MAKING SENSE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM:
LINGUISTIC IDEOLOGY AND LINGUISTIC PRACTICES IN GERMANY,
1933-1939

by

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Abstract

This work approaches the question of how to make sense of German National Socialism from a joint political economic and linguistic perspective. It charts the historical emergence of Nazism and its linguistic ideology before analysing its linguistic practices in the fields of law, the mass media, and education. Plying these two strands together, it is argued that a racially-inflected understanding of language as “mother-tongue” informed the Nazis’ re-envisioning of German community, while certain practical uses of language contributed to the Nazi state’s attempt to make this community both discursively and materially real. Finally, the possibility is raised of extending the mode of enquiry modelled here to Italian Fascism and Spanish Francoism, but also to the linguistic ideologies and practices that characterise global capitalism, in an attempt to make sense of the present.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the members of my supervisory committee, Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny, for their support and guidance throughout the production of this thesis but also for having inspired it in the first place: it is to them that I owe the idea of combining political economic analysis with the study of linguistic ideologies and practices, an idea that I expect will remain a cornerstone of my work in future. I also owe many thanks to my brother and comrade, the terrific Owen Sheppard, for the many enlightening conversations we have shared on the topic of this work as on many others, and for the knack he has of listening to my jumbled thoughts and repeating them back to me in a way that makes more sense. I am tremendously grateful to the nice Michael Carswell, for having read my drafts, shared his ideas, caught the typos, and above all for having been an incomparable friend to me over the years. My wonderful aunt Linda Sheppard, too, has helped me immeasurably with her thoughtful reading, but most of all with her reliably good counsel and superb company. Thanks also to the excellent Michael Wayne for having been a sympathetic ear, a fascinating conversationalist, and a role model to me as I set out on the academic path. Finally, I am most thankful to one whose sharing of his experiences, ideas, encouragement, and most importantly his constant love and support has been invaluable to me, my dearest dad, Brian Sheppard.

All translations in this work, unless otherwise noted in the reference list, are my own.
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### Abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>DNB</td>
<td>Deutsches Nachrichten Büro</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSWA</td>
<td>German South West Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</td>
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<td>NSLB</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund</td>
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<td>RGA</td>
<td>Reich Genealogical Authority</td>
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<td>RKK</td>
<td>Reichskulturkammer</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMVP</td>
<td>Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda</td>
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<td>RMWEV</td>
<td>Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung, und Volksbildung</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPK</td>
<td>Reichspressekammer</td>
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<td>Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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Introduction: Making sense of National Socialism

This work takes a broadly political economic approach to the question of how to make sense of National Socialism. This is a question with two parts: first, why did the German fascist state make sense in historical context? Or in other words, why this response to the particular conditions that obtained in Europe at this particular juncture? And second, how did Nazism actively make new sense? That is, how did it undertake the basically educative task of creating new sensibilities, meaning new standards of sense, or parameters of rationality, as well as new subjectivities that situated that rational agency within a peculiar form of social identity?

These questions demand that we take into account both the material and the discursive structures of National Socialism. By “material” structures, I refer to the pattern of political and economic practices, manifested both in the enforcement of law and order and in the distribution of wealth and commodities through everyday life, that partially constrains actors, tending to channel their actions according to the strictures of a certain rationality. Yet “rationality” itself does not belong to this material realm, since it is not a constant quantity but a discursive construction. I use the term “discursive”, then, to refer to those practices that create the less tangible structures of the social environment: the word of law as opposed to its enforcement, for example, or the concept of class as opposed to the actual maldistribution of resources. These conceptual frameworks influence the behaviour of the individuals who act within them, but also permeate their mentality, setting the boundaries of right and wrong, good and bad, sensible and senseless, according to which actors interpret the world.

In practice, of course, the material and the discursive cannot be so cleanly separated. Their relationship is dialectic, each partially underwriting, partially emanating from the other. The first part of our question then effectively asks how existing material structures supported the introduction of new discursive structures, with the background of the early twentieth-century European context causing the ideas and intentions expressed by the National Socialists to appear reasonable, not to mention appealing enough to enough individual actors that the young party was able to come to state power at all. The second part asks how these discursive structures, as elaborated by the National Socialists in power, in turn underwrote the establishment of new material structures, particularly new powers to police new state borders, but also the maintenance of certain existing structures, especially an inequitable system of economic distribution. Recast, the question of how to make sense of National Socialism thus asks how the National Socialists attempted by discursive means to transfigure popular interpretations of and interactions with material conditions—that is, social life—so as to rationalise new courses of action that appear senseless, at first glance, to an observer struggling to understand them after the fact. Centred on
the active, discursive labours of National Socialism, then, this work’s approach is therefore not only political economic but also centrally linguistic.

Of course, any such work must take language into account because it is a basic, indeed inescapable, instrument of social life. Yet there is another element in the linguistic perspective: we should consider how language is not only a functional component of human sociality, but also an object of thought in its own right. This means considering, too, how the way people think is influenced by the political, economic, and indeed broadly social conditions in which the thinking goes on, for “language” is by no means a single, stable concept: is it a self-contained system or a historical palimpsest, a module in the brain or a learned social skill, a transparent medium of communication or an occluding and excluding marker of group identity? Each of these and many other understandings of language have appeared more or less sensible at different times in different places. Without wanting to suggest that ideas are ever an unconscious transcription of the setting in which they are expressed, we nevertheless achieve a fuller understanding of their significance when we view them within the broader context in which they circulate. Thus for the purposes of this work I understand language not only as a discursive tool for shaping the human environment, but also as a concept in itself that is inevitably the patient of that environment’s influence, existing in a mutually constitutive relationship with it.

A final major question therefore arises, namely, what is the precise nature of the relationship between how language was thought about in the historical setting of National Socialism and how language was used to shape that setting? In other words, what is the connection between the linguistic ideology and linguistic practices of National Socialism? Within the relatively large literature delving more or less superficially into the characteristic “language of Nazism”, no author of whom I am aware addresses this question. That is of course not to say that there are not works of great importance to my own attempt to answer it, alongside others which have informed my approach less by their commission than by what I perceive as their omissions. Among the former, I would like to make particular mention of the work of Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny (forthcoming), to whom I owe the inspiration for the approach I use here. Before outlining the course that approach will take, I wish briefly to acknowledge some of the other authors who have informed my work.

Chronologically the first, but also the work that first prompted my own research, is Victor Klemperer’s (2000) firsthand account of The language of the Third Reich, published in 1947. Klemperer, a German philologist who was classified as Jewish by the National Socialists yet survived the regime to write an analysis of the linguistic features and social functions of the pervasive lingua tertii imperii, understood the Nazis’ use of language primarily as a form of symbolic domination. “Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people,” he wrote, “through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed on them in a million
repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously” (15). Once this language of “absolute uniformity” (12) had made its way from the bureaucracy and the media into the mouths and minds of “Germans” and “Jews” alike, Klemperer intimates, they could no longer hold themselves critically aloof from the categories it imposed, nor find the words to counter the policies that the regime based on them.

One year earlier, meanwhile, the English author George Orwell (1995) had published a prediction of exactly what Klemperer was about to confirm: the German language would emerge altered, Orwell foresaw, from years of political contortion under a regime which depended for its existence on balancing between the revelation and the concealment of its own criminality. Yet in English, too, Orwell decried both the political use of dissimulating language and what he perceived as a worsening popular lapse into unclear language; he, like Klemperer, believed that the use of convoluted language promoted a “reduced state of consciousness” that lent itself to “political conformity” (432). Three years later, Orwell envisioned the terrible apogee of “political conformity” in the world of Nineteen Eighty-four (2013), where “Newspeak” eliminated the potential for popular subversion of the state by eliminating potentially subversive words—a form of linguistic determinism certainly stronger than anything Klemperer suggested, but not divergent in principle from the practices he observed.

Apparently the only academic effort to continue the work begun by Klemperer was not however made until 1964, when Jean-Pierre Faye first introduced his concept of langage totalitaire. With this notion of “totalitarian language”, Faye traced the paths taken by the ideologeme “totalitarian” itself through the European fascist discourses of the interwar period. This focus on the trajectory of a single term was in one sense obviously much narrower than the broad field that Klemperer had delineated for the study of language use in fascist society. At the same time, however, Faye’s particular attentiveness to the transnational play of fascist political discourse seemed to open that field up to a comparative consideration of the political, economic, social, and ideological currents at play within and between fascist states in interwar Europe.

Unfortunately, the study of language and fascism did not stay this promising course. A review of the literature published in this area since Faye’s first essay reveals that the concept of “totalitarian language”, as almost all authors in the field have continued to identify their object, has nevertheless come completely unmoored from the historical context in which it was originally embedded. The most recent volume on the subject, a collection of essays reviving and responding to Klemperer’s original project (Aubry and Turpin 2012), is in this regard representative of the past fifty years in the field. A valuable resource for its wealth of detail about the surface traits and rhetorical strategies on display in characteristically National Socialist texts, it nevertheless omits any analysis of how this or any other language dubbed “totalitarian” relates to the background of political, economic, social, ideological, or in a word historical developments
on which it took shape. Instead of confronting the complex field of forces within which specific regimes emerged, its contributors visualise the total suppression and subjection of an archetypical individual consciousness to an archetypical totalitarian oppressor, by means of a monolithic language, both manipulated and manipulative, that has been hijacked by a pernicious ideology (whether fascist or communist is typically irrelevant).

I detect three major flaws in this model, all of which stem from a failure to account adequately for the details of the historical contexts from which it has been abstracted. First, it is never clear whether “totalitarian language” is intended only as a retrospective empirical construction which we observers have created to describe the way language has been used by certain regimes, or if it describes a linguistic ideology that was not only implemented but consciously developed by those regimes themselves. That is, it obscures the distinction, and consequently the possibility of exploring the relationship, between language as a tool and language as a concept.

Moreover, just as “totalitarianism” itself describes a heuristic ideal type rather than a functional system of government, “totalitarian language” can only describe the arguably impossible aspiration to reduce all discourse to the lower limit of monologue and not the accomplishment of this goal. The very existence of dissenting voices such as Klemperer’s proves as much. Any analysis that describes a certain usage of language as “totalitarian” without asking how it was actually produced and why, or how it was really received and to what effect, risks being deceived by the very rhetoric it purports to analyse.

Thus related to and no less erroneous than the assumption that “total” control was ever actually achieved by any “totalitarian” regime, finally, is the idea implicit in much of the literature on “totalitarian language” that there is a direct, quasi-metaphysical correspondence between langue-parole and state-society, as it were. That is, many authors seem to describe a situation in which individual speech, as under the pressure of an invisible hand, becomes evenly and everywhere more subdued in proportion to the increasing dominance of the authoritative language of the state.

Yet language is not simply an analogue for the spirit of the times, “totalitarian” or otherwise, in which it is used. It is a tool whose use, whether by the powerful or by the disempowered, is influenced by a range of historical factors, not least the way in which the phenomenon of language itself is actually consciously conceptualised by those using it. All in all, then, I see the original flaw of the “totalitarian language” approach as being its failure to relate its object to the proper historical context that Klemperer inhabited, Orwell observed, and Faye confirmed as the rightful setting for the study of language and fascism. Certainly, the concept of “totalitarian language” succeeds in drawing attention to the way in which certain regimes, and indeed not only fascist ones, have set out to monopolise public discourse, saturating and shifting
it so as to inculcate new sensibilities in their populations. The failure to recognise these efforts for what they are, however—steps toward a goal that nevertheless remains unattainable, taking shape within states whose specific political, economic, social, and ideological characteristics are at least as significant to their actual use and conceptualisation of language as are their totalitarian ambitions—tends to undermine the substance of work in the “totalitarian language” line.

Thus there is still more to be said about language and Nazism. Looking at the function of language as both an object of ideology and a practical tool under National Socialism can help us to better understand how National Socialism itself functioned: that is, it reveals something about how Nazism made sense, in historical context but more especially in actively creating new sensibilities for those who lived under it. To gain this perspective means retreating from the interpretive primacy of the “totalitarian”, and recomplicating a number of relationships that have been flattened by the tendency to rely on textual content to the exclusion of actual context: between linguistic ideologies and the historical environment from which they emerged, between that historical environment and the linguistic practices that it both shaped and was shaped by, and finally between linguistic ideology and linguistic practices themselves.

I will approach this task by examining both linguistic ideology and linguistic practice under National Socialism, and specifically by situating them within the dynamic between the vision of national society and the practices of state that drove Nazism between 1933 and 1939. My thesis is that the concept of language was a crucial component in the National Socialists’ re-envisioning of German community in a way that resonated with the recent past while sounding out an entirely unfamiliar future, while language as an instrument of action was indispensable to the practices through which the National Socialist state attempted to make this community “real”—both as a discursive figuration in the minds of its inhabitants, and as a social body materially purged of elements deemed undesirable.

In the course of making this argument, I will also attempt to answer a number of secondary questions that it prompts. What was the vision of the German community concocted by National Socialism, drawing on what ideas about language? And how can we understand this concoction not as an aspect of an isolated, decontextualised ideology, German, Nazi, or “totalitarian”, but as an ideological function of the political economic conditions of Germany under a Nazi state that continually strove toward total control over its population? As regards practices, how and why did the linguistic tools of the giant apparatus that was the National Socialist state operate as they did, and how did their role contribute to the functioning of the whole? What uses, in what areas broadly construed as fields of education, created new sensibilities under Nazism?

The structure of my argument, then, is as follows. Having outlined the historical background on which National Socialism developed and came to power, I will describe the core
linguistic ideology of Nazism, rooted in the concept of the “mother-tongue”, in order to show how the National Socialist constellation of language, nation, and state formed a coherent response to the upheavals of Germany’s late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will then go on to examine National Socialism’s aims in certain broadly educative fields, and why it made sense to target these fields in particular: following an outline of the legal basis of the segregation of “Germans” and “Jews” under Nazism and its effects, I will proceed to an investigation of the informal education of the broader public through the mass media, specifically the radio and the press, before turning my attention to the kinds of knowledge and subjectivity mediated through the formal education of the young in the National Socialist state. Lastly, I reflect on how the substantive and more broadly methodological proceedings of this research might be extended further into other fields of National Socialism, but also applied to other times and places: by way of conclusion, then, I will sketch the outlines of an enquiry into fascism’s twentieth-century manifestations in Italy and Spain, as well as considering the prospects for a study of language and capitalism in the postfascist global present.
National Socialism and the movements of history

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were to their contemporaries a march of political, social, and economic “progress”, to cite the liberal watchword of the era, whose increasing precariousness is unmistakable only in retrospect. It was a time marked by rapid political and economic developments: imperialism, nationalism, the massification of politics, the rise of class consciousness, global war, revolution, and economic catastrophe each left a legacy which affected all following events in turn. Not the least important of these bequests were the mass migrations within and beyond Europe that reached their apogee at the end of the First World War. Millions were displaced by conflict, revolution, and from 1919 the redrawing of the European map. Already from the mid-nineteenth century, meanwhile, industrialisation and population growth had set millions more in motion from country to city, country to country, and continent to continent. The march of imperialism toward the end of that century, finally, had taken settlers from the European centre to colonies all over the globe, and sometimes also brought inhabitants of the peripheries to the metropole.

These events were to have a real impact on the formation of characteristically National Socialist ideas about the boundaries, racial and linguistic, of the German people or Volk, as well as on the practical attempt to secure them. That is to say, the combination of ideas about Germanness on which the National Socialists drew in constructing their idea of the German community—as a historical phenomenon defined by external manifestations of state, society, and culture, but also as an intrinsic essence in the form of race—actually has its roots in the nineteenth-century nationalism which developed in the context of the movements, in every sense of the word, brought about by capitalism, imperialism, and their fallout. In this context, race-thinking itself underwent a gradual migration from the periphery to somewhere nearer the centre of the idea of the nation in much of European thought, and most especially in Germany. This chapter will trace each of these movements in order to establish the historical background against which National Socialism made sense.

The movements on which Nazism followed, as well as the concern with race which was to be so central to fascism in Germany, are in large part the products of the second wave of European imperialism that began in the late nineteenth century. Arendt (1968) sees this stage of imperialism as marking a crisis of superfluous capital within domestic capitalist systems that were based on the maldistribution of wealth across a hierarchical class structure. That is to say that capitalism’s modus operandi is growth, and growth that could not stop at the boundaries of the nation-state: once it had brought a country’s domestic economic structures and social system into its orbit, capitalism had to find new investments in new markets, with new producers and new consumers, if the domestic order was not to become top-heavy and collapse (147-48). By the
1880s, Africa and the Pacific were the only major zones not yet incorporated into the capitalist world system. For at this stage a world system was indeed in place, characterised by worldwide flows of goods, people, and communications, a fact which had become ever more significant to the actions and interactions of nation-states from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Hobsbawm 1975, 63).

This significance derived from the fact that, as Hobsbawm (1987) argues, a mutual reliance had grown up between political and economic power during the nineteenth century simply by virtue of the logic of expansion inherent in capitalism. Economic power relied on political power to safeguard its continued accumulation of capital through first the expropriation and subsequently the exploitation of people on both home and foreign territory, as well as to protect it from the competition of other capitalists. Yet political power also increasingly relied on economic power in a world order that grew ever more dichotomous as capitalism expanded ever further, that is, an order in which no small, economically weak country could hope to achieve the status of a so-called “great power”. With this ever-closer alliance or “fusion” of politics and economy, competition became the default mode of interstate relations as of capitalist ones (317-18). As capitalists began to look abroad for further expansion, their respective states scrambled to stake out a claim for them, before the ends of the earth were reached and both domestic stability and international prestige thrown into jeopardy.

The most powerful European nation-states’ simultaneous and rival attempts to expand their territorial claims into Africa and the Pacific led to the establishment of new settler colonies among the indigenous populations of these areas and in so doing revived the vexed question, first raised in the original round of European colonisation centuries before, of difference and commonality between the “white” European self and the “black”, “brown”, or “yellow” other. While there were recognisable similarities between them, dissimilarity had to prevail if the new imperialists were to justify their brutal practices of exploitation. As a result race-thinking—and an important subset of thought about racial mixing, expressed above all in the colonial nightmare-fantasy surrounding the “mixed-blood” progeny of interracial unions—developed into an extremely sensitive issue, one of real practical significance in the colonies and of vivid imaginative import to the metropole.

Up to this point, however, the most significant demagogic currents, at least in Germany, were arguably more nationalist than racist, although the often exclusionary terms in which that nationalism was frequently couched did tend to blur the distinction (Arendt 1968, 165). All nationalisms are of course defined in part by whom they exclude. Yet in the German case, the lack of a unified nation-state before 1871 meant that the task of drawing boundaries weighed all the more heavily on those who thought in national terms. The most important group of such thinkers was the Pan-German movement. Their solution to the problem of delineating Germany
was to advocate the adoption of what Arendt (1968) calls an “enlarged tribal consciousness” (223), encompassing all the German-speakers of central Europe in the absence of, and perhaps in preparation for, a sovereign state that could make a political reality of the unity that the Pan-Germanists perceived in their shared language. This state would ideally take the form of a Großdeutschland or “Greater Germany”, incorporating the states of the German Confederation, but also the Austrians, who would be liberated from their constituent status in the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Pan-Germanists, with their notion of an “enlarged tribal consciousness”, found an ally in their contemporary “völkisch” thinkers. Originally a Romantic body of thought, focused on the unique essence that supposedly inhered in the German Volk by virtue of its language, culture, and historical connection to the land, as modernisation progressed the völkisch ideology developed a more reactionary and conservative significance that chimed with the Pan-Germanists’ concern to demarcate and secure the boundaries of the German people. In the eyes of the völkisch thinkers, Germanness itself was coming under threat as the nineteenth century progressed. Industrialisation was uprooting German people from the land and transporting them to cities or even across oceans; the predominance of materialist and rationalist modes of thought divorced bodies, now little more than units of production, from the historically and culturally unique German soul (Mosse 1964). The accompanying atomisation of German society and the rise of individualism, meanwhile, seemed to be destroying traditional, close-knit, homogeneous “community” or Gemeinschaft, and replacing it with modern, vast, impersonal “society” or Gesellschaft (Tönnies 1963).

Since the processes of modernisation continued regardless, the power of völkisch thought evidently derived not from its political but from its ideological leverage. That is, it “answered the problem of alienation from society by positing a suprasocial unity to which it was vital to belong” (Mosse 1964, 17). The corresponding function of this solution was inevitably the marking of those who did not belong, and it was first and foremost the Jews who were forced into this role by the völkisch thinkers. The reasons for this, thoroughly analysed by Arendt (1968), are too complex to elucidate adequately here. It must suffice to say that the Jews had long been the traditional scapegoats for every and any ill that troubled European societies; it may be additionally that in the German case in particular, in the absence of a unified state capable of establishing clear borders and thus a clear demarcation between “us” on the one side and “them” on the other, self-conscious anxieties about national identity were more easily projected onto a traditionally “other” people who did not obey the logic of the nation-state and its boundaries, and therefore seemed to pose a direct threat to the integrity of the inchoate German nation, than onto neighbours who were already firmly settled into established nation-states of their own. If the similarities between the antisemitic process of national individuation followed by the Pan-
Germanists and völkisch thinkers and the racial distinctions developed by the imperialists abroad are evident, however, nevertheless power was not yet joined to prejudice in the former case as it was in the latter.

In reality, obviously, the developments that caused the völkisch thinkers so much anxiety were not the work of the Jews but the necessary corollaries of the Pan-German movement’s other aspiration, that is, the creation of the very state that would assuage nationalist fears for the integrity of the German Volk. Of course, the achievement of German unification was primarily attributable not to the efforts of the Pan-German movement—the new state did not include Austria—but rather to the most powerful existing German-speaking state’s rational engagement with the logic of the contemporary European and indeed world order. In an era when the global economy was dominated by a mere handful of so-called “great powers”, it was clear that there could be no future for a large confederation of mostly small states in the middle of Europe. In the twenty years before political unification was finally achieved, Prussia led an astonishing economic transformation among the other states of the German Confederation, leading to the creation in 1871 of a Germany that already surpassed even France as an industrial power (Hobsbawm 1975, 56). As we have seen, however, a strong domestic economy was not enough for a belated nation-state looking to claim and maintain the status of a European power. Fortunately for Germany, it attained unity just in time to participate in the second European imperial frenzy, seizing empire enough to both sustain its growth and prove itself to its already imperial neighbours, who increasingly appeared rather as rivals.

That the new Germany’s expansionist ambitions were motivated more by political and economic reasons of state than by populist ideological notions of national emancipation, disappointing the Pan-Germanists in their dream of a Großdeutschland including Austria, did not mean that many of that movement’s constituents were not excited by the prospect of empire abroad. In one sense, as Arendt (1968) points out, nationalism and imperialism appear irreconcilable: the former is inherently limited, resting on the claims of a certain group of people to distinctiveness, as the Pan-Germanists made it their business to assert; the latter is based on the ambition of infinite expansion which sees every part of the world as a new market and cares nothing about the people in it, not even those in its own country of origin, insofar as they are not useful as producers or consumers. In practice, however, nationalism could be and was used in Germany as elsewhere as a justification for both the socially irresponsible, indeed anomic greed that fuelled this imperial expansion, as well as for the ruthless exploitation that accompanied it abroad.

The imperialists made this two-part justification to the societies they had left behind by arguing first, and not unconvincingly given the real connection between economic and political status in the world system, that their accumulation of capital in overseas colonies was in the
national interest. This was obviously not the same as the general social interest, given that the profits amassed abroad would be no more equitably distributed than those taken at home. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of national prosperity seemed to offer a way of forging an identification between even the poorest worker and the nation-state in which he or she toiled, with the hope that the lack of improvement of real social conditions would be obscured by an awareness of and pride in the real political status that was accorded to economically powerful empire in the international context. Second, the imperialists argued that the use of force to derive their profits was justified because the expropriated and oppressed peoples of the colonised lands were not only visibly different to the colonising people, but because their visible difference indicated specifically inferiority to the Europeans (Arendt 1968, 153). Merely to be white thus became a symbol of superiority and power to which even the most disempowered citizen of empire could lay claim: hence nationalism shaded into race-thinking and became a populist means of justifying the political and economic necessity of empire.

The promotion of this all-(German)-encompassing form of identification, against the racialised and exploitable other, rather than the exploitative yet fellow German, was particularly important for the imperialists given certain changes in the political systems of Europe around the time of Germany’s unification, specifically the rise of mass politics. Following on the ascent of industrial capitalism and the bourgeoisie, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a gradual widening of the franchise in one European country after another (Hobsbawm 1975 127); in Germany, universal male suffrage was introduced in the year of unification. The electoral party was not the first or only form taken by mass politics, however. Even before the extension of the franchise, mass movements proliferated: besides Pan-Germanism, and indeed of much greater contemporary political significance, there was the organisation of labour on a mass scale, most obviously in Marx’s International, established in 1864, but also in bodies like Lassalle’s Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein (General German Workers’ Association), formed in 1863, and the broader trade union movement. The year 1871, as the first opportunity for a meeting of the electoral and movement forms of mass organisation in Germany, saw a surge forward for the German socialists in particular, as the newly-founded Social Democratic Party garnered immediate support at the polls (137-38).

The German socialists still trailed far behind the major parties that had grouped around more traditional liberal or indeed conservative or Catholic interests, yet the bourgeoisie in that country was not incorrect in perceiving the increasing political activity of the masses as posing a real threat to its own political and social dominance, which rested on the economic dominance of the capitalist class over an ever-growing proletariat. Having only relatively recently risen to elite status itself, the European bourgeoisie more broadly feared that the rise of mass labour in particular would displace it from dominance in turn. Up to World War One, this threat was
typically managed with a combination of precautionary concessions, such as the provision of social insurance (Hobsbawm 1987, 103), and preemptive actions, such as the outlawing of social democratic activity in Germany in 1879 (99), in an attempt to douse the spreading awareness among working people that their interests did not align with those of their employers and governors.

From the 1880s onwards, however, a new tactic was found, as European governments realised the potential domestic application of the markedly competitive and chauvinistic nationalism that the imperialists promoted in aid of their exploits abroad. Official patriotic cults incorporating anthems, flags, and public rituals were cultivated across Europe at this time (Hobsbawm 1987, 107). In them—as well as in the objective material benefits that imperialism really did bring, however inequitably distributed—it was hoped that the ever starker class divisions present in the ever more unequal societies of an ever expanding capitalist world order could be submerged and defused. Thus imperialism no longer appeared only as a means to the political and economic ends of the state and requiring justification to the public, but as a positively advantageous way of fostering loyalty to the state and identification with its ends among the public by nationalising it, substituting pride in the metropole’s imperial glory (and perhaps a meagre share of the spoils) for real egalitarian reform, and notions of racial superiority to the colonised for class consciousness at home (70). The patriotic blandishments that attended the spread of imperial capitalism can therefore be seen as an attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie, having brought about the crisis of class antipathy in the form of industrial capitalism, to solve it without leaving the same paradigm from which it arose.

It was of course in large part the imperial rivalry among the nation-states of Europe that led to World War One. It is however the consequences rather than the events of the war itself that most interest us here. In an apparent confirmation of the European bourgeoisie’s worst prewar fears, revolution sprung up in Russia in 1917, the product of decades of exploitative misrule by that country’s autocratic tsarist regime sharpened by the strains of war (Hobsbawm 1996, 56-57). The Bolshevik revolution touched off a brief wave of revolutionary activity throughout Europe. Lasting until 1920, its centrepiece was an insurrection in the defeated Germany in 1918, resulting in that country’s transformation from an empire into a republic, albeit a liberal, parliamentary democratic rather than a soviet one. Yet if the Bolsheviks were disappointed, Germany’s bourgeois liberals themselves could hardly have been relieved, for the revolutionary interlude, despite its speedy suppression, seemed to prove that all prewar attempts to insure the social order against the left had come to naught, reversed by four years of cataclysmic conflict.

Thus the First World War appeared to have given the lie to the bourgeois principle of “progress”, for that word seemed in no sense applicable to the carnage of the war, nor to the conclusion of its peace, in which, notwithstanding its terms, there were no real victors, but only a
single rank of discredited governments, devastated economies, and traumatised societies. If there
were no real winners in World War One, however, there was certainly one country whose losses
were more severe than any other. Germany was defeated; humiliated by the forced acceptance of
sole responsibility for the war, the curtailment of its military forces, and the surrender of some of
its European territory and all of its overseas colonies; and, most ruinously, held to account for the
debilitating reparations exacted by its vanquishers. So punitive were the terms of the 1919 Treaty
of Versailles, it seems doubtful whether any amount of the old liberal optimism on the part of the
Weimar Republic’s newly minted statesmen and -women could have extricated Germany from
the political, economic, and social morass in which they mired it.

Certainly, the Great Depression’s 1929 landfall in Germany, which had relied on foreign
loans for the payment of reparations and indeed for bare economic survival since the
hyperinflation crisis of the early 1920s, was a blow from which no government in that position
could have recovered. More widely in Europe, it seemed to be the final proof that liberalism
could not solve the crisis it had created through its dogma of unbounded political and economic
expansion and competition. After 1929, the doctrine of free trade around which the capitalist
world economy had been structured was felt either to have been theoