2010), 90–91.

[176] Nerad, *Erinnerungen eines unpolitischen Wanderers*, 325.

[177] Küpper, *Karl Hermann Frank*, 91.

privately administered. The association also founded specialized institutions, including a business academy in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) and a teacher training institute in Bílina (Bilin). In addition, 18 new elementary schools were established by the ÚMŠ in 1937 alone.[178] The example of a newly built Czech state school in Srní (Rehberg), which was also used as a machine gun post, serves as a significant symbol of the connection between the defense of the state and Czech state schooling.[179] In this context, the Munich Agreement of 1938 can be understood not only as the culmination of a deep-seated territorial obsession and colonizing nationalist fervor, but also as the outcome of long-term financial investments – amounting to millions – indirectly funneled by the German government into cultural and educational institutions across the Czechoslovak Republic.

Conclusion

From the late nineteenth century to the eve of World War II, schools in the Bohemian Lands became far more than spaces of instruction. They emerged as strategic instruments in the nationalist contest for territory, identity, and political power. For both Czech and German national politics, the schoolhouse was a fortified outpost on the linguistic frontier – its location, language of instruction, and very architecture was intended to materialize claims to the space and project an enduring national presence. This transformation was driven by a dynamic interplay between state policy and private activism. In the Habsburg era, nationalist associations compensated for legislative and administrative limitations by building and financing private schools, often in defiance of hostile municipalities. After 1918, the new Czechoslovak state absorbed Czech nationalist ambitions into law and administration, while German school activism was cut off from its traditional operational ties and pushed into new strategies – pursuing legal challenges and clandestine operations, and increasing its reliance on financial lifelines from abroad.

The struggle over schools was neither purely symbolic nor confined to official channels. It encompassed economic leverage, social coercion, and at times outright violence. Evictions, boycotts, the repurposing of buildings, and attacks on newly established schools became recurring features of local politics. Each

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[178] *Padesátá výroční zpráva Ústřední Matice Školské v Praze za 57. správní rok od 1. ledna do 31. prosince 1937* (Praha: Ústřední matice školská, 1938) [Fiftieth Annual Report of the Ústřední matice školská in Prague for the 57th Administrative Year from January 1 to December 31, 1937], 16–17.

[179] Základní škola a Mateřská škola Srní, "Historie školních budov," https://skolnibudovy.npmk.gov.cz /budova/821 (accessed April 9, 2025).

confrontation reinforced the perception of schools as physical markers of victory or defeat in the broader nationalist struggle for power.

By the interwar period, the contest had become firmly internationalized and a key matter of state interest and security. The DKV's growing dependence on subsidies from the VDA and the German Foreign Office paralleled the Czech associations' coordination with state authorities in establishing Czechoslovak schools deep inside German-speaking areas. Both Prague and Berlin integrated school policy into their project of internal cohesion and territorial control, linking the classroom directly to their geopolitical agendas. Social needs as well as consumption also played a decisive role. Nationalist associations cultivated vast membership networks, commercialized "national brands," and turned everyday goods into vehicles for political identity. The fusion of cultural capital and economic power embedded the schoolhouse into the daily lives of the communities it was meant to influence. The analysis in this paper may provide a stimulus for further research into the crucial, but here only tangentially addressed, the everyday dimension of elementary school and the ways in which the curricula mirrored the nationalist influence over schools.

In the late 1930s, the contest over schooling helped fuel the Sudeten crisis, compelling the Czechoslovak government to make far-reaching concessions and revise its minority school practices. While this led to the establishment of several long-demanded German schools, it did not slow the intensive program of Czechoslovak school construction in German-speaking areas, which was increasingly tied to state defense objectives. In the end, political credit for advancing German minority schooling during the Czechoslovak era was seized by the SdP, which in 1937 brought the DKV into line through *Gleichschaltung* and turned it into a key instrument of its propaganda. Likewise, Adolf Hitler's expansionist policy did not emerge in a vacuum but drew legitimacy from a long-standing narrative of ethnic struggle cultivated for decades by nationalist rhetoric as well as concrete strategies and financial mechanisms.

Ultimately, the history of schooling in the Bohemian Lands reveals that education was not a peripheral cultural matter but a central mechanism of border-making in East Central Europe. Schools shaped both the imagined and the physical boundaries of the nation, and their control was pursued with persistence and investment – material, symbolic, and human – that matched any other front of nationalist mobilization. The schoolhouse, once a beacon of progress, became a watchtower of national vigilance, with the full potential to escalate into the persistent violence that scarred the contested landscapes of interwar Central Europe.

"BORDERIZATION" AS A TOOL OF GRAY ZONE WARFARE: THE CASE OF GEORGIA

OLGA DOROKHINA
ST. KING TAMAR UNIVERSITY

Abstract

This article analyzes "borderization" in Georgia – the process of unilaterally erecting physical barriers and control regimes along administrative lines with Abkhazia and the former South Ossetian Autonomous District – through the prism of the concept of gray zones. The study answers the question: how does the process of borderization contribute to the institutionalization of legal and spatial uncertainty, and to what extent can it be interpreted as a form of gray zone tactics? Based on a critical synthesis of military-strategic, institutional, and operational approaches, this study proposes a working definition of gray zones as sustainable regimes of coercion below the thresholds of war, characterized by difficult attribution of the source of actions and controlled escalation. The analysis is based on policy documents, reports from international organizations, and long-term field observation (2009–2024). The findings demonstrate that borderization functions as a gray zone regime through legal ambivalence, spatio-temporal transformation, and their informational articulation. This regime ensures territorial control without open war or formal annexation. The conceptual contribution consists in defining the minimum core of gray zones as applied to territorial conflicts and identifying the structural connection between gray zones and border areas.
Keywords: borderization; gray zones; territorial conflicts; legal ambivalence; spatial control; Russia; Georgia; South Ossetia; Abkhazia
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Dr. Olga Dorokhina is an associate professor at St. King Tamar University. Address correspondence to Faculty of Arts, Social and Human Sciences, 68 Dimitri Uznadze St., Tbilisi, Georgia. E-mail: olga.dorokhina.geo@gmail.com.

43

Introduction

Contemporary borders are increasingly becoming the subject of attempts to change them not through war, but via ambiguous practices below the threshold of open military action. One such practice has been called "borderization," which involves the gradual strengthening of dividing lines by installing physical and symbolic structures and introducing administrative procedures. In Georgia, this term refers to the process by which the so-called administrative boundary lines (ABL) with Abkhazia and the former South Ossetian Autonomous District (SOAD) are subject to unilateral attempts to turn them into state borders through actions aimed at strengthening separation and restricting mobility on the ground. In this article, the case of Georgia is examined in the context of the "gray zone," a concept used to describe spaces where actors deliberately blur traditional definitions of war, peace, and sovereignty. Although this concept is most developed in military studies, it is also applicable to the analysis of territorial conflicts, where state and non-state actors exploit legal ambiguities and institutional gaps to gradually change the status quo.

To understand whether borderization in Georgia exemplifies gray zone tactics, it is necessary to analyze the specific mechanisms of creating and maintaining uncertainty through territorial practices. This raises the central question: How does the process of borderization along the lines of division in Georgia contribute to the institutionalization of legal and spatial uncertainty, and to what extent can it be interpreted as a form of gray zone tactics? The central argument advanced here is that borderization in Georgia represents a deliberate institutionalization of uncertainty. This is achieved through the establishment of visible structures of control that simultaneously reinforce ambiguity over territorial status and applicable legal regimes. In doing so, borderization exhibits core characteristics of gray zone strategies, consolidating de facto control while avoiding the political and legal costs associated with overt annexation or renewed large-scale hostilities.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study of the process of borderization in Georgia. The choice of the Georgian case is due to the fact that borderization in Georgia represents the most documented and long-lasting example of such practices in the post-Soviet space, which provides a sufficient empirical basis for analysis.

The empirical basis of the study combines a variety of sources to ensure a multifaceted understanding of the borderization process. The analysis draws

on official documents, including bilateral agreements from 2008–2009, Georgian legislation, and statements by officials, which allow us to trace the legal arguments of the parties regarding the borderization process. Reports from international organizations, especially the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe (CoE), play an important role in documenting the development of the process from the perspective of external observers. Materials from human rights organizations document instances of borderization in specific incidents, such as detentions of citizens, access restrictions, and territorial changes. Analytical reports from Georgian research centers offer expert assessments of the processes taking place. Open mapping serves as visual documentation of borderization incidents and their geographical distribution.

A special place in the study is given to longitudinal participant and field observation, based on regular trips to areas adjacent to the lines of separation from 2009 to 2024. This approach made it possible to track the evolution of the borderization process in real time, record changes in control practices, and capture the specifics of the process on the ground. Direct observation of individual sections of administrative dividing lines from the Georgian-controlled side was supplemented by informal conversations with local residents and constant monitoring of developments through local networks and media from both sides of the dividing line.

The study uses the concept of the gray zone as an analytical framework for examining borderization in Georgia. The analysis is structured around two key mechanisms of gray zoning, namely legal ambivalence and spatio-temporal transformation, as well as their informational articulation. Empirical data on borderization are evaluated against these mechanisms to determine the extent to which the Georgian case corresponds to the theoretical characteristics of gray zone tactics. This conceptualization allows us to analyze borderization as a specific gray zone tactic that creates a state of uncertainty around dividing lines.

The Concept of Gray Zones: Disciplinary Approaches and Critical Issues

Contemporary international politics is increasingly marked by the erosion of traditional categories. Situations where de facto and de jure control over territories do not coincide are not new, but have acquired new significance in the post-Cold War context. These inconsistencies give rise to zones of uncertainty where traditional norms of international law are applied in a limited or

selective manner. New forms of governance are emerging that operate outside the framework of international law but still provide effective control over people and resources. State and non-state actors use various forms of pressure and influence, creating sustained tension below the threshold that would justify a full-scale military response. Interdisciplinary analysis confirms these observations, revealing how different fields have conceptualized gray zone dynamics. The concept of the "gray zone" emerged as an attempt to conceptualize such intermediate, "blurred" conditions, phenomena that exist between clearly defined categories: war and peace, legal and illegal, sovereign and occupied. The parallel development of the concept in different disciplines can be explained by the specific practical tasks of each field. Military strategists needed to conceptualize an operational environment that did not fit into traditional categories. Geopoliticians observed territories where formal sovereignty did not coincide with actual control. Legal scholars documented how states exploit the spaces between different legal regimes. Political scientists described political systems in transitional conditions. Each discipline grasped different aspects of a single phenomenon – deliberately produced and maintained uncertainty as a tool for achieving strategic goals.

Military strategic studies elaborate on this logic, interpreting ambiguity as a deliberate tactical tool. The US Special Operations Command has defined the gray zone as the space "between peace and war."[1] Mazarr systematized this approach, showing that the intensity of actions is deliberately calibrated to transform the status quo without giving the enemy a legal basis for a large-scale response.[2] As Wirtz has shown, gray zones "attack the victim's strategy" by shifting the "burden of escalation" to the defending side.[3] The International Security Advisory Board's (ISAB) institutional approach emphasized political purposefulness, according to which gray zones are not chaotic actions, but organized "political confrontation aimed at achieving political goals."[4]

The geopolitical perspective revealed the spatial dimension of the phenomenon. Vereshchuk and Umland argued that the post-Soviet space between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)/European Union (EU) and

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[1] United States Special Operations Command, "White Paper: The Gray Zone" (September 9, 2015), 2, https://info.publicintelligence.net/USSOCOM-GrayZones.pdf.

[2] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2015).

[3] James J. Wirtz, "Life in the 'Gray Zone,'" *Defense & Security Analysis* 33, no. 2 (2017): 106–114, https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1310702.

[4] International Security Advisory Board, "Report on Gray Zone Conflict" (U.S. Department of State, January 3, 2017), 1–2, https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/isab/266650.htm.

the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)/Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) functions as systemic gray zones, where the correlation between international presence and territorial integrity creates stable configurations of uncertainty.[5] However, geopolitical analysis has exposed the problem of spatial consistency. As Knudsen and Frederiksen note, a "matryoshka" effect arises, when some authors refer to the entire post-Soviet space as a gray zone, others to individual countries such as Moldova, and still others to specific conflict regions like Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[6]

The persistence of uncertainty as a constitutive feature of gray zones can be traced in legal and institutional dimensions. Lattimer and Sands have shown how contemporary conflicts "blur the boundaries between international human rights law and international humanitarian law," creating legal loopholes that states exploit to avoid accountability.[7] Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Resolution 2240 (2018) noted the practical need for legal conceptualization of gray zones for the activities of humanitarian organizations in "territories of states under de facto control."[8]

A systematic analysis of disciplinary perspectives reveals three recurring elements: threshold effects, ambivalence of attribution, and controlled escalation. These constitute the minimal core of the concept of gray zones. At the same time, disciplinary fragmentation gives rise to a number of conceptual challenges.

The problem of conceptual vagueness. The concept of the "gray zone" claims to explain the intermediate conditions between war and peace. However, Matisek notes that for many analysts, the concept of the gray zone represents a "tautological expression" of already existing terms.[9]

The most problematic issue is the conceptual confusion between gray zones and hybrid warfare. In theory, the difference is clear: a "gray zone" is

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5   Iryna Vereshchuk and Andreas Umland, "How to Make Eastern Europe's Gray Zone Less Gray?" *Harvard International Review*, August 23, 2019, https://hir.harvard.edu/how-to-make-eastern-europes -gray-zone-less-gray.

6   Ida Harboe Knudsen and Martin Demant Frederiksen, eds., *Ethnographies of Grey Zones in Eastern Europe: Relations, Borders and Invisibilities* (London: Anthem Press, 2015); Vereshchuk and Umland, "How to Make Eastern Europe's Gray Zone Less Gray?"

7   Mark Lattimer and Philippe Sands, eds., *The Grey Zone: Civilian Protection Between Human Rights and the Laws of War* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2018), 3.

8   Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "Resolution 2240 (2018): Unlimited Access to Member States, Including 'Gray Zone,' by Council of Europe and United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Bodies," adopted October 10, 2018, http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref -XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=25168&lang=en.

9   Jahara W. Matisek, "Shades of Gray Deterrence: Issues of Fighting in the Gray Zone," *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 3 (2017): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.3.1602.

conceptualized as a regime of interstate competition below the threshold of war,[10] while "hybrid warfare" is conceptualized as a synchronized combination of regular and irregular methods of warfare within a single operational-strategic design.[11]

However, institutional practice blurs these theoretical boundaries. The lexicon of the US intelligence community distinguishes between a "gray zone" and "hybrid/irregular warfare," warning that vague definitions undermine the quality of analysis. The very fact that such a glossary exists demonstrates the extent of conceptual uncertainty.[12] In contrast, the House of Commons Defence Committee report uses "gray zone" and "hybrid" interchangeably, noting the absence of a universally accepted definition.[13]

Both concepts are criticized for their blurred boundaries and terminological "creep." Stoker, Whiteside, and Kofman point to the transformation of analytical tools into "trash cans" for any non-traditional actions.[14] The criticism is fueled by the thesis of "historical banality," as camouflage, subversion, and the combination of tools have long been characteristic of war; the novelty lies in speed, digital environments, and threshold management.[15] Fridman adds that the terms are politicized and serve as ideological markers rather than analytical categories.[16]

The result is a situation where some phenomena (e.g., Russian actions in Crimea in 2014) are simultaneously classified as "hybrid warfare" and "gray zone tactics" without a clear explanation of the differences. The connection between different interpretations of gray zones remains conditional, creating a universal metaphor for any uncertainty, which deprives the concept of analytical precision.

The confusion between analytical and practical application exacerbates the problem. In academic discourse, gray zones are used as a category of analysis,

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[10] Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*.

[11] Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007).

[12] Office of the Director of National Intelligence – National Intelligence Council, "Updated IC Gray Zone Lexicon: Key Terms and Definitions" (July 2024), 2, https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIC-Unclassified-Updated-IC-Gray-Zone-Lexicon-July2024.pdf.

[13] House of Commons Defence Committee, "Defence in the Grey Zone" (2025), 12, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmdfence/405/report.html.

[14] Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War – Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking," *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 1 (2020), article 4, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss1/4; Michael Kofman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts," *War on the Rocks*, March 11, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts.

[15] James K. Wither, "Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare," *Connections* 15, no. 2 (2016): 73–87, http://dx.doi.org/10.11610/Connections.15.2.06.

[16] Ofer Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare": Resurgence and Politicization* (2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, 21 Feb. 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190877378.001.0001.

but in political discourse, the same term is used as an assessment tool with normative undertones.

The development of Echevarria's views illustrates the critical reflection of the concept. In his early works, he viewed gray zones as "classical coercive strategies" below the thresholds of NATO's Article 5, which provided a clear institutional link.[17] In *Weaponizing Risk* (2025), he criticizes excessive enthusiasm for the concept, arguing that "NATO's deterrence measures were calibrated more for hybrid/gray zone attacks of the 2014 type than for large-scale operations of the 2022 type,"[18] showing that the concept can distract from preparedness for conventional threats.

The problem of geopolitical instrumentalization. Various actors use the concept of gray zones not as a neutral analytical tool, but as a means of geopolitical positioning. Western think tanks are incorporating the concept into the logic of defending their own interests. The Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team characterizes gray zones as actions that "threaten the interests of the United States and its allies."[19] The RAND Corporation has analyzed in detail China's "gray zone tactics" against American allies in the Indo-Pacific region, identifying about 80 different coercive tactics.[20] Wilson, vice president of the Atlantic Council, argued that "Russia seeks to keep these neighbors at best in a permanent gray zone and at worst under its domination."[21]

Russian analysts, on the other hand, criticize the concept as a Western analytical and political tool, noting that "the gray zone has become a kind of geopolitical marker that is applied to opponents of the unipolar system of Pax Americana."[22] They further claim the term is used to justify "creating unpre-

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[17] Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Operating in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2016).

[18] Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Weaponizing Risk: Recalibrating Western Deterrence* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2025).

[19] Strategic Multilayer Assessment, "Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: A Multi-Agency Deep Dive Assessment, The Characterization and Conditions of the Gray Zone" (ViTTa Report, Winter 2016), 2.

[20] Bonny Lin et al., *Competition in the Gray Zone: Countering China's Coercion Against U.S. Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022), https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA594-1.

[21] Damon Wilson, "It Is the Absence of Security for Georgia and Ukraine That Has Tempted Russia to Occupy and Annex Their Territory," July 18, 2018, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/News/deimon-vilsoni-usafrtkhoebis-ararseboba-saqartvelo.aspx.

[22] "['50 ottenkov serogo'] Seraia zona: teoreticheskaia kontseptsiia i strategicheskii instrument Zapada: Zachem Rossii evropeiskaia 'seraia zona' s SShA vmesto chetkoi 'cherno-beloi' granitsy na zapade materika?" *News2.ru,* July 23, 2022, https://www.news2.ru/story/648912.

dictability in planned steps" as part of strategies to contain Russia and China.[23] Russian strategic documents prefer to use their own terminology like "information space" and "new generation warfare" avoiding Western conceptual frameworks.[24]

Such mutual instrumentalization calls into question the analytical applicability of the concept. In practical military-political analysis, Western experts use it to describe the actions of geopolitical opponents, who, in turn, criticize this approach and develop alternative conceptual frameworks.

The problem of operationalization and scalability. In addition to politicization, the concept faces methodological limitations in its practical application. Even with a narrow definition of gray zones as modes of coercion below the threshold of war, the problem of choosing the level of analysis arises. Individual episodes like an incident on the line of demarcation, the installation of a barrier, a targeted cyberattack may appear to be gray zone actions. However, it is unclear how many such episodes are necessary to speak of a systematic campaign rather than isolated random actions.[25]

Geographical specificity creates additional constraints. Approaches developed to analyze Chinese actions in the South China Sea (use of maritime police, gradual change of the status quo) do not work well when analyzing borderization in Georgia (legal ambiguity, spatial control), and vice versa.[26] Attempts to create a universal definition lead to excessive abstraction. A more productive approach is to adapt analytical tools to the specific context.

The problem of temporal nature of gray zones: a transitional state or a stable regime? The conceptual uncertainty of gray zones is also evident in the question of their temporal nature. Do they represent a transitional state between peace and war, or do they function as an independent, stable regime of interaction?

Milevski argues that the gray zone has "insignificant strategic and analytical value" but "high social utility."[27] The concept can be a "strategic trap" for defend-

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[23] Aleksandr Bartosh, "Seraia zona – pole bitvy XXI veka," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, October 27, 2022, https://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2022-10-27/1_1212_web.html.

[24] Dominika Dziwisz, "Rethinking Future Conflicts: The Cyber Grey Zone from the Russian Perspective," *Politeja* 5, no. 92 (2024): 294, https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.21.2024.92.13.

[25] Lyle J. Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2942.

[26] Michael Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017).

[27] Lukas Milevski, "When Does Gray Zone Confrontation End? A Conceptual Analysis," *Joint Force Quarterly* 112 (1st Quarter 2024): 8, https://digitalcommons.ndu.edu/joint-force-quarterly/vol112/iss1/2.

ers who are forced to "play by the rules" set by the initiator of the gray zone campaign, without having any criteria for victory within this logic.

This criticism can be reinterpreted by recognizing that gray zones operate according to a different strategic logic. Mazarr describes the gray zone as a deliberately constructed regime of coercion below the thresholds of *jus ad bellum*, where the initiator achieves cumulative changes to the status quo in small steps, constantly managing escalation thresholds and relying on plausible deniability.[28] In this interpretation, "success" is measured not by decisive victory, but by long-term change in the actual situation on the ground while minimizing political and legal costs. Maintaining "gray" rather than removing it becomes a rational strategic goal.

The thresholds between the gray zone and war are unstable over time. A campaign classified as a gray zone in one period may later either stabilize at a low level of intensity or escalate into open war. Ukraine demonstrates a model of transformation, where a situation classified as a gray zone in 2014 escalated into open warfare by 2022. Georgia, on the other hand, illustrates the stability of the gray zone regime for more than 17 years after the 2008 war. The US intelligence community lexicon predicts that gray zone campaigns will remain the dominant dynamic of international competition until at least 2030.[29]

Thus, gray zones can function as a transitional phase and as a long-term regime. Analytical approaches should distinguish between cases where a gray zone represents a temporary stage of conflict and cases where it becomes a self-sufficient form of strategic interaction. The classification of actions as gray zone depends on the circumstances, the actor, and the context.[30]

The Analytical Value of the Gray Zone Concept

Critical analysis has revealed serious methodological problems with the concept of gray zones. A logical question arises: why use a problematic analytical tool? This question becomes particularly acute in the context of contemporary debates about the relationship between gray zones and related concepts such as political warfare, coercive diplomacy, and hybrid warfare. The analytical value

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[28] Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*.
[29] Office of the Director of National Intelligence – National Intelligence Council, "Conflict in the Gray Zone: A Prevailing Geopolitical Dynamic Through 2030" (July 2024), https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIC-Unclassified-Conflict-In-The-Gray-Zone-July2024.pdf.
[30] Office of the Director of National Intelligence – National Intelligence Council, "Updated IC Gray Zone Lexicon" (July 2024).

of the concept of gray zones can be justified through a critical comparison with these alternatives.

The first area of alternatives focuses on non-military instruments of strategy. Political warfare, actively developed in the context of long-term competition between great powers, encompasses the use of all means except war to achieve strategic goals. Kennan defined it as the systematic use of propaganda, economic pressure, and subversive actions to weaken the enemy.[31] Brands, on the other hand, emphasized long-term competition through the accumulation of advantages.[32] At first glance, this is close to gray zones – both approaches describe actions "below the threshold of war." However, the difference is that political warfare does not emphasize threshold logic or the conscious calibration of intensity to avoid legitimizing a military response. It describes an arsenal of non-military means, but does not explain the strategy of dosing their application to keep actions within the threshold space. Actions can be of any intensity as long as they are not formally war, whereas the specificity of the gray zone lies in deliberate threshold management that allows for highly intense actions while remaining below the level that would justify a military response.

Coercive diplomacy analyzes the threat of force as a means of extorting concessions from the enemy. Schelling's logic of the "burden of escalation" is close to that of the gray zone, whereby the initiator structures the situation so that the responsibility for escalation is shifted to the enemy.[33] However, there is a fundamental difference in strategic goals here. Coercive diplomacy is focused on resolution through the opponent's compliance. Pressure is exerted to achieve a specific result and subsequent reduction of tension. The gray zone, on the contrary, may seek to maintain a state of uncertainty as an end in itself. Gray zone strategies often have no clear end point since ambiguity becomes not a tactical means to achieve compliance, but a strategic state that is inherently beneficial.[34] Coercive diplomacy is a tool for achieving a goal, while the gray zone can be the goal itself.

The next approach involves a combination of methods, which brings us to the most controversial concept. As noted above, the conceptual confusion

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[31] George F. Kennan, "The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare," Policy Planning Memorandum, May 4, 1948, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116191.

[32] Hal Brands, "The Lost Art of Long-Term Competition," *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2018): 31–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1556559.

[33] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003).

[34] Wirtz, "Life in the 'Gray Zone,'" 109.

between gray zones and hybrid warfare remains problematic both in institutional practice and in analytical discourse. The concept of hybrid warfare suffers from its own vagueness, but the key difference from gray zones is its focus on synchronizing methods rather than staying below the threshold.[35] The difference can be illustrated by the following questions: hybrid warfare answers "how" (combination of means), whereas gray zone answers "where" (threshold space) and "why" (managing escalation to avoid war while achieving change).[36] Moreover, hybrid warfare, being "war" in the Clausewitzian sense, can escalate into open conflict since the synchronization of means does not imply any restrictions on intensity. The gray zone, by contrast, operates on threshold management logic that aims to avoid escalation to war. When such escalation occurs (as in Ukraine 2014–2022), it marks the end of the gray zone.

It is precisely in this consistent inability of alternative concepts to tie together disparate elements that the unique analytical value of gray zones lies. The concept of gray zones ensures their systemic integration through the prism of threshold management, where the intensity of actions is deliberately calibrated, responsibility is blurred through legal and organizational mechanisms, and gradualism allows changes to accumulate without provoking a decisive response. The concept integrates the logic of coercion from coercive diplomacy, non-military instruments from political warfare, and a combination of means from hybrid warfare through the overarching logic of threshold management. A gray zone is not simply the sum of these elements, but a specific mode of their coordination in conditions of deliberate avoidance of both open war and formal peace.

The practical applicability of the concept is confirmed by its use in operational research. Morris et al. systematized eight key characteristics of gray zones and proposed an operational typology of intensity levels, ranging from "persistent" low-intensity routine actions through "moderate" to "aggressive" quasi-military actions.[37] The authors explicitly classify Russia's actions in Georgia as an example of gray zone operations, noting the evolution "from a temporary, military-controlled space after the 2008 war" to a "long-term strategy of manipulating and redefining lines of control."[38] Their operational typology provides an

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[35] Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007).

[36] Milevski, "When Does Gray Zone Confrontation End?" 10.

[37] Lyle J. Morris, Michael J. Mazarr, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Stephanie Pezard, Anika Binnendijk, and Marta Kepe, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), 8–11, https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2942.

[38] Ibid., 78.

analytical framework for the comparative analysis of gray zone campaigns at the macro level of strategic competition. The present study develops this approach by focusing on the specific mechanisms of producing and sustaining gray zone dynamics through spatial practices of borderization.

Operationalization of the Concept of Gray Zone

An analysis of existing approaches has revealed the need to formulate a working definition that avoids conceptual vagueness and geopolitical bias. Based on a synthesis of military-strategic, institutional, and operational approaches, the following working definition can be derived: *gray zones are operationalized as stable regimes of coercion, deliberately kept below the threshold of armed conflict, characterized by difficult attribution of the source of actions and controlled escalation.*[39] Three elements constitute the minimal core of the concept:

Threshold calibration refers to actions that are deliberately kept below the level that would legitimize the use of force under international law. The intensity of the impact remains sufficient to exert pressure and transform the situation, but insufficient to provide the adversary with a legal and political basis for a large-scale military response.[40]

Ambiguity of attribution means that the source of the actions is obscured through legal mechanisms such as the use of de facto structures, organizational obscurity in chains of command, or the deployment of proxy actors. The blurring of responsibility complicates the formulation of an adequate response and creates space for plausible deniability.[41]

Controlled escalation implies conscious control of intensity to avoid crossing critical thresholds. The initiator retains the ability to both intensify and de-escalate pressure depending on the opponent's reaction, using the threat of escalation as a tool of coercion while effectively avoiding a transition to open conflict.[42]

This definition is compatible with the operational typology of Morris et al., who distinguish between levels of intensity of gray zone actions, from constant low-intensity to aggressive quasi-military.[43] While their approach includes

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[39] Synthesis based on Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*; International Security Advisory Board, "Report on Gray Zone Conflict"; Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone.*

[40] Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone,* 5–7.

[41] International Security Advisory Board, "Report on Gray Zone Conflict," 3–4; Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage,* 9.

[42] Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage,* 11.

[43] Ibid., 137, Table 5.1.

a broad catalog of tools applicable to various spheres from cyber operations, information campaigns to economic coercion, this study focuses specifically on how the minimal core operates through the territorial dimension. Their systematization confirms that the identified elements constitute a stable core of the concept in various contexts of application. As applied to territorial conflicts, the minimal core materializes through two main mechanisms.

The mechanism of legal ambivalence creates situations where formally legal actions lead to a de facto change in the territorial status quo. Selective interpretation of international law justifies unilateral actions.[44] The exploitation of procedural mechanisms, such as the use of negotiation formats, monitoring missions, and access regimes, blocks effective countermeasures.[45] The creation of alternative legal regimes through the establishment of de facto jurisdictions without international recognition and the delegation of powers to proxy structures complements this mechanism. Challenging actions is difficult because they formally comply with a certain interpretation of the norms, despite their destructive nature for the existing order.

Spatial-temporal transformation mechanism includes three interrelated dimensions:

Spatial uncertainty creates ambiguity regarding jurisdiction and lines of control. The blurring of administrative boundaries is achieved through the absence of agreed reference maps, the creation of buffer zones with undefined status, and the gradual change of actual lines of control.[46] Space is produced as ambivalent, since physical structures of control exist, but there is no international recognition of their legitimacy. This uncertainty is a deliberate strategy that allows the dominant actor to maximize freedom of action while minimizing opportunities for effective counteraction.

Strategic gradualism is expressed in a phased deployment, where each individual step is scaled as insufficient to legitimize a military response, reflecting threshold management.[47] Normalizing each stage of change before moving on to the next allows the boundaries of what is acceptable to be gradually shifted without triggering effective countermeasures. The effect is such that the combination

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[44] Lattimer and Sands, eds., *The Grey Zone.*
[45] Viktor Startsun and Il'ia Balkanov, "The Definition of 'the Gray Zone' and the Problems of Its Incorporation into Legal Support of International Security," *Military Aspects of International Law* 3 (2016): 80.
[46] Knudsen and Frederiksen, eds., *Ethnographies of Grey Zones in Eastern Europe*; Vereshchuk and Umland, "How to Make Eastern Europe's Gray Zone Less Gray?"
[47] Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*, 33.

of small steps radically transforms the territorial configuration without provoking the response that each individual action could have caused.[48] Preserving the possibility of de-escalation through a wave-like mode of action embodies the principle of controlled escalation.

Sustained intensity characterizes the manner in which spatial-temporal transformation is carried out. In territorial conflicts, intensity is inseparable from the duration of the process and is expressed through a combination of spatial practices such as erection of barriers, detentions, and restrictions on mobility, operating in a cyclical temporal regime without clear completion. Constant pressure keeps the enemy on alert, creating lasting tension that is psychologically, politically, and economically exhausting.[49] This pattern, consisting of a sequence of incident, protest, condemnation, lull, and repetition, sustains tension without crossing critical thresholds.

It is conceptually important to understand that intensity is not a separate measure, independent of gradualism. Gradualism without intensity is simply slowness, while intensity without gradualism is escalation toward war. Only their combination creates a specific gray zone quality, when sufficient pressure to transform the status quo is maintained below critical thresholds that would legitimize a military response.

Information exposure articulates and reinforces legal ambivalence and spatial-temporal transformation through terminological polyphony, informational ambiguity, and cycles of media events.[50] The creation of multiple interpretations makes it difficult to independently verify facts and form an international consensus on the nature of what is happening. Restricted access to disputed territories, the use of closed zones, and non-transparent decision-making maintain a state of conceptual ambiguity.[51] The logic of information influence is to maintain a multiplicity of interpretations that hinders the formation of a consolidated position and creates constant uncertainty about the nature of actions.

This framework provides a conceptual basis for rigorous empirical analysis of cases where institutionalized uncertainty becomes an instrument of territorial control through spatial practices.

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[48] Ibid., 36–37.
[49] John Chambers, "Countering Gray-Zone Hybrid Threats: An Analysis of Russia's 'New Generation Warfare' and Implications for the U.S. Army" (Modern War Institute at West Point, October 18, 2016), 14.
[50] Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*, 3; International Security Advisory Board, "Report on Gray Zone Conflict," 2.
[51] International Security Advisory Board, "Report on Gray Zone Conflict," 2.

The next step requires turning to the concept of borderization, through which these mechanisms materialize in specific spatial practices in the post-Soviet space.

Borderization as an Instrument of the Gray Zone Regime

The structural connection between gray zones and border spaces. Gray zones do not arise arbitrarily in political or geographical space. They predominantly materialize in border zones, or territories where jurisdictions intersect or are contested, where sovereignty is blurred and legal regimes are ambiguous. Border areas have structural characteristics that make them particularly susceptible to gray zone logic as they are often outside the direct control of central authorities, regulated by multiple and sometimes contradictory legal regimes, and inhabited by communities whose allegiance may be contested or exploited.

The connection between gray zones and border spaces has been explicitly conceptualized in recent works on border and migration studies. Leutloff-Grandits suggests that the gray zone and liminality function as complementary analytical frameworks for understanding border processes.[52] The gray zone describes the level of instrumental coercion by the state at the border, including actions below the threshold of open conflict, lawfare, and semi-privatized practices involving the coast guard, contractors, and parastatal formations. The state's gray zone tactics at the border produce lived uncertainty (liminality) as their socio-temporal trace. Border practices become the core of the gray zone strategy, materializing through infrastructure such as fences, waiting areas, distribution centers and producing liminal states characterized by uncertain time, "temporary traps," and ambiguous legal status.[53] Cold-Ravnkilde, using the example of the externalization of EU migration control in Mali, documents how borderwork takes place "in the gray zone" between law and practice. State agents and bureaucrats act through bargaining, delays, foot-dragging, and strategic cooperation while covertly editing the rules "on the ground," without crossing the threshold of open conflict or breaking agreements. Diverse border practices, such as readmissions, biometrics, and administrative procedures, change access and

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[52] Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, "The Grey Zone and Liminality as Complementary Conceptual Approaches for Border and Migration Studies," *Current Issues in Migration Research* 2, no. 1 (2025): 32, https://doi.org/10.24834/cimr.2025.1.1919.

[53] Ibid.

mobility regimes without formally violating legal norms.[54] These works translate the abstract concept of the gray zone into a concrete analytical toolkit for border studies by operationalizing it through material border practices and their socio-temporal effects.[55]

The specificity of the term in the Georgian context. The application of the term "borderization" to Georgia contains a conceptual contradiction. In classical border studies, borderization describes the strengthening of legally recognized international borders. In the Georgian case, the process is aimed at creating the appearance of a state border where it does not legally exist. The administrative boundary lines with Abkhazia and the former SOAD are not internationally recognized borders, but represent lines of effective control following the conflicts of the 1990s and 2008. However, physical infrastructure and bureaucratic practices create a material and symbolic reality of a border or something that looks, functions, and is experienced as a border without legally being one.

Despite ongoing conceptual debates, "borderization" has become established in professional and media discourse. The term has taken root because it accurately describes what is visible like fences, posts, signs, and implicitly refers to the process – the attempt to turn an administrative line into a state border. Bachelet finds the term functional precisely because of its material, unilateral, and symbolic characteristics.[56] In this work, the term borderization is used with an understanding of this duality. It refers to an attempt to present an administrative line of control as a state border through material and symbolic practices, without any basis in international law.

Existing studies of borderization in Georgia. Borderization in Georgia has been studied in several disciplinary traditions. Boyle was one of the first to analyze the process through the concept of "fortified borders" and the discursive construction of the "little Berlin wall."[57] He also noted the "theatrical nature of the fence,"[58] an observation developed by Toal and Merabishvili,

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[54] Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, "Borderwork in the Grey Zone: Everyday Resistance within European Border Control Initiatives in Mali," *Geopolitics* 27, no. 5 (2022): 1450–1469, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1919627.

[55] Leutloff-Grandits, "The Grey Zone and Liminality."

[56] Ariane Bachelet, "Borderisation of South Ossetia: The Perspective of the Border Population," in *Post-Soviet Borders: A Kaleidoscope of Shifting Lives and Lands*, ed. Sabine von Löwis and Beate Eschment (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2023), 153–169, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003169376.

[57] Edward Boyle, "A 'Little Berlin Wall' for All," *Europa Regional* 24 (2016): 80–92.

[58] Edward Boyle, "Borderization in Georgia: Sovereignty Materialized," *Eurasia Border Review* 7 (2016): 14, https://doi.org/10.14943/ebr.7.1.1.

who show how each placement of a new sign or barrier becomes a geopolitical performance.[59]

The social and existential consequences of these material changes are documented in works focusing on the lived experiences of border communities. Bachelet explores borderization as an everyday and emotional geography, analyzing how physical barriers transform mobility practices and sever social ties.[60] Gotfredsen, based on an ethnographic analysis of 14 villages, shows how borderization produces "sensitive spaces" – zones of overlapping sovereignties where rules are applied unpredictably.[61] The process disrupts everyday mobility and erodes kinship ties, turning residents into "human shields" between competing sovereignties.[62]

At the same time, policy research and human rights reports document human rights violations and propose measures to mitigate the consequences of borderization.[63] Additional tools include the EastWatch mapping platform and the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) map, which visualize the spatial expansion of the process.[64]

These works create a rich empirical and analytical base, documenting in detail what is happening on the administrative lines and how it is being experienced. At the same time, the question of the strategic logic of the process remains insufficiently clarified, particularly regarding how borderization fits into broader patterns of territorial control and geopolitical pressure.

Borderization in Georgia: An Empirical Analysis

The analysis focuses on episodes that most clearly illustrate the functioning of each category of gray zone regime mechanisms. For this reason, the main focus is

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59 Gerard Toal and Gela Merabishvili, "Borderization Theater: Geopolitical Entrepreneurship on the South Ossetia Boundary Line, 2008–2018," *Caucasus Survey* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1–24, https://doi.org /10.1080/23761199.2019.1565192.

60 Bachelet, "Borderisation of South Ossetia."

61 Katrine Bendtsen Gotfredsen, "'We Are Like Human Shields': Dilemmas of Mobility, Kinship and Place in Georgian Borderland Villages," *Caucasus Survey* (2024): 1–23, https://doi.org /10.30965/23761202-bja10040.

62 Ibid.

63 Kornely Kakachia, Salome Minesashvili, Levan Kakhishvili, and Lasha Tchantouridze, *Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia* (Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics, 2017); Joseph Larsen, *Deterring Russia's Borderization of Georgia*, GIP Commentary, no. 18 (Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics, 2017); *Zone of Barbed Wires* (Tbilisi: Human Rights Center, 2019).

64 Jelger Groeneveld, "Checkpoint Regime South Ossetia," *EastWatch,* 2020, https://eastwatch.eu /checkpoint-regime-south-ossetia; Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS), "Incidents of Borderization," interactive map, https://gfsis.org/maps/borderization.

on the territory of the former SOAD, where borderization was more intense than in Abkhazia, where most of the dividing line runs along the Inguri River.[65]

Legal ambivalence operates through the creation of multiple jurisdictions and the selective use of international legal categories. The process of legal justification undertaken by Russia and the de facto authorities is a striking example of legal and political duplicity. Actions are presented as legal, but their real consequences are deliberately obscured and established international norms are circumvented.

Before the 2008 war, the mass issuance of Russian passports to the population in the conflict zones became one of the tools used by Russia to create a pretext for the allegedly necessary "protection" of Russian citizens. The sequence of legal acts in 2008–2009 shows the systematic preparation of a legal framework for borderization. After the end of active hostilities, Russia took additional steps to create a "legal" justification for its continued presence in the conflict zones on Georgian territory.[66] On September 17, 2008, Russia and the so-called Republic of South Ossetia signed a Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. In response, on October 23, 2008, Georgia adopted the Law on Occupied Territories.[67] A month later, representatives of the de facto authorities spoke of the need to "carry out delimitation" unilaterally, in accordance with the administrative boundaries of the former SOAD.[68]

On January 26, 2009, the Georgian Ministry of Defense signed a Memorandum with the EUMM on limiting the deployment of weapons near the former SOAD and Abkhazia. In February of the same year, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated Russia's "commitment" to ensuring the security of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, including through military bases. At the same time, it was emphasized that, in addition to security and border control issues, "these people can independently resolve all practical issues related to socio-economic development and the establishment of peaceful life."[69]

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[65] "Interior Ministry Briefs Diplomats on 'Borderisation,'" *Civil Georgia*, Tbilisi, June 4, 2013.

[66] Novitskii, "Peacekeepers will operate on the border between Abkhazia and Georgia in the previous regime," *Kavkazskii Uzel*, June 30, 2008, https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/138562.

[67] "The Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories," International Labour Organization – NATLEX, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/81268/88220/F1630879580/GEO81268.pdf.

[68] Boris Attoev, "Our border will be guarded by the border troops of the KGB RiUO," *Committee Information Service*, October 21, 2008, http://cominf.org/node/1166478531; Iurii Dzittsoity, "South Ossetia needs to establish a border and conduct itself as an independent state vis-à-vis Georgia," *Committee Information Service*, October 8, 2008, http://cominf.org/node/1166478457.

[69] "Interview with Russian Foreign Minister S. V. Lavrov, RIA Novosti, Russia Today television channel, and Voice of Russia radio station," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 25,

During the same period, accusations were made against the Georgian side, claiming that "Georgian special services have become more frequent in staging provocations against South Ossetia."[70] Although the exact starting point of the borderization process remains controversial, it can be said with certainty that sporadic actions began in early 2009.[71] This stage was characterized by the short-term nature of the actions when barriers were erected, but then removed after only a few days. Perhaps the purpose of these one-off provocations and accompanying "official statements" was to prepare the ground for the "official announcement" of the Agreements on Joint Measures to Protect the State Border of the Republic of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on April 30, 2009. The decision was probably made long before that. This is evidenced by the immediate deployment of the first units of the Russian Border Guard Service on the same day the agreements were signed. According to these documents, the de facto Republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia delegated to Russia the authority to protect their so-called state borders.[72] The essence of the agreements is to strengthen the relevant structures, including their professional capacity, and to confirm that Russia will provide protection for the de facto "border."

As Lavrov promised, the Russian Federation's first steps in the territory of the former SOAD and Abkhazia were aimed at strengthening its military presence and creating border infrastructure. The "border guard contingent" consisted of border guards from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB).[73] According to Russian media reports, the construction of border infrastructure facilities was described as part of the FSB's activities "within the framework of international agreements."[74] These units were involved in installing information signs, negotiating the allocation of land for "border posts," and deploying surveillance systems.[75]

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[70] 2010, http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/261460.

[70] "Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation," *Committee Information Service*, March 26, 2009, http://cominf.org/node/1166479563.

[71] Goga Aptsiauri, "Russian Troops Try To Shift South Ossetia Border Markers," *Radio Tavisupleba* (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty), August 3, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_Troops_Try_To_Shift_South_Ossetia_Border_Markers/1791641.html.

[72] "Russian Border Guards Begin Guarding South Ossetia's State Borders," *Committee Information Service*, May 1, 2009, http://cominf.org/node/1166479791.

[73] Tornike Turmanidze, "The Occupation Line – Russia's Foreign Policy Instrument Against Georgia" (August 5, 2017) GFSIS Expert Opinion no. 89, 5, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4709972.

[74] "Russian border guards celebrate their professional holiday," *United Russia*, May 28, 2012, https://er.ru/news/84633.

[75] "For six years, border guards have controlled the border of South Ossetia," *Sputnik Ossetia*, April 30, 2015 (updated June 3, 2015), https://sputnik-ossetia.ru/South_Ossetia/20150430/50728.html.

This sequence of legal acts creates a situation of multiple jurisdictions, which is a key characteristic of the gray zone regime. For international law, there is an occupied territory of Georgia; for Russia, there is an allied state with a legitimate border. This legal duality allows Russia to act "within the framework of international agreements" (as emphasized by the Russian media), avoiding an unambiguous classification of its actions as aggression. The source of the actions is blurred, as formally, decisions are made by the de facto authorities, but in reality, the process is controlled by Russia, and legally, everything is formalized through a "delegation of authority."

Manipulation of the category of "delimitation" also illustrates the mechanism of producing legal uncertainty. According to international standards, delimitation is a legal process in which two sovereign states establish and describe in writing the location of their common border, usually as a result of negotiations and mutual agreement. Accordingly, such a process requires at least the intention and participation of two or more countries.[76] Despite this, the de facto authorities, knowing about the principles of international practice, stated that they had unilaterally decided to apply this method to install information signs and other types of barrier infrastructure.

It should be noted that there are several interpretations of this phenomenon. In 2010, after another round of meetings of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), the head of the so-called South Ossetian delegation, Chigoev, called this process "work on defining the state border line," emphasizing that this was "our unilateral format" and clearly stating that "this is not a delimitation or demarcation of the border, since such actions are carried out only in an agreed bilateral format."[77] It is also interesting to note that, although the Russian side is actively involved in this unilateral process, it has taken a different position on "unilateral delimitation" in other contexts of the conflict.[78] For example, when on November 19, 2014, the Ukrainian government approved a decision on the unilateral demarcation of the Russian-Ukrainian border, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation stated that "the demarcation of a state border is a mutual process between

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[76] Mohammed Al Sayel, Peter Lohmann, and Christian Heipke, "International Boundary Making – Three Case Studies," in *Proceedings of the ISPRS Workshop on High-Resolution Earth Imaging for Geospatial Information* 38, no. 1 (2010).

[77] "Yuzhnaya Osetiya v tselom udovletvorena itogami vstrechi v Ergneti," *Committee Information Service*, December, 10, 2010, https://cominf.org/node/1166485478.

[78] Viktor Nekhezin, "Unilateral demarcation: what do experts think?" *BBC Russian Service*, June 17, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/06/140617_ukraine_russia_demarcation_borders.

neighboring states, therefore unilateral demarcation cannot be legally binding on the other party."[79] This approach reveals selectivity and inconsistency in the application of international legal practice by both the Russian Federation and the de facto authorities, when the established legal basis for delimitation and demarcation is interpreted frivolously, when in one context it is applied unilaterally, and in another, depending on political interests, is completely rejected.

Legal ambivalence persists even in the presence of decisions by international courts. On April 9, 2024, the European Court of Human Rights unanimously concluded that Russia's actions aimed at effectively establishing new borders since 2009 violated numerous human rights.[80] However, the Russian side continues to position the borderization as a legitimate action to protect the de facto borders of its allies, and characterizes the decisions of international bodies as "political manipulation" and manifestations of "double standards."[81]

Using an international legal term, but applying it unilaterally in a deliberately unlawful context, the actors create a quasi-legal procedure that embodies the logic of ambivalence of attribution. The source of the actions can formally be attributed to the de facto authorities conducting the "delimitation of their borders," although in reality the process is being carried out by Russia. Legal gaps and procedural obstruction reinforce this effect. International monitoring mechanisms cannot respond effectively because the actions are formalized as de facto internal procedures of states.

The effectiveness of this process is evident in its gradual normalization in the minds of local residents. During repeated field visits to Nikozi, Ergneti, Ditsi and Mereti (2009–2024), a noticeable linguistic shift was observed: residents increasingly use the term "border" when describing the barrier. This semantic change, although seemingly insignificant, signals a mental acceptance of an imposed spatial order without international legal recognition.

The legal justifications for borderization include all the characteristics of legal ambivalence as a mechanism of gray zone by exploiting its ambiguity.

Spatial-temporal transformation includes three interrelated dimensions: spatial uncertainty, strategic gradualism, and sustained intensity.

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[79] "Ukraine to continue building wall on border with Russia in April," *TASS*, March 5, 2015, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1811470.

[80] European Court of Human Rights, *Georgia v. Russia (IV)*, Application No. 39611/18. Judgment of April 9, 2024. Strasbourg: ECHR.

[81] "The Policy of Double Standards Is Criminal and Unacceptable: The South Ossetian Foreign Ministry on the Decision of the European Court," *Committee Information Service*, April 10, 2024, https://cominf.org/en/node/1166555836.

Spatial uncertainty is evident in blurred lines of jurisdiction and control. One of the most obvious questions arising in connection with so-called "demarcation" is: what maps are used as a guide when installing barbed wire, metal barriers, and other structures? Logically, if there were clarity regarding the cartographic materials used, it would at least be possible to predict where a new barrier might appear.[82]

Representatives of the de facto authorities claim that they are acting "in accordance with the 1922 Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of Georgia, which defines the administrative border of the former SOAD, and we are not crossing that line."[83] However, according to other sources, the de facto authorities have decided to use the 1984 base maps to define the territory within the borders of the former SOAD. Utiashvili claims that "there are no maps or any official documents indicating the exact route of the occupation line."[84]

During the Soviet era, there were no physical markers on the ground, and various editions of geographical maps existed, each with a different configuration of administrative boundaries. Administrative boundaries often coincided with the boundaries of collective farms, which were subject to change. The maps used by Russian border guards for demarcation vary in scale, allowing the occupation forces leeway in interpretation.[85]

Thus, a situation arises in which, firstly, the maps provided differ in scale and interpretation, and secondly, they are not the only copies that can be used for this purpose. New circumstances may constantly arise, accompanied by "numerous appeals" from the de facto authorities or the local population. This level of uncertainty and ambiguity provides the Russian Federation with a flexible tool for exerting constant pressure on Georgia.

Spatial uncertainty is a deliberate strategy that allows the dominant actor to maximize freedom of action while minimizing opportunities for effective counteraction. The absence of agreed reference maps, the creation of zones with uncertain status, and the gradual change of actual lines of control produce a space that is ambivalent, namely, physical structures of control exist, but there is no clarity regarding their legal status and territorial basis. For communities

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[82] Turmanidze, *The Occupation Line*, 7.

[83] "V Tskhinvale proshlo zasedanie iugoosetinskoi Komissii po delimitatsii granitsy," *Committee Information Service*, March 15, 2010, http://cominf.org/node/1166482670.

[84] Shota Utiashvili, "The Creeping Occupation: In Search of a Solution. Georgians Are Gathering the Grapes of Russian Wrath," *InoSMI*, November 28, 2017, https://inosmi.ru/politic/20171128/240865491.html.

[85] Turmanidze, *The Occupation Line*, 8.

living along these shifting lines, strategic ambiguity translates into sustained psychological pressure. In conversations conducted in Nikozi, Ergneti, and Mereti between 2013 and 2019, residents consistently emphasized living in a state of permanent alertness, not knowing when the next barrier might appear, which road might be blocked, or which family member might be detained.

Strategic gradualism operates through the calibration of each step of the borderization process below the level that would legitimize a military response. The duration and fragmentary nature of the process are key factors in this mechanism. If it wished, the Russian Federation could complete the demarcation process much more quickly. An illustrative example is the fact that Russia built a 60-kilometer high-tech security fence along the administrative border between annexed Crimea and mainland Ukraine, equipped with barbed wire and hundreds of sensors, in approximately four years (2014–2018).[86]

In the direction of the former SOAD, the total length of the occupation line exceeds 350 kilometers. According to various estimates for 2018–2021, fragmented fenced areas range from 52 to 60 kilometers.[87] However, in order to keep this tool active, the process is carried out in waves, without any clear pattern. This tactic allows each episode to be kept below the critical threshold.

Each individual step may seem insignificant and not requiring a decisive response. Normalizing each stage of change before moving on to the next allows the boundaries of what is acceptable to be gradually shifted without triggering effective countermeasures. As a result, the combination of small steps transforms the territorial configuration without provoking the response that each individual action could have caused.

Borderization acts as a kind of irritant that allows for a quick and limited demonstration of control before anyone has time to react. It puts the other side in a position where it must choose between concession and the risk of a larger conflict.[88] Having such a tool in the arsenal allows the situation to be kept "below the threshold," at a level sufficient to put pressure on the Georgian state and society, but not so intense as to provoke strong international resistance or

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[86] "Russia Finishes Building Border Fence between Crimea and Ukraine," *BBC News*, December 28, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46699807.

[87] Il'ia Barabanov, "'Pust' oni chut' otodvinutsia': Kak zhivut gruzinskie sela, cherez kotorye proshla granitsa Iuzhnoi Osetii," *BBC Russian Service*, August 10, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-45130357; Jaba Ananidze, "'Mtsotsavi Okupatsiis' Opitsialuri Danakargi da Tvitkmakopili Khelisupleba," *Batumelebi*, September 13, 2020, https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/296447; Ia Asatiani, "Rogor 'Ghobavs' Ruseti Sakartvelos?" *iFact*, https://ifact.ge/borderizatsia.

[88] Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*, 36–37.

reaction.[89] Preserving the possibility of de-escalation through a wave-like mode of action embodies the principle of controlled escalation. After each incident, the process can be suspended, barriers can be temporarily removed, creating the appearance of readiness for dialogue. However, the process then resumes in another place or at another time, maintaining constant pressure while retaining control over the intensity.

Sustained intensity characterizes the way in which spatial-temporal transformation is achieved by maintaining prolonged pressure without crossing critical thresholds. Each new incident of borderization traditionally caused public outrage and civil protests, followed by official condemnation from the Georgian authorities and a reaction from the international community, only for the process to subside and resume a few days or weeks later. This cyclical pattern fueled internal political tensions, destabilized the situation, and confused society.

However, amid the deepening domestic political instability of recent years, public attention and protest energy have been redirected toward internal political confrontations, reducing the visibility of borderization incidents in public discourse. The domestic political crisis creates conditions for the continuation of gray zone practices amid weakened public control – an effect that may be either an unintended consequence of internal dynamics or the result of the strategic use of domestic political instability.

The sustained intensity is maintained by the ongoing detentions of Georgian citizens along the occupation lines in both Abkhazia and the former SOAD.[90] The first cases occurred immediately after the August 2008 war, and in subsequent years, cases of illegal detentions became more frequent and continue to this day. Although data from different years and sources vary, it is safe to say that a total of more than 1,500 people have been detained in the Tskhinval (Tskhinvali) direction. Borderization not only restricts people's fundamental rights but also threatens local and international security.[91]

Informational articulation of the gray zone regime. Legal ambivalence and spatio-temporal transformation are articulated through the informational dimension, which determines how actions are publicly presented and perceived by different audiences.

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[89] "How Should Georgia Respond to Russia's Borderization?" Expert Comment, Georgian Institute of Politics, no. 5 (August 2017).

[90] "Kak vygliadiat pogranichnye upravleniia FSB Rossii v Abkhazii," *Sova.news*, March 14, 2019, https://sovanews.tv/2019/03/14/kak-vyglyadyat-pogranichnye-upravleniya-fsb-rossii-v-abhazii.

[91] Boyle, "A 'Little Berlin Wall' for All," 86.

Informational ambivalence is clearly evident in the origin and use of the term "borderization" in the Georgian context. The term was introduced by the EUMM in 2013 to describe physical marking and activity along administrative boundary lines.[92] The first public uses of the term are recorded in EUMM press releases from May 2013, where the mission announces its intention to discuss the "issue of borderization" at the Geneva international discussions.[93] By 2017, the EUMM had formally articulated the term in its EUMM Monitor publication, defining it as "the establishment of physical infrastructure, surveillance and patrol systems along ABLs."[94]

The process began in 2009, but the term for it only appeared four years later – from international observers who regularly encountered this phenomenon during monitoring and needed a term to describe it in reports and diplomatic communications. After the term was established in EUMM documents, it was disseminated by the media and civil society organizations (CSOs) and gradually entered both official Georgian and international discourse.

The belated official reaction of Georgian state structures – the first cases of signs being installed were recorded in 2009, with sustained public discussion appearing around 2013–2015, and a detailed official statement from the State Security Service (SSS) only in 2021 – created a terminological vacuum that was filled from outside.[95] Official structures have not developed their own designation, and their attitude toward the term "borderization" remains heterogeneous and contradictory.

By 2021, the terminological uncertainty had become particularly apparent. The SSS statement indicates that the use of certain terms such as "zone of fear," "border," and "border movement" "undermines the state's efforts to de-occupy and provokes fear among local residents."[96] However, without offering an alternative, the text consistently uses the cumbersome construction "illegal so-called borderization," repeating it nine times. The qualifier "so-called" signals a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the term, but at the same time

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[92] *EUMM Monitor*, issue 4 (April 2017): "Borderisation is a term introduced by the Mission to describe the physical markings and activities on the ground...".

[93] EU Monitoring Mission, Press Release, May 31, 2013, https://eumm.eu/en/press_and_public _information/press_releases/3429.

[94] *EUMM Monitor*, issue 4 (April 2017).

[95] Goga Aptsiauri, "Russian Troops Try to Shift South Ossetia Border Markers," *Radio Tavisupleba (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty)*, August 3, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_Troops _Try_To_Shift_South_Ossetia_Border_Markers/1781282.html.

[96] State Security Service of Georgia, "Official Statement on Illegal Borderization," August 2021, https://ssg.gov.ge/en/news/official-statement-on-illegal-borderization-august-2021.

demonstrates the absence of another generally accepted designation. It is important to mention that in the Georgian public discourse of 2020–2025, the terms "borderization – creeping occupation" are often used as a synonymous package.[97]

As shown above, the Russian side deliberately uses the international legal terms "delimitation" and "demarcation," strategically appropriating legitimizing terminology. The result is a competition of frames, where the same phenomenon is described through:

"delimitation/demarcation" (Russian and de facto authorities' frame), to appropriate legitimacy through international legal terminology;

"borderization" (EUMM, some Georgian officials, media), a term that is technical and institutional, but criticized by some journalists and human rights activists as a euphemism masking a land seizure;[98] and

"creeping occupation/annexation" (CSOs, media, activists) – a moral and political framework that qualifies the actions as illegal seizure of territory.

Information support for the borderization process is provided through orchestrated campaigns coordinated by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rossotrudnichestvo, a Russian state agency established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, effectively functions as an instrument for "waging information warfare in favor of Russia" and applying "soft power" in territories outside the control of the Georgian central government.[99] Information operations are aimed at creating the appearance of legitimacy for the de facto structures and their actions, including borderization, as part of a broader strategy of information influence on Georgian society. Studies of the media landscape reveal the deliberate production of mutually exclusive frames of the same events in the Georgian information space.[100] The delegitimization of international observers and the narratives about "Western provocations" create an environment of distrust towards international organizations and CSOs that monitor territories adjacent to the occupied regions and implement projects to develop dialogue between

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[97] Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS), Analytical Materials, 2023–2025. Civil Georgia, Reports, 2023–2025.

[98] "We Are Using a Glaring Euphemism," *Georgia Today*, 2019, https://georgiatoday.ge/we-are-using-a-glaring-euphemism; Masho Lomashvili, "Erasing August: How Russia Rewrites Georgia's Story," *Coda Story*, August 7, 2025, https://www.codastory.com/rewriting-history/russia-georgia-august-war.

[99] Mamuka Komakhia, *"Foreign Policy" of the Russian-Occupied Regions of Georgia after the August 2008 War* (Tbilisi: Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, 2023).

[100] DFRLab / Atlantic Council, "Cross-Platform Disinformation Campaign in Georgia," December 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dfrlab.

the parts of a divided society. Such campaigns do not focus directly on borderization, but they shape the information environment in which the problem becomes less visible. When even the basic designation of the process remains a subject of competition more than ten years after its inception, it structurally hinders the formation of a unified national and international position.

The informational impact goes beyond terminological competition and affects the collective memory of the 2008 war. Journalistic investigations record a divided collective memory among residents of border villages. Some consider the war a "staged provocation," some retain memories of Russian aggression, and others feel confused by conflicting narratives.[101] According to these studies, the fear of publicly contradicting dominant positions in conditions of increasing political control makes it difficult to articulate alternative interpretations, creating an information environment where a multiplicity of narratives coexists with restrictions on their public expression. Borderization, therefore, occurs not only on the physical map, but also in the information space – the reformatting of collective memory about the conflict becomes part of the gray zone regime.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Georgian case confirms that borderization acts as a spatial mechanism of institutionalizing the status of the gray zone. Legal ambivalence, spatio-temporal transformation and informational articulation function as an integrated system of managed uncertainty. Sustained coercion below the thresholds of war while intentionally diluting the source of action creates a form of territorial control characteristic of contemporary conflicts.

Operationalizing the minimal core of the gray zone through mechanisms of legal ambivalence and spatio-temporal transformation allows for a systematic analysis of spatial practices of managed uncertainty. The structural relationship between gray zones and border spaces shows that border practices can constitute the core of gray zone strategy.

The focus on the strategic logic of borderization means that a detailed analysis of its impact on the everyday life of communities living along dividing lines has remained beyond the scope of this study. An ethnographic investigation of this dimension represents an important challenge for future work. The

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[101] Masho Lomashvili, "Erasing August: How Russia Rewrites Georgia's Story," *Coda Story*, August 7, 2025.

conceptual framework also requires verification on other cases of territorial gray zone practices to assess its applicability beyond the Georgian context.

Borderization reveals a fundamental challenge to the contemporary system of international relations. Traditional legal and institutional instruments are conceptually ill-equipped to respond to practices that systematically exploit their procedural limitations. Gray zone regimes are designed to remain in the gap between the categories on which response mechanisms are based. The legal status of territories remains in limbo. They are not recognized as independent, are not formally annexed, and do not have the status of temporary occupation with clear obligations. This situation allows the principles of territorial integrity to be undermined.

This study points to a possible transformation of the very nature of territorial conflicts. The territorial practices of the gray zone create a new form of spatial change. It is gradual, ambivalent and extended over time. This form may be more sustainable precisely because of its uncertainty. The final resolution of the situation depends on factors beyond the analytical reach of this research. Geopolitical change, the transformation of Russian foreign policy, and the evolution of the international community's position remain external variables. However, understanding how the gray zone regime produced by borderization operates, what mechanisms ensure its stability, and what vulnerabilities it creates remains a prerequisite for any attempts to transform it.

Studying borderization in Georgia offers a contribution to understanding how spaces of conflict, ambivalence and managed uncertainty are constructed and maintained. These processes require new analytical approaches and political strategies capable of working with the logic of uncertainty.

RECLAIMING CRIMEA: UKRAINE'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER

PATRICIE ŚCIBIOR
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

Abstract

This article explores how Ukraine's cultural diplomacy contributes to the global culture war over fundamental values underpinning the international order. Using a mixed method approach it analyzes the strategic narratives about Crimea employed by the Ukrainian Institute in its cultural diplomacy initiatives in years 2020–2024. The analysis identifies a strategic narrative framework composed of a sovereignty macro-narrative and three supporting micro-narratives: decolonial, humanitarian, and humanizing. Their discursive construction indicates an alignment with the ideological assumptions of the liberal international order and a strategy of persuasion centering indigenous rights, human rights, and personal freedom, while backgrounding immediate state interests in order to generate support for the fundamental claim of "Crimea is Ukraine." In doing so the framework both draws legitimacy from and reinforces the liberal international order exemplifying how states may act within a symbolic struggle to advance their own interests.
Keywords: Ukraine; Crimea; Ukrainian Institute; cultural diplomacy; strategic narratives; liberal international order
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Introduction

"Krym – tse Ukraina!" [Crimea is Ukraine!] is Ukraine's primary declaration being made in its fight to reclaim the Black Sea peninsula illegally occupied by Russia since 2014. This assertion is not just a declaration of territorial integrity. It is also a voice in a global culture war over what values should define international politics. The struggle plays out between the liberal international order (LIO), which consolidated after the end of the Cold War as a unipolar system grounded in a set of shared values including human rights, minority rights, sovereignty, democracy, and personal freedom,[1] and the challengers intent on its fundamental revision. In this conflict Ukraine positions itself on the side of the LIO against Russia's persistent objection to its core principles which its assertion of "Krym nash!" [Crimea is ours!] echoes.

In the current information age this battle is largely fought using stories. As Joseph Nye observes, following the democratization and the globalization of political and information systems, "outcomes are shaped not merely by whose army wins but also by whose story wins."[2] Strategic narratives provide these stories. They are constructed by actors of international politics in order to shape the understanding of reality others have and thus influence their behavior.[3] By reining in the overload of information modern audiences are subjected to, they provide interpretative frameworks that guide perceptions and subsequent actions in ways aligned with the sender's interests.[4]

Cultural diplomacy, understood here as a distinct branch of public diplomacy, constitutes a crucial channel for disseminating strategic narratives and consequently an arena for their confrontation.[5] In this sense cultural diplomacy represents one of the stages upon which the global culture war over fundamental values unfolds. Culture is unique in that it appears benign making audiences more open to interaction than they would be in the case of overtly political

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[1] Daniel Deudney and John G. Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of Liberal International-al Order," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 179–196, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210599001795.

[2] Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 19.

[3] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, "Strategic Narratives: A Response," *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 3 (2015): 341–344, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2015.1103023.

[4] Karl Gustafsson and Linus Hagström, "Narrative Power: How Storytelling Shapes East Asian International Politics," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 4 (2019): 389–391, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623498.

[5] Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 108–110, 120–123.

messaging.[6] Admiration for an actor's culture can thus provide a strong foundation for long-lasting receptivity to its goals and narratives.[7] For Ukraine its cultural diplomacy has become an important tool in advancing its interests, including its claim to Crimea, and countering Russian strategic narratives that seek to legitimize its aggressive revisions of the LIO, many of which target Ukraine directly.

Despite its growing significance Ukraine's cultural diplomacy has received little scholarly attention. Existing research mostly chronologically traces main trends in its institutional development and provides some general critical assessments as well as recommendations for future improvements. Researchers tend to take on a state-centric perspective viewing cultural diplomacy as a crucial soft-power instrument of Ukraine's foreign policy. A slight comparative leaning is also common with Ukraine's cultural diplomacy initiatives evaluated in relation to those of other European states, especially more robust Russian efforts. Authors further emphasize the strength of Russia's soft power along with its use of misinformation as the key reasons as to why Ukraine must strengthen its cultural diplomacy.[8]

While this body of literature reveals some notable trends, most works follow a similar trajectory resulting in a high degree of homogeneity. What is missing is more targeted research of how Ukraine's cultural diplomacy operates in practice especially as a factor in larger symbolic struggles. The case of Crimea is especially relevant in this context. The peninsula has become a microsome of the global culture war over the international order: should it be defined by

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[6] Stephanie Christine Winkler, "'Soft Power Is Such a Benign Animal': Narrative Power and the Reification of Concepts in Japan," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 4 (2019): 483–501, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623171.

[7] Milton C. Cummings, "Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey," Cultural Diplomacy Research Series, 2009, 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623171.

[8] Olha Filatova, "Kul'turna dyplomatiia Ukrainy: dosvid, problemy ta perspektyvy," *Pytannia politolohii* 40 (2021): 50–57, https://doi.org/10.26565/2220-8089-2021-40-06; Serhii Hololobov, "Kul'turna dyplomatiia yak skladova derzhavnoi polityky u sferi kul'tury na suchasnomu etapi ukrains'koho derzhavotvorennia," *Publichne upravlinnia ta rehional'nyi rozvytok* 18 (2022): 1057–1074, https://doi.org/10.34132/pard2022.18.04; Mariia Kushnarova, "Ukrains'ka kul'turna dyplomatiia pid chas viiny: dosvid, problemy, perspektyvy," *Natsional'na biblioteka Ukrainy imeni V. I. Vernads'koho* 67 (2023): 35–53, https://doi.org/10.15407/np.67.035; Larysa Mytsyk, "Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for Shaping the International Image of Ukraine," *Literature and Culture of Polissya* 15, no. 105 (2021): 70–84, https://doi.org/10.31654/2520-6966-2021-15i-105-70-84; Oksana Rozumna, *Kul'turna dyplomatiia Ukrainy: stan, problemy, perspektyvy* (Kyiv: Natsional'nyi Instytut Stratehichnykh Doslidzhen', 2016); Vitaliy Tereshchuk, "Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool of Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Institutional Dimension," *Historia i polityka* 28, no. 35 (2019): 59–70, https://doi.org/10.12775/HiP.2019.015.

norms of sovereignty and non-aggression, or the interests of great powers and spheres of influence? Examining Ukraine's efforts to shape international perceptions of Crimea thus provides insight into how states contribute to this struggle while advancing their key interests.

This article addresses the outlined gaps by examining the Ukrainian Institute's three major recent projects concerning Crimea. The Ukrainian Institute is currently Ukraine's primary state institution for cultural diplomacy. It was established in 2017 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs amid renewed interest in this field following the Revolution of Dignity. Since beginning operations in mid-2018,[9] it has developed a diverse portfolio of activities ranging from promotion of Ukrainian culture and language to communication campaigns, research publishing, and diplomatic events, all supported by a robust online presence. Following Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Institute has contributed to Ukraine's official war messaging and expanded significantly through increased donor funding, thus intensifying outreach beyond Europe.[10]

Guided by the centrality of storytelling to these initiatives the article takes on a strategic narratives perspective. The aim here is to identify the key narratives used in the projects, examine their discursive construction, and interpret the reasoning behind it. The following section outlines the research design and the specificities of the employed mixed-method approach. The next section, then, discusses the results of the analysis and to this end, it reconstructs the Ukrainian Institute's strategic narrative framework, moving from a general overview to a detailed examination of the overarching macro-narrative and three supporting micro-narratives. Finally, the concluding parts summarize the findings and situate them within the broader context of the global culture war over the LIO.

Research Data and Methodology

The methodological framework is based on a mixed-method approach which combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) and thematic narrative analysis (TNA). CDA is the primary methodological tool in this framework with the analysis drawing specifically on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The model is designed to analyze discursive events in detail by focusing on their three key aspects: text, discourse practice, and social practice.

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[9] Tereshchuk, "Cultural Diplomacy"; Ukrains'kyi Instytut, *Zvit pro diial'nist' za 2018 rik* (2019), 4–5, https://ui.org.ua/reports.

[10] Ukrains'kyi Instytut, *Richnyi zvit 2024* (2025), 18, https://ui.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/annual-report-2024-spreads.pdf.

The first stage of the analysis constitutes the descriptive phase of the process. It centers the discursive event itself with attention given to elements such as vocabulary, grammar, and structure. The second stage is dedicated to discourse practice. It examines the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of a discursive event constituting the interpretative phase of the analysis. The third stage is the explanatory phase and focuses on social practice. It is concerned with how a discursive event connects to the broader social context, especially the power relations and ideological structures within which it takes place.[11]

Narrative analysis, specifically thematic narrative analysis (TNA) as outlined by Katherine Riessman, is the second component of the methodological framework. TNA focuses on the *what* of a story asking what is happening in a narrative rather than how or why. TNA thus allows for identification of specific strategic narratives and preservation of their integrity in the analytical process which would be otherwise lost.[12]

It must be mentioned that TNA and CDA differ in their epistemological perspectives. CDA is rooted in critical realism, whereas TNA aligns itself with interpretivism. For the purposes of this work TNA is reinterpreted within CDA's critical realist paradigm. This view assumes that objective reality exists but that access to it is mediated by a socially constructed layer.[13] This contrasts with interpretivism which considers reality to be entirely subjective.[14] Narratives should thus be understood not merely as a way of subjective construction of meaning but a form of social practice which both shapes and is shaped by an underlying reality.

The data selected for the analysis consists of three projects of the Ukrainian Institute dedicated to the topic of Crimea from 2020 to 2024. This period is covered by the Ukrainian Institute's first strategy.[15] All three are available in English and online making them widely accessible which ensures their relevancy to the international focus of the analysis. Firstly, "We are Crimea," produced in 2020 in collaboration with Ukraïner, is a series of videos and articles based on interviews with culturally and politically influential Ukrainians from Crimea. The

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[11] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Routledge, 2013), 132.

[12] See Catherine K. Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), 80–114.

[13] Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 4–5.

[14] Catherine K. Riessman, *Narrative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1993), 4–5.

[15] Ukrainian Institute, *Strategy 2020–2024* (2020), https://ui.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/strategy-ui-en-web-2.pdf.

participants were given virtual reality headsets through which they revisited personally meaningful places on the peninsula, sharing their memories of life in Crimea and offering reflections on the occupation.[16] Secondly, "Crimea 5am" created in 2021 is composed of several elements. Its main part is a documentary play written by Natalia Vorozhbyt and Anastasiia Kosodii based on interviews with unjustly imprisoned citizen journalists from the Russian-occupied Crimea and their families. The play was performed in several countries and published in book form. A dedicated website provided updates and supplementary materials. Additionally, a public awareness campaign took place featuring an installation of broken, red doors inscribed with information about the prisoners, placed in several locations internationally at different points in time.[17] Lastly, "Crimea: History and People" is an online educational course consisting of video lectures and written materials dedicated to the history of Crimea and of the Crimean Tatars.[18] The multimodal character of the projects is taken into account with the linguistic, the visual, the auditory, and the performative elements all acknowledged in the analysis. However, all these aspects are treated as a discursive whole which reflects the focus on the overall meaning constructed regardless of the mode through which this is done, rather than the role specific modes play and interaction between them.

The analysis followed several stages. The first step was the familiarization with the materials during which preliminary narrative themes were identified. This was followed by the main coding phase conducted manually using a coding table based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model with an additional layer dedicated to TNA. This TNA layer was used to identify key narrative themes which were then analyzed using layers corresponding to Fairclough's CDA model. Once the coding was completed, strategic narratives were reconstructed based on the narrative themes identified in the TNA layer. The CDA layers were then used to identify patterns in discursive construction and function of specific narrative themes as well as of the broader strategic narratives they constitute. In short, TNA served to identify the narratives articulated through the projects, while CDA examined how these narratives were constructed and contextualized them.

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[16] "We Are Crimea," Ukrainian Institute, accessed July 14, 2025, https://ui.org.ua/en/sectors-en /en-projects/we-are-crimea-2.

[17] "Crimea 5am," Ukrainian Institute, accessed July 14, 2025, https://ui.org.ua/en/sectors-en /en-projects/documentary-performance-crimea-5am.

[18] "Crimea: History and People," Ukrainian Institute, accessed July 14, 2025, https://ui.org.ua/en /sectors-en/crimea-history-and-people-2.

The liberal international order

The sovereignty macro-narrative

Crimea is an illegally occupied Ukrainian territory

The decolonial micro-narrative
Crimea is an indigenous rights issue

The humanitarian micro-narrative
Crimea is a human rights issue

The humanizing micro-narrative
Crimea is a human issue

Crimean Tatars are Ukrainian

Crimeans support Ukraine

Ukrainian Crimea is home

Ukraine is a civic nation

Ukraine is a liberal democracy

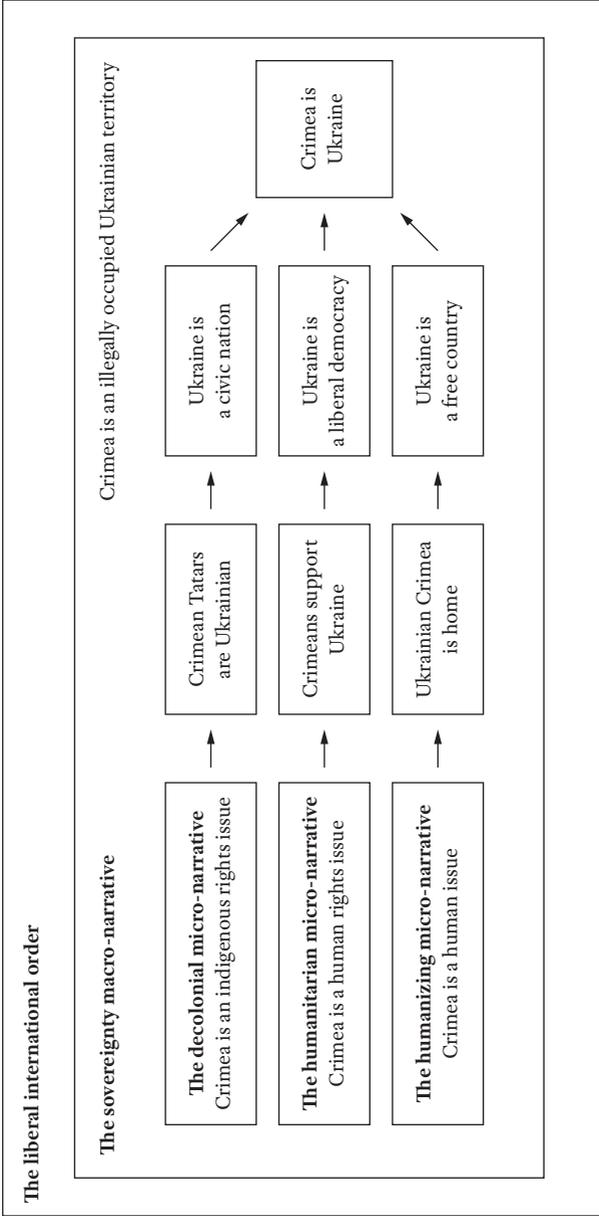Ukraine is a free country

Crimea is Ukraine

Figure 1: The Ukrainian Institute's Strategic Narrative Framework
Source: Compiled by author.

The Ukrainian Institute's Strategic Narrative Framework

The analysis identified four strategic narratives including one macro-narrative and three micro-narratives (Figure 1). The sovereignty macro-narrative constitutes the ideological backbone of the Ukrainian Institute's strategic narrative framework and anchors the fundamental claim of "Crimea is Ukraine" in the context of the liberal international order (LIO). However, the framework derives its persuasive power largely from the micro-narratives. The micro-narratives are: the decolonial micro-narrative centering indigenous rights; the humanitarian micro-narrative focused on human rights; and the humanizing micro-narrative rooted in individual experiences. They frequently overlap but each tells a separate story and constructs the issue of Crimea differently. What unites them is the ideological assumptions established by the sovereignty narrative. The micro-narratives focus on tangible issues grounded in liberal values generating emotional engagement more effectively than the general contents of the sovereignty macro-narrative would be able to. Within each micro-narrative Ukraine is positioned as the natural solution to the problem at hand allowing for the redirection of the emotional capital they accumulated towards the macro-narrative. This in turn strengthens the claim "Crimea is Ukraine." What follows is a closer examination of each component of this framework.

The Sovereignty Macro-narrative

The overarching macro-narrative in the Ukrainian Institute's projects is the sovereignty narrative. This narrative claims Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine's sovereign territory the occupation of which by Russia constitutes a violation of international law and an encroachment upon Ukrainian sovereignty.

The macro-narrative never takes center stage and it is instead seemingly purposefully backgrounded. While it is occasionally explicitly articulated, as in the below example, this is done through brief and concise paragraphs that do not occupy significant space within the projects. The language used in such cases is legalistic and relatively dry which establishes a tone of authority without drawing overt attention:

> Russia occupied the Crimean peninsula as a result of its armed aggression against
> Ukraine, which continues to this day. Most countries and international organizations

do not recognize this violent and illegal cleaving away of a part of Ukraine, nor its unlawful incorporation into the Russian Federation.[19]

More often, however, the sovereignty narrative is expressed implicitly primarily through repetition of specific linguistic choices. When referring to the Russian presence in Crimea since 2014 the projects avoid the neutral term "annexation" which has become common in the mainstream international discourse.[20] Terms "occupation," "temporary occupation," "Russian occupation" and seldom "attempt of annexation" are preferred.[21] This appears to be an intentional choice meant to reject the discursive normalization of the situation. Common use of words such as "unlawful" and "illegal" further supports the framing of Russia's intrusion into Crimea as a violation of international law, while "armed," "violent," or "seized" emphasize the sense of coercion.[22] This lexical register creates an unambiguous position on Crimea which remains ever-present throughout the examined materials.

The backgrounding strategy is crucial in positioning the narrative as common sense. Here, "common sense" refers to ideological assumptions so deeply embedded in social practice that they are perceived as self-evident. Because of this they are rarely questioned as to do so would appear irrational and extreme, making them imperative to the reproduction of existing power structures.[23] The sovereignty narrative achieves this status by aligning itself with the core values of the LIO. For instance, the narrative's lexical choices clearly reference international law. The international consensus regarding Crimea is also emphasized and the narrative appeals to the authority of respected institutions

[19] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea," *Ukraïner*, December 20, 2020, https://www.ukrainer.net/en/jamala-and-her-crimea.

[20] See, for example, BBC, "Ukraine: Putin Signs Crimea Annexation," *BBC News*, 2014, March 21, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26686949; Neil MacFarquhar, "Putin Contradicts Claims on Annexation of Crimea," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/10/world/europe/putin-contrary-to-earlier-assertions-suggests-planning-to-seize-crimea-started-in-early-2014.html.

[21] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "17. Russian Occupation of Crimea in 2014," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947212#content; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea," *Ukraïner*, December 19, 2020, https://www.ukrainer.net/en/oleg-sentsov-and-his-crimea; Natalia Vorozhbyt and Anastasiia Kosodii, *Crimea 5am* (Kyiv: IST Publishing, 2021).

[22] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "17. Russian Occupation of Crimea in 2014."; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea," *Ukraïner*, December 10, 2020, https://www.ukrainer.net/en/akhtem-and-his-crimea; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea."

[23] Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Routledge, 2015), 13.

such as the United Nations General Assembly reflecting the LIO's multilateral approach.

By situating itself within this liberal hegemonic framework the sovereignty narrative gains discursive power. The fundamental claim of "Crimea is Ukraine" grows from a national position into a defense of liberal norms. This is further reinforced by its non-polemical articulation marked by the use of high modality. What results from this is a narrative that presents itself as so self-evident that it does not need to be defended as it derives its legitimacy from integrating itself into the dominant ideology's common sense. The sovereignty narrative thus blends into the background and becomes naturalized in the audience's mind as a non-controversial shared understanding.

The Decolonial Micro-narrative

The first micro-narrative found across the analyzed projects is the decolonial narrative which focuses on the historical and current experiences of the Crimean Tatars. Within this narrative the issue of Crimea is presented as a matter of indigenous rights. The peninsula is portrayed as the ancestral homeland of the Crimean Tatars which has been subjected to centuries of Russian colonization, the current occupation being just its latest stage.

The narrative's prevalence is visible in the discursive privileging of the Crimean Tatars within all of the analyzed projects. In "We are Crimea" three out of four interviewees are Crimean Tatar; "Crimea: History and People" is wholly dedicated to the peninsula's history framed through a Crimean Tatar lens; and "Crimea 5am" is dedicated to stories of Crimean Tatar citizen journalists. This is likely an intentional choice given that the Crimean Tatars constituted only around 12% of Crimea's population prior to Russia's takeover.[24]

The main element of the decolonial narrative is the historiography it constructs. Its protagonists are the Crimean Tatars whose indigeneity is strongly emphasized. On the lexical level this is done through repeated labeling of them as "indigenous" along with the use of terms like "native land," "ancestral homeland," or "their [Crimean Tatar] homeland" in reference to Crimea.[25] They are also never referred to as just "Tatar" always appearing as "the Crimean Tatars."

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[24] Kerstin S. Jobst, *A History of Crimea: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025), 337.

[25] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "2. Introduction: Why You Should Learn about Crimean Tatars," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947012#content; Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 17, 158.

This constitutes a rejection of what Finnin has termed "discursive cleansing" or the Soviet attempt to erase their region-specific following the Sürgün [exile] meaning the 1944 deportation of Crimean Tatars from Crimea.[26] Furthermore, the narrative firmly rejects the claim that the Crimean Tatars are "merely descendants of the Mongols"[27] which is an idea rooted in Russian historiography that was used to portray the Crimean Tatars as foreign invaders and a threat to Slavic inhabitants of the peninsula through association with the brutality of medieval Mongol invasions.[28]

The Crimean Khanate is strongly valorized within the decolonial narrative as a flourishing civilization which moves it from the margins to the center of Eastern European historical discourse. A key element of its portrayal is the deconstruction of the Khanate's conventional depiction as a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman suzerainty is acknowledged but so are numerous markers of independence including Khanate's own currency, civil bureaucracy, judicial system, and diplomatic relations. Its military and political significance is emphasized for instance by noting that regionally influential actors such as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Muscovy paid tribute directly to the Khanate. This is visually reinforced with maps of its extensive territory. Achievements of the Crimean Khanate in the fields of culture and education are also emphasized through mentions of poets such as Umer Ashek or Khan Jan Mohammad, the Zincirli Madrasa, and vibrant depictions of court life.[29]

The primary antagonist in the decolonial narrative's historiography is Russia, constructed as a colonizing power. Every instance of its entry into the Crimean Peninsula is framed in negative terms. The annexation of Crimea into the Russian empire is described as an "invasion" and "catastrophe,"[30] while the Bolshevik take-

[26] Rory Finnin, "Forgetting Nothing, Forgetting No One: Boris Chichibabin, Viktor Nekipelov, and the Deportation of the Crimean Tatars," *The Modern Language Review* 106, no. 4 (2011): 1091–124, https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.106.4.1091.

[27] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "4. Origins of Crimean Tatars and Their State Crimean Khanate," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947084#overview, 1:45–1:50.

[28] Filiz Tutku Aydin and Fethi Kurtiy Sahin, "The Politics of Recognition of Crimean Tatar Collective Rights in the Post-Soviet Period: With Special Attention to the Russian Annexation of Crimea," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52 (2019): 42, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.02.003.

[29] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "Section 3: The Crimean Khanate," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947120#; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea."

[30] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "5. The Crimean Khanate as a Political and Military Player in Eastern Europe," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947088#content, 4:30–4:45.

over is labeled a forcible annexation.[31] Russian presence in Crimea is delegitimized as artificially created through a deliberate strategy of displacement. Emphasis is placed on explaining the formation of contemporary ethnic Russian majority in Crimea through settler colonialism. In section 5 of "Crimea: History and People" a map of Crimea appears alongside this explanation. Initially filled with figures representing the Crimean Tatars, the map shows about half of them then disappearing, replaced by a new Slavic population, thus reinforcing this framing.[32]

The narrative also deconstructs Russian epistemic violence particularly through critique of colonial historical revisionism. The already discussed valorization of the Crimean Khanate is part of this effort. Another one of its key elements focuses on the Hellenization and the Russification of indigenous toponyms under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. These processes are discussed[33] and countered within the projects through the widespread use of Crimean Tatar toponyms. These forms are often privileged over later imperial and Soviet versions with phrasings such as: "Mamashay (Qt – Mamaşay; Orlivka since 1945) in the South-West Crimea near Sevastopol (old Qt – Aqyar)."[34]

Russian rule over Crimea is discussed primarily through the lens of its negative effects on the Crimean Tatars with the Sürgün constituting the defining point of the narrative. The lexical register used to describe it includes terms such as "tragedy," "abominable act of violence," and "genocide" leaving no room for ambiguity. All of the existing justifications propagated by Russia are strongly rejected as "slander" and "myth."[35] The Sürgün emerges as the most frequently referenced historical event throughout the narrative, dividing Crimean Tatar history into "before" and "after."[36] The narrative also stresses its

[31] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "11. Crimea during the Revolution and Civil War (1917–1921)," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people /learn/lecture/30947176#content, 4:04–4:10.

[32] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "9. Modernization: The Colony as an 'Imperial Garden,'" *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture /30947168#content, 2:20–2:30.

[33] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "9. Modernization: The Colony as an 'Imperial Garden'"; Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "14. Claiming the Homeland. Deportation and Return of Crimean Tatars," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people /learn/lecture/30947190#content.

[34] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea."

[35] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "13. Ambiguity of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course /crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947188#content; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea"; Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 8.

[36] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "13. Ambiguity of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic," 8:55.

long-term effects for instance through the biographical profiles of the projects' protagonists, most of whom were born in Uzbekistan and only later returned to Crimea.[37]

Parallels are drawn between past and present Russian policies emphasizing colonial continuity. They emerge both organically through natural similarities, such as the post-2014 influx of Russian settlers appearing as a continuation of earlier methods of demographic engineering, and deliberately through specific narrative constructions. One example of the latter is the story of Veciye Qaşqa which opens the "Crimea 5am" play. Her life is recounted in short sentences starting with deportation to Uzbekistan at 10 years old and ending with a heart attack during her arrest by Russian occupation forces in 2017.[38]

The Crimean Tatar resistance to these attempts is then naturally framed in anticolonial terms. The Crimean Tatars "reclaim," "return," and repatriate which emphasizes their rightful ownership of the land and status of indigenous people.[39] They are also morally valorized in both historical and contemporary contexts appearing as "innocent people," "faithful Muslims" who "renounce all terror."[40] Their historical and contemporary resistance is portrayed as grounded in values of peace and democracy. The short-lived Crimean People's Republic of 1917 is framed as a pioneer of democracy and gender equality while the Soviet era dissident movement is praised for its non-violent character.[41] Their peacefulness is further highlighted with contemporary examples such as the story of Reşat Ametov who, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, took part in a protest against the occupation for which he was brutally murdered.[42] Therefore, a strong contrast exists between the portrayals of the colonized and the colonizer in the decolonial narrative. This frames the issue in terms of two opposing moral extremes prompting the audience's alignment with the struggle of the righteous indigenous people against the violent Russian colonization.

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[37] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea"; Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 69.

[38] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 28.

[39] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "14. Claiming the Homeland. Deportation and Return of Crimean Tatars," 9:15; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea," *Ukraïner*, December 12, 2020, https://www.ukrainer.net/en/mustafa-jemilev-and-his-crimea.

[40] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 140, 164.

[41] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "1. Promo Video," *Udemy*, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.udemy.com/course/crimea-history-and-people/learn/lecture/30947250#content, 0:47–0:57; Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "14. Claiming the Homeland."

[42] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 28–29.

The Humanitarian Micro-narrative

In contrast with the historical perspective of the decolonial narrative the humanitarian narrative shifts to a more immediate timeframe. It tells the story of ordinary Crimeans' civil resistance to Russian occupation authorities since 2014 and of their subsequent persecution. Discursively, it is the simplest out of the identified narratives. It contrasts the righteous Crimean civil society with the deplorable Russian occupation forces. In doing so it constructs a clear moral binary positioning the issue of Crimea as a question of right and wrong grounded in human rights considerations.

The narrative portrays civil resistance as a spontaneous, grassroots response to Russia's occupation of Crimea. It primarily relies on stories of real people. Frequently provided biographical information of the story's protagonists emphasizes the ordinariness of their lives prior to the narrative's main story. For instance, the audience learns that Rustem Sheikhaliev finished a technical high school, worked as fruits and vegetables seller at Simferopol's Central Market, had three children, was known in the community for his honesty in business, and often helped to organize children's parties.[43] These and other details amount to a series of diverse genre paintings depicting hard-working Crimean citizens leading normal lives.

The year 2014 marks a rapture in these biographies with a sudden appearance of systemic violence in the narrative.[44] Crimean citizens' resistance against this intrusion is framed as stemming from an internal sense of moral obligation. This is best illustrated through excerpts from speeches of arrested citizen journalists delivered mostly in court which are included in the "Crimea 5am" project.[45] The following quotation from Nariman Memedeminov's last speech before his verdict was announced provides a clear example:

> No wonder the authorities, the government structures, the public prosecutor, and their ilk cannot wrap their enlightened heads around it: "Like, why can't you just stay at home? What on earth makes you crowd the 149 courtrooms and protest in front of buildings? Why all these banners, all these protests? Why do you raise the money for these families? Why all these coins?" They fail to see that it is our nature, the way we are. Whenever one of us is in trouble, we all feel out of place, this is called solidarity... This is what I call unity![46]

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[43] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 47–48.
[44] Ibid., 47–48, 69–70, 92–93.
[45] Ibid., 134–162.
[46] Ibid., 149–150.

With a hint of irony Memedeminov contrasts the authoritarian logic of the Russian state unable to comprehend civil resistance with the community's understanding of it as a moral reflex. Resistance is therefore positioned as morally superior and grounded in shared values of a unified community.

Additionally, the humanitarian narrative highlights the inter-ethnic character of Crimean civil resistance creating a sense of a shared struggle across an entire population. While the Crimean Tatars remain dominant in the narrative as "the vanguard of the resistance," [47] they are not the sole actors. "We are Crimea" also includes the story of Oleg Sentsov who is a Ukrainian film director from Crimea opposed to Russia's occupation and a former political prisoner.[48] Furthermore, when discussing shutdowns of independent media, Ukrainian channels are mentioned alongside the Crimean Tatar ones[49] and visual materials depicting anti-occupation protests feature images of crowds holding both Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar flags.[50]

This empathetic portrayal of the civil society is contrasted with a depiction of Russia as a violent, neo-totalitarian regime. Numerous examples of morally valorized acts of resistance are paired with extensive accounts of human rights violations they are met with. These abuses are shown to the audience primarily through personal testimonies of victims accompanied by visual materials which reinforce their authenticity. The narrative's protagonists recount arrests of civil activists full of unprovoked violence and carried out in the presence of terrified children and elderly family members.[51] It is explained how charges of terrorism are fabricated through constant surveillance and sham legal procedures.[52] Other stories also speak of the activists' displacement and their inability to return to Crimea.[53]

Russianness is deindividualized in the humanitarian narrative. Russians feature almost exclusively as agents of repression: they are border guards, masked soldiers, shadowy men with rifles.[54] They are nameless and faceless, visually appearing in military or police uniforms, usually captured in carrying out acts of

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[47] Ibid., 9.

[48] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea."

[49] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 9.

[50] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "17. Russian Occupation of Crimea in 2014," 0:54–0:58.

[51] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 64–87.

[52] Ibid., 59–60.

[53] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea"; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea."

[54] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea"; Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 70–72.

violence against Crimeans. Their characterization is consistently negative. Russians appear to the audience as violent, opportunistic, and emotionally numb. They benefit from the occupation at Crimeans' expense and remain indifferent or even actively supportive of the suffering they cause. This is exemplified by citizen journalist Amet Suleimanov's description of FSB soldiers with whom "(…) it is futile to strike a conversation and expect real empathy from them, it's beyond their power. They are machines. Completely insensitive. For them, nothing matters but the order to obey and the decree to put into effect."[55] Similarly, Russian society as a whole is described in a generalized manner: "a lot of people there don't like Putin, and their number is growing every year. But their opinion about Crimea is uniform – they all believe Crimea belongs to Russia. This mentality is very deep-rooted there: 'we'll capture what's ours and we won't give it back'. It's disgusting, but they really do think like this."[56] The humanitarian narrative thus explicitly frames Russians as a homogenous collective of cogs in a totalitarian system which contributes to the construction of a moral divide between the oppressors and the oppressed.

Importantly, the identification of some segments of Crimea's population with Russianness is excluded from the story. Protagonists of the humanitarian narrative are only Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian, or both. While Oleg Sentsov is ethnically Russian this is not acknowledged within the narrative which further exemplifies the intentional aligning of Russianness with the oppressor group.[57] Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian remain the only morally legitimate identities within the narrative.

The humanitarian narrative also constructs parallels between contemporary Russia and the former Soviet Union contextualizing current abuses within a longer tradition of state violence and further delegitimizing the occupation. Brutal interrogations and show trials of civil activists followed by imprisonment in distant penal colonies echo Soviet-era practices. This tactic is not limited to implicit comparisons. Russia is indeed directly labeled as "the Soviet Union 2.0"[58] and the Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, himself a victim of Soviet repression, asserts that the ongoing violence sometimes exceeds that of the Soviet Union.[59]

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[55] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 98.
[56] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea."
[57] Zoya Svetova, "Krymskoe delo," *The New Times*, May 31, 2014, https://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/83077.
[58] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea."
[59] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea."

The Humanizing Micro-narrative

The final, humanizing micro-narrative narrows its scope even more centering personal stories of exile and loss following Russia's intrusion into Crimea. Unlike the previous two micro-narratives, which derive their persuasive power from greater and more abstract values, the humanizing narrative is grounded in the subjective experience. By focusing on individual lives, it humanizes the issue of Crimea and encourages the audience to identify with the narrative's subjects. Within this narrative Crimea then appears as a personal homeland which positions the conflict as a primarily human issue.

The humanizing narrative is noticeable in the prevalent use of personal testimonies in the projects' materials which position the individuals as the main protagonists of the story. For instance, "We are Crimea" is based on interviews with prominent Crimeans who revisit their home through a virtual reality experience. This format quite literally allows the audience to look at Crimea through the interviewees' eyes prompting development of an emotional connection. Outside of the virtual reality segments the visuals of the project remain simple. Interviewees are positioned against plain backgrounds ensuring all focus remains on them by eliminating unnecessary distractions.[60]

Similarly, "Crimea 5am" includes a documentary play built around interviews with imprisoned Crimean Tatar citizen journalists and their families. All productions of the play remain minimalist. Performers in plain clothing are seated around the stage and read out the script without fully embodying the characters. One performer will often take on multiple roles and there is little physical movement involved. A screen will usually constitute the most dynamic element on the stage displaying additional contextualizing details, photos of the play's heroes, and occasional visual effects.[61] This minimalism allows the audience to directly engage with the stories being recounted providing a window into the realities of life in occupied Crimea.[62]

Language plays a crucial role in establishing a focus on the narrative's subjects and appealing to the audience's sense of empathy. The use of first-person voice, rhetorical questions, pauses, and exclamations creates a sense of being

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[60] "We Are Crimea," Ukrainian Institute.
[61] Crimea 5am, "Crimea 5am, Documentary Performance in National Center Ukrainian House, Kyiv, Ukraine," *YouTube*, November 4, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=totG97u3d5M; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, "Ukraine, 5 a.m. – A Staged Reading Followed by a Discussion," *YouTube*, June 13, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpjOFvl-plM.
[62] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 13.

directly spoken to, while dialogues and reported speech capture the authenticity of real-life conversation. The language is very emotive, especially when subjects speak about their exile and the occupation's terror clearly communicating the subjects' emotions during these experiences. For example, Jamala expresses that she feels "caged and helpless" due to her inability to return to Crimea,[63] while Aishe Asanova recalls her outrage at seeing armed men pointing guns at her husband in front of their frightened children.[64]

The humanizing narrative also seeks to universalize the issue of Crimea through appeals to shared values of home, family, or dreams. One article from the "We are Crimea" project introduces its subject as follows:

> Most of us have favourite scents, things, places, and memories that are associated with home. Where the home starts, anxiety and uncertainty vanish. Home holds us like strong roots hold a tree, tells us who we are, where we are from and what path we follow.[65]

Here, the discursive construction is inclusive thanks to the use of collective pronouns and the generalization of the experience of home which establishes a common ground between the audience and the narrative's subjects.

The narrative is further characterized by strong individualization of its protagonists. Their names are consistently provided along with biographical details such as levels of education, professions, number of children, hobbies, and personal preferences. For instance, a section of "Crimea 5am" is dedicated to the wedding memories of the speakers. The recollections vary in tone with Elzara Suleimanova recounting her nikah with joy, comparing it to a "fairytale," while Suria Sheikhalieva remembers it through the sad context of her mother's battle with cancer at the time.[66] Such details add depth to the narrative allowing the audience to perceive its subjects as diverse individuals and connect with them. This is further reinforced through the visual and auditory dimensions. Within the "We are Crimea" project the interviewees are seen in photographs and speaking on video, often with silent close-up shots of their faces. "Crimea 5am" similarly includes extensive photographic material depicting the people whose stories are being told making them appear more real to the audience.

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[63] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea."
[64] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 66.
[65] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "We Are Crimea," *Ukraïner*, February 24, 2021, https://www.ukrainer.net/en/we-are-crimea.
[66] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 44–51.

Overall, the narrative achieves a paradoxical sense of objectivity through subjectivity. The audience accesses Crimea through the lived experiences of individuals which invites emotional identification with their perspectives. The connection of the audience with the story's protagonists supports the narrative's credibility because they appear real and thus relatable. Their stories are grounded in personal memory allowing the narrative to assert a special kind of authority. Its claims are correct precisely because they are based in subjectivity. One scene of "Crimea 5am" captures this well. As Suria Sheikhalieva speaks of her husband's dream to own a house and his daily hard work, a Soviet-era Photon TV broadcasts "jokes about Ukraine." She talks over the noise until someone finally turns the device off after which she is able to continue in a softer voice.[67] This scene symbolically captures the struggle between depersonalized state propaganda and individual truth. Out of the two competing voices, Suria is who the audience trusts, exactly because she appears deeply human.

The claim to Crimea in the humanizing narrative is thus personal. Stories of childhoods and marriages are recounted full of mundane but intimate memories of assembling furniture at night,[68] preparing pilaf, grazing sheep,[69] drinking coffee at sunrise.[70] These elements make Crimea appear as the home of the narrative's protagonists. Their belonging in the land does not need to be proclaimed; it is shown through experiences of everyday life on the peninsula. This bond is strengthened by the subjects' emotional attachment to and intimate knowledge of Crimea. For example, in "We are Crimea," Akhtem Seitablaiev describes the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai as his "place of power,"[71] while Jamala refers to a small part of Crimea's coastline as "my shore, my pier."[72] The interviewees recognize locations they are shown, are visibly and audibly emotional at seeing them, and detail changes to the environment that occurred since their last visit.[73] Furthermore, Crimea is repeatedly referred to as "home" or "homeland,"

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67 Ibid., 55–57.
68 Ibid., 54.
69 Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea."
70 Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 58.
71 Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea."
72 Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea."
73 Ukrainian Institute, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea | We Are Crimea," *YouTube*, February 25, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIsNNnKstw8; Ukrainian Institute, "Jamala and Her Crimea | We Are Crimea," *YouTube*, February 25, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sV-uRLBA9V8; Ukrainian Institute, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea | We Are Crimea," *YouTube*, February 25, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WK0lOmtW9WE; Ukrainian Institute, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea | We Are Crimea," *YouTube*, February 25, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhbTx14s9Hc.

described as "native" and labeled as "my" or "our" reinforcing the emotional importance of the peninsula.[74]

When directly addressing the Russian occupation of Crimea the humanizing narrative retains its focus on the personal. The occupation is shown through portraits of personal tragedies it caused highlighting the human cost of Russia's invasion. The affective range of the narrative is drastically different before and after the invasion. The past is filled with warmth constructed by joyful and loving memories. In contrast the present is dominated by sadness, fear, and longing. The occupation consequently appears as an emotional rapture. Its primary consequence within the narrative is the loss of home. "We are Crimea" is based on stories of those who cannot return. Interviewees speak of their exile with pain, describing being cut off from their families,[75] missing funerals of loved ones,[76] and being unable to show the land of their childhood to their own children.[77]

In "Crimea 5am" this is articulated through the voices of families of fathers taken away from home by Russian authorities. These men are imprisoned in distant cities like Rostov-on-Don or Novocherkassk with the voices of their wives and children foregrounded as they recount the trauma of separation. One scene illustrates how the occupation intrudes into the category of home. It begins with Khalide Bekirova speaking of how her son Muhammad made a cutout of a tree representing his family but with his father absent. When asked why, the boy points to a part of his cutout, explaining he is in the shadows, behind bars, chained by FSB officers.[78]

Narrative Resolution: Crimea is Ukraine

The natural resolution to all of the Ukrainian Institute's micro-narratives is the return of Crimea to Ukraine. The linking of a micro-narrative's main story with this endpoint is done most explicitly in the decolonial narrative. In addition to the earlier discussed elements, the narrative's historiography also constructs a sense of a shared fate between the ethnic Ukrainians and the Crimean

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[74] See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea"; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "We Are Crimea"; Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 129.

[75] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Akhtem Seitablaiev and His Crimea"; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea"; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea."

[76] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea"; Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea."

[77] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Jamala and Her Crimea."

[78] Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 112.

Tatars. It highlights episodes of cooperation between the two and marginalizes those of conflict. Historical parallels which link elements of their past highlight the themes of solidarity and shared values. For instance, the Crimean People's Republic and the Ukrainian People's Republic are connected through the narrative's emphasis on their mutual respect.[79] Russia is also important to this narrative construction functioning as a shared enemy.

Importantly, Ukraine is not a major actor within the decolonial narrative and appears only as a background presence paralleling the Crimean Tatar experience. This positioning, especially in contrast with Russia's militant presence, paints Ukraine as a natural ally to the Crimean Tatars, united with them through a common experience of Russian colonial subjugation. Developments such as the recognition of the Crimean Tatars, Karaites, and Krymchaks as indigenous are highlighted as examples of Ukraine's commitment to indigenous rights. However, the fact that even such symbolic steps were not taken until after the Russian takeover is omitted.[80] Together these elements provide a historical basis for the legitimacy of Ukraine's claim to Crimea. Words of Mustafa Dzhemilev included in the "We are Crimea" project capture the logic of this historical link:

> There was a time when a significant chunk of Ukraine was part of Crimean Khanate, now we are part of Ukraine. From time to time we change our status but if we separate, Ukraine will be lost to us, so under no circumstances should that happen. We will be part of Ukraine. We [the indigenous people] are the founders, a part of Ukraine as a country, so we see our all, our own, in Ukraine.[81]

In the decolonial narrative Crimea is then Crimean Tatar and the Crimean Tatars are an integral part of the Ukrainian civic nation bound to ethnic Ukrainians by a shared history. The claim "Crimea is Ukraine" thus becomes a statement in support of indigenous rights.

Within the humanitarian and humanizing narratives, the connection between Crimea and Ukraine is constructed much more implicitly, mostly through contrast with conditions of life in Crimea under Russian occupation. The humanitarian narrative focuses on violent repression of a morally valorized Crimean civil society. Support for Ukrainian control over Crimea is framed as a natural reaction of Crimean society stemming from its deep-rooted values.

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[79] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "11. Crimea during the Revolution and Civil War (1917–1921)," 2:06–2:28.
[80] Ukrainian Institute and EdEra, "17. Russian Occupation of Crimea in 2014," 8:15–8:23.
[81] Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Mustafa Jemilev and His Crimea."

While Ukraine is not presented as flawless with occasional criticism of its failures in integrating Crimea allowed, it is also implicitly positioned as aligned with values of the Crimean civil society.[82] In this context Ukraine's claim to Crimea becomes a matter of ensuring Crimeans' rights, freedoms, and protection from totalitarian state impulses.

The humanizing narrative similarly relies on an implicit sense of Ukrainian governance being preferable. The strong contrast in the tone of the presented personal stories, between the joyful past and the fearful present, communicates that life under Ukrainian administration is remembered positively. The idyllic vision of Crimea as home is a vision of a Ukrainian Crimea. Return of Crimea to Ukraine thus means the return of the possibility to live freely in one's homeland.

A key tactic used by all three micro-narratives is individualization. Each includes specific voices of Crimeans who explicitly state that Crimea is a part of Ukraine, that its return is necessary, and that they identify as Ukrainian. In making these statements they represent both themselves on a personal level and larger communities to which they belong. For example, when Server Mustafaiev, an imprisoned Crimean Tatar citizen journalist, states that he is a citizen of Ukraine he does so simultaneously as a Crimean Tatar, a representative of Crimean civil society, and an ordinary Crimean inhabitant.[83] His multifaceted identity makes him an embodiment of the core issues in all three micro-narratives. Through Mustafaiev's assertion, along with numerous others, Crimea's belonging to Ukraine is framed as the general will of the people. The audience is encouraged to align themselves with the macro-narrative's advocacy for Ukrainian sovereignty because the individuals who embody the tangible issues that they have come to care about through the micro-narratives endorse it.

Therefore, Ukraine's positionality within the strategic narrative framework is quite unique. Despite being an ever-present referent, it rarely appears as an active actor. Even when it plays a direct role within a micro-narrative, as in the decolonial narrative, it remains in the background with a rather supplementary function. In fact, the micro-narratives are in general characterized by a limited number of actors. They all center on a binary relationship between just two agents. In the decolonial narrative these are the Crimean Tatars and Russia depicted as a colonizer; in the humanitarian narrative the focus is on the conflict between Crimean civil society and Russia's neo-totalitarian system; in the humanizing narrative the emphasis is placed on individual suffering under

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82 See, for example, Ukrainian Institute and Ukraïner, "Oleg Sentsov and His Crimea."
83 Vorozhbyt and Kosodii, "Crimea 5am," 134.

a destructive Russian occupation. This produces simple narrative structures with a clear moral binary and a single antagonist bearing full blame for the situation in Crimea. Ukraine is not an explicit part of the equation. Instead, it is a goal to which the "good" actors aspire becoming central to the micro-narratives' resolution despite its absence from their main stories.

Ukraine's Strategic Narratives within the Global Culture War

The issue of Crimea does not exist in a vacuum. The peninsula's occupation represented one of Russia's first major challenges to the LIO paradigm. Forcible seizure of territory was something many in the Global North considered unthinkable, yet it became a reality marking an early battle in the global culture war over the world order and later escalating into Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In this context, Ukraine's state interest in Crimea, the restoration of its territorial integrity, is directly aligned with the LIO as it relies on the international community's continued commitment to the equal sovereignty of all states.

This alignment is reflected in the above-described strategic narrative framework of the Ukrainian Institute which both is supported by and supports the LIO. On one hand, the framework derives legitimacy from liberal ideological assumptions. Each of the identified micro-narratives focuses on tangible issues grounded in the LIO, whether its indigenous rights, human rights, or personal freedom. Ukraine is consistently positioned as the solution to the described issues in Crimea and thus appears as a guarantor of liberal values with support for its sovereignty becoming synonymous with upholding these values.

On the other, the strategic narrative framework also reinforces the LIO. The sovereignty macro-narrative which most directly references its institutional and normative architecture is backgrounded in favor of the micro-narratives. The audience's attention centers on the fates of specific people and communities. From engagement with these smaller stories arises interest in the topic of Crimea more broadly which in turn translates into support for Ukraine's territorial claims. Ultimately, this reaffirms the value system in which Ukraine's state interests are supported as morally correct. That is of course the liberal international order.

Conclusion

This article examines how the Ukrainian Institute, as Ukraine's primary state institution in the field of cultural diplomacy, constructs strategic narratives about

Crimea to address international audiences in its initiatives produced during its first strategy for years 2020 to 2024. The analysis identified a strategic narrative framework composed of a sovereignty macro-narrative, within which the fundamental Ukrainian narrative claim of "Crimea is Ukraine" is grounded, and three supporting micro-narratives: decolonial, humanitarian, and humanizing.

The macro-narrative presents Ukraine's claim to Crimea supported by international law. It remains in the background subtly aligning the overall framework with the liberal international order (LIO). The three micro-narratives function as accessible entry points for the audience generating interest in the topic of Crimea through tangible issues of indigenous rights, human rights, and personal freedom. The decolonial narrative portrays Crimea as the ancestral homeland of the Crimean Tatars and paints Russia as a colonial power whose attempts to subjugate Crimea span centuries and continue to this day. The humanitarian narrative focuses on the on-going human rights violations contrasting Crimean civil resistance with Russian neo-totalitarianism. The humanizing narrative centers personal stories of tragedy resulting from Russian occupation and frames Crimea in emotional terms as a lost home.

All three micro-narratives position Ukraine as the natural solution to the problems they describe without overt focus on the state. Ukraine is decentered and instead implicit links and explicit proclamations by symbolic figures articulate support for the core assertion of "Crimea is Ukraine" connecting back to the sovereignty macro-narrative and the larger context of the LIO.

This strategic narrative framework exists in a two-way relationship with the LIO. It both draws legitimacy from its ideological assumptions in positioning support with Ukraine as synonymous with support for liberal values and strengthens it against revisionist attacks with the emotionally engaging micro-narratives backing up the LIO's fundamental principles. In this way the work of the Ukrainian Institute demonstrates how actors of international politics interact with wider culture wars within which they are embedded entering a symbiotic relationship in which they both shape and are shaped by these grander clashes over fundamental values.

REVIEWS

Visualising The Creator's Game: Visual Anthropology, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lacrosse Across Borders
In the Homeland of Lacrosse / V domovině lakrosu. Directed by Lívia Šavelková and Milan Durňak. Pardubice: University of Pardubice, 2024. 110 minutes.

Introduction: Visual Anthropology and Ethnographic Filmmaking

The growing importance of visual culture[1] over the last two centuries has led to what is commonly described as the *pictorial turn*,[2] accompanied by the emergence of interdisciplinary fields such as visual studies[3] and visual anthropology.[4] These approaches have become standard components of university curricula and provide essential methodological tools for analyzing the complex, multilayered visual environments of contemporary societies. Despite this development, visual anthropology continues to occupy an uneasy position within Czech academia, where visual outputs are still rarely evaluated as scholarly work on par with written texts.

Visual culture constitutes a specific field of evidence that requires distinct theoretical and methodological approaches. As Peter Burke has argued, visual sources gain particular analytical value when examined in series,[5] as seriality enables comparison, contextualization, and the identification of structural patterns. It is precisely this strength that characterizes the long-term ethnographic project of the anthropologist Lívia Šavelková, developed in collaboration with anthropologist and filmmaker Milan Durňak. Their body of work – four feature-length ethnographic films produced between 2014 and 2024 – forms a coherent visual research corpus devoted to lacrosse as a cultural, political, and spiritual phenomenon, and to its unexpected yet historically grounded entanglement with Central Europe.

Šavelková's work stands out not only for its thematic focus on sport and indigeneity but also for its sustained engagement with the socialist and post-socialist contexts.[6]

1 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).
2 William J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," *Artforum* 30, no. 5 (1992): 89–94; Gottfried Boehm, "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder," in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. Gottfried Boehm (München: Fink, 1994), 11–38.
3 Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001).
4 David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Anna Grimshaw and Alison Ravetz, eds., *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
5 Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 187–188.
6 Lívia Šavelková and Klára Perlíková, "Konceptualizace humoru ve vztahu k původním obyvatelům Severní Ameriky v česko-slovenském prostoru," in *Na křídlech aztéckého orla*, ed. Tomáš Boukal, Adam Horálek, and Tomáš Retka (Praha: Dauphin, 2022), 300–340.

Lacrosse entered Czechoslovakia through scouting, woodcraft, and subcultural movements that drew on imaginaries of Native American life, at a time when these practices functioned as subtle forms of resistance to the communist regime. By tracing these transatlantic and transhistorical connections, the films challenge both nationalist narratives of sport and reductive representations of Indigenous cultures.

The Lacrosse Film Cycle: Themes and Methodologies

Šavelková and Durňak's lacrosse films – *Lakros – To je způsob života / Lacrosse – It's a Way of Life* (2014) together with Tomáš Petráň, *Globální lakrosobá vesnice / Global Lacrosse Village* (2015), *Na břehu / On the Shore* (2022), and *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* (2024) – constitute a rare example of longitudinal visual research in Czech anthropology. Each film adopts a distinct analytical perspective, while together they document the authors' evolving understanding of lacrosse as a cultural practice shaped by colonial histories, globalization, amateurism, and Indigenous revitalization movements.

Methodologically, the films combine observational and participatory modes with a high degree of reflexivity. The filmmakers explicitly address the challenges of cross-cultural filming, including differing audience expectations and ethical responsibilities toward the communities involved. Humor, sensitivity, and self-irony function as deliberate narrative strategies, enabling the films to remain accessible without sacrificing analytical depth. Across the series, lacrosse emerges not merely as a sport, but as a medicine game, a medium of collective memory, and an arena in which questions of sovereignty, identity, gender, and material culture are negotiated.[7]

From Czech Republic to Six Nations: *In the Homeland of Lacrosse*

In the Homeland of Lacrosse was filmed in 2015 during the World Box Lacrosse Championship at Onondaga Nation and the unofficial U19 World Challenge held at Six Nations of the Grand River. Although chronologically conceived as the third major film in the series, it was completed only in 2024. The bilingual film has nevertheless circulated internationally, including screenings at the 45th *American Indian Workshop* (2024) and the 8th International Conference *Search for Indigenous America* (2025).

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[7] For further critical assessment of these films, see Martin Heřmanský, "Through the Lens of Lacrosse: Seeing Beyond the Game in the Haudenosaunee/Iroquois Land," *Cargo* 23, no. 1 (2025): 81–88, https://doi.org/10.46585/cargo.2025.1.152; Zuzanna Kruk-Buchovska, review of Lacross – It's a Way of Life, dir. Lívia Šavělková, Tomáš Petráň and Milan Durňák, Global Lacrosse Village / Lakrosová vesnice, dir. Lívia Šavelková and Milan Durňak, On the Shore / Na Břehu, dir. Lívia Šavelková and Milan Durňak, *Review of International American Studies* 16, no. 1 (2023): 313–317, https://doi.org/10.31261/rias.15319; Lucie Kýrová, review of Lívia Šavelková: Stvořitelova hra na cestě světem: Identita Irokézů v procesu revitalizace a globalizace. DVD with ethnographic film Global Lacrosse Village. Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2015. 178 pages, *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Studia Territorialia* 17, no. 1 (2017), 83–87.

In many respects, the film functions as a mirror image of *Lacrosse – It's a Way of Life*. Whereas the first film depicted the arrival of the Iroquois Nationals in Prague in 2011, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* follows Czech players and fans travelling to Haudenosaunee territories. This reversal allows for a deeper exploration of what lacrosse means within its place of origin – as a practice embedded in cosmology, healing, land claims, treaty rights, and political sovereignty. Through visits to Haudenosaunee territories, the film presents Haudenosaunee homeland not as a set of fragmented reservations divided by the U.S.–Canadian border, but as a continuous cultural and territorial space, articulated through emic perspectives.

The film also addresses internal diversity and political tensions within Haudenosaunee communities, shaped by histories of colonization and assimilation. Interviews with key figures such as Oren Lyons and Rick Hill – co-founders of the Iroquois (now Haudenosaunee) Nationals – situate lacrosse within broader Indigenous revitalization movements since the late twentieth century. The inclusion of women's voices and references to the belated recognition of the Haudenosaunee women's national team further complicate the gendered dimensions of the game.

Gender, Authority, and Lacrosse Participation

As explained in the film, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy is composed of six nations – Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora – each internally organized into matrilineal clans, associated with animal figures. Clan membership, political identity, and inheritance are transmitted through the maternal line, and women, known as clan mothers, play a central role in political and social governance. Together with the council of fifty male chiefs, clan mothers participate in a complementary system of authority, including the nomination and removal of chiefs, thus occupying a structurally powerful position within Haudenosaunee society.

At the same time, the film reveals a pronounced gender differentiation within the contemporary lacrosse environment. While men occupy the visibly central role as players, women are primarily shown engaging in supportive activities such as organizing facilities, preparing food, and participating in ceremonial roles. During opening ceremonies, the camera captures male chiefs and medicine men alongside female clan mothers, faithkeepers, and representatives of Indigenous communities, reflecting a gendered division of roles rather than an egalitarian interchangeability. Although the film briefly acknowledges that girls and women also play lacrosse, their participation remains largely absent from the visual narrative.

Such gendered divisions should not be read straightforwardly as the outcome of a colonial patriarchy.[8] While colonialism and missionary influence significantly altered

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[8] Julieta Elisa Paredes Carvajal, *1492 Entronque patriarcal: la situación de las mujeres de los pueblos originarios de Abya Yala después de la invasión colonial de 1492* (Buenos Aires: FLACSO and Sede Académica Argentina, 2018).

Indigenous governance structures – often undermining women's authority and imposing Eurocentric gender norms – the Haudenosaunee gender system prior to European contact was already structured around differentiated but interdependent roles rather than gender symmetry. Scholars emphasize that women's political authority, particularly through clan motherhood, coexisted with male leadership in warfare, diplomacy, and ceremonial life.[9] The film thus reflects both the resilience of matrilineal principles and the ways in which colonial histories, Christianization, and modern sport institutions have reshaped gender visibility and participation. The relative invisibility of women's lacrosse in the film can therefore be read not as evidence of an absence of female agency, but as a product of historically layered transformations affecting Indigenous gender relations, sport, and representation.

Lacrosse Wooden Stick: An Actor within Transnational Network

Material culture plays a central analytical role in Šavelková and Durňak's films. The traditional wooden lacrosse stick is treated not merely as an object but, in line with Bruno Latour's actor-network theory,[10] as an actor within a transnational network connecting Haudenosaunee cosmology, Czech woodcraft traditions, and global sport governance. The films document traditional stick-making practices among Haudenosaunee artisans such as Cam Bomberry, Alfred Jacques, and Toby Williams, and juxtapose them with the work of Czech craftsman Richard Kliment, whose sticks circulate as symbolic gifts between communities. In this sense, the wooden lacrosse stick functions as a cultural agent, whose materiality and techniques of fabrication shape the experiences, practices, and social relations of lacrosse players.

Over time, the materials and forms of stick-making have changed, marking a distinction between the traditional game, played with wooden sticks and imbued with historical, spiritual, and medicinal significance, and the modern, contemporary form of field or box lacrosse, which relies on synthetic sticks standardized for international competition. For the Haudenosaunee, the traditional lacrosse stick carries cosmological and ritual meaning and accompanies players throughout life, serving as a tribute to the Creator, whereas contemporary synthetic sticks primarily facilitate performance within formalized rules.

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9   Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Elisabeth Tooker, "Women in Iroquois Society," in *Extending the Rafters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian Studies*, ed. Michael K. Foster, Jack Campisi, and Marianne Mithun (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 109–123; Sally Roesch Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* (Summertown, TN: Native Voices, 2001); Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
10 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

This visual ethnography thus highlights ongoing tensions between Indigenous claims to cultural tradition and the regulations of international sport, which prioritize synthetic materials under the guise of safety. The films show how the stick as a material object mediates transnational relations, linking Indigenous communities, European practitioners, and global sporting institutions, and how it embodies both the continuity of Haudenosaunee cultural practices and the pressures of modernization and globalization.

Contribution to Visual Anthropology and the Anthropology of Sport

Although filmed a decade ago, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* remains strikingly timely. The film addresses enduring issues of colonization, residential and boarding schools, Indigenous identity documents, and international legal frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), while simultaneously engaging with contemporary debates on Indigenous participation in global sport mega-events, including the Olympic Games. By incorporating more recent developments – most notably lacrosse's return to the Olympic program and explicit political support from North American leaders – the film extends its analytical reach beyond ethnography in the narrow sense and contributes meaningfully to the anthropology of sport and global sports politics.

Šavelková has long been engaged in ethnographic research among the Indigenous peoples of North America and is widely recognized as a leading Czech expert on the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois).[11] She is also a pioneer of visual anthropology[12] and the anthropology of sport within the Czech academic environment.[13] Her scholarly and visual work on lacrosse – referred to by the Haudenosaunee themselves as the Creator's Game – offers unexpected and analytically rich insights into the sport as a cultural, spiritual, and political practice. By following lacrosse back to its place of origin, the film reveals the colonial histories of Haudenosaunee communities at Six Nations, the transformations of their cultural practices, and the challenges they continue to face, including the traumatic

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[11] Lívia Šavelková, *Současní Irokézové: Severoameričtí Indiáni a utváření jejich identit* (Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2010).

[12] Lívia Šavelková, "Cross-Cultural Filmmaking as a Process of Self-Reflection: Filming Native Americans within Central European Space's Prevailing Imagery of the 'Noble Savage,'" *Ethnologia Actualis* 17, no. 1 (2017): 133–154; Michal Pavlásek and Lívia Šavelková, "Vizuální antropologie v České republice a na Slovensku: Mezi marginalitou a marginalizací?" *Biograf* 73/74, no. 1–2 (2026): 3–14.

[13] Lívia Šavelková, *Stvořitelova hra na cestě světem: identita Irokézů v procesu revitalizace a globalizace* (Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2015); Lívia Šavelková, "When the Creators Game Spreads to the World," in *Identity, Tradition and Revitalization of American Indian Cultures*, ed. Barbora Půtová (Praha: Karolinum Press, 2017), 74–107; Lívia Šavelková, "Lacrosse and Its Spread and Transformation in Various Countries with Emphasis on Continental Europe," in *Cultural Transfers in Sport in Europe / Les transferts culturels en sport: Origins and Diffusions of Sport in Europe / Origines et Diffusion du sport en Europe*, ed. Denis Jallat (Strasbourg: Université de Strasbourg, 2021), 129–177.

legacy of residential schools, the disruption of family and community ties, and ongoing efforts to revitalize Indigenous culture, traditions and languages such as Cayuag, Ganondagan, Seneca, Mohawk and Onondaga, all of which are addressed within the film.

When read in dialogue with Šavelková and Durňak's earlier film documenting the 2011 World Indoor Lacrosse Championship in Prague, Czech Republic, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* also foregrounds a persistent condition confronting Indigenous peoples globally: systematic marginalization and exclusion from official state, legal, and international sport structures, inseparable from ongoing processes of territorial dispossession. This is exemplified by the participation of the Iroquois Nationals – travelling on Haudenosaunee passports that remain unrecognized by both U.S. and Canadian authorities – as well as by the historically precarious position of lacrosse within international sport governance. At the same time, the film situates these struggles within a broader colonial continuum in which Indigenous nations continue to be deprived of their ancestral lands and resources, and in which land claims, treaty rights, and sovereignty remain actively contested. Although recent developments – including lacrosse's planned inclusion in the 2028 Olympic Games – suggest a degree of institutional recognition, the film makes clear that access to global sport remains deeply entangled with state power, international law, and the enduring colonial struggle over land, territory, and resources. In this respect, ethnographic films focused on Indigenous peoples and sport offer critical insights into transnational power relations and the persistence of colonial structures within ostensibly apolitical domains such as international sport.

In the Homeland of Lacrosse can be productively situated within the broader historiography of ethnographic film[14] that emerged in critical response to the colonial epistemologies of early visual anthropology. As scholars have long noted, classical ethnographic films relied on authoritative voice-overs, asymmetrical power relations, and the assumption that the filmmaker could transparently represent cultures deemed unable to speak for themselves. From the late 1960s onward, however, this paradigm was increasingly challenged by reflexive, dialogical, and participatory approaches that sought to dismantle the hierarchical distinction between observer and observed. As articulated, for example, by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, this shift entailed a growing "modesty" on the part of filmmakers, marked by an awareness of positionality, the contingency of knowledge, and the ethical limits of speaking *for* the Other.[15]

Šavelková and Durňak's film clearly aligns with this later tradition. Rather than offering a didactic account of Haudenosaunee culture, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* foregrounds interaction, encounter, and shared space. The filmmakers do not claim epistemic authority over Indigenous knowledge; instead, they allow Haudenosaunee actors – players, chiefs, clan mothers, intellectuals, and activists – to articulate the meanings of lacrosse, land, and sovereignty in their own terms. This approach resonates with earlier

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[14] For further information and literature, see Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 345–346.
[15] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 2014), 31–37.

experiments in dialogical anthropology associated with Jean Rouch and his ethnographic pieces,[16] as well as with Latin American and Indigenous filmmaking practices that replaced representational certainty with negotiated meaning, reflexivity, and the possibility of being challenged by one's interlocutors.

At the same time, the film engages – indirectly but critically – with debates surrounding indigenous media. While *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* is not itself produced by Indigenous filmmakers, it is attentive to the politics of mediation, circulation, and audience. Lacrosse emerges not only as a cultural practice but as a medium through which Haudenosaunee actors negotiate sovereignty, land claims, treaty rights, and international visibility. In this sense, the film reflects what scholars of Indigenous media have described as the use of audiovisual practices to mediate ruptures of time, history, and territory, and to assert identity across colonial borders. Importantly, the film avoids romantic narratives of redemption or ecological idealization; instead, it presents Indigenous political struggle as ongoing, pragmatic, and embedded in unequal global power relations.

By combining reflexive ethnographic filmmaking with a sustained focus on sport, sovereignty, and transnational mobility, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* contributes to the expansion of visual anthropology beyond its traditional thematic boundaries. It demonstrates how ethnographic film can function not merely as documentation, but as a form of historical and political analysis – one that renders visible the persistence of colonial structures while also foregrounding Indigenous agency, humor, and strategic engagement with global institutions. In doing so, the film exemplifies the shift from representing the Other toward collaborating with interlocutors in a shared, contested field of meaning, a shift that has been central to the reconfiguration of ethnographic cinema since the late twentieth century.

To Conclude

Taken as a whole, Šavelková and Durňak's lacrosse film cycle constitutes a substantial and methodologically complex contribution to both visual anthropology and the anthropology of sport. The films demonstrate how ethnographic cinema can generate forms of knowledge that are difficult to capture through text alone: embodied practices, spatial relations, affective intensities, and the material and symbolic dimensions of transnational encounters. In doing so, they challenge persistent stereotypes of Indigenous cultures as static or peripheral and instead foreground Indigenous actors as politically engaged, historically grounded, and strategically positioned within global structures.

Rather than reproducing a simplified postcolonial opposition between Native and European/Western worlds, the series reveals shared – though asymmetrical – experiences of marginalization, amateurism, political constraint, and institutional exclusion. Lacrosse emerges not merely as a sport but as a medium through which histories of colonization, claims to sovereignty, and struggles over land, resources, and recognition are

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[16] E.g. *Bougo, les funérailles du vieil Anaï,* dir. Jean Rouch (1979); or *Jaguar*, dir. Jean Rouch (1967).

articulated and contested across borders. The films thus situate sport within broader colonial continuities, showing how global sporting institutions remain deeply entangled with state power, international law, and territorial dispossession.

At the same time, *In the Homeland of Lacrosse* exemplifies a reflexive and dialogical mode of ethnographic filmmaking that resists authoritative representation and instead privileges encounter, collaboration, and emic perspectives. By allowing Haudenosaunee players, leaders, and intellectuals to articulate the meanings of the Creator's Game in their own terms, the film aligns with critical traditions in ethnographic cinema that seek not to speak for the Other but to create a shared, contested space of meaning. In this sense, Šavelková and Durňak's work offers a compelling argument for the scholarly value of visual anthropology itself. It demonstrates that ethnographic film can function not only as documentation or illustration, but as a form of analytical inquiry capable of engaging with historical depth, political complexity, and theoretical reflection.

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6. Reference Examples

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Hans-Uwe Stahlmann, e-mail message to author, December 29, 2017.

Adapted from *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 741–890.

Please consult our website https://stuter.fsv.cuni.cz for further details, including the Ethics and Malpractice Statement.

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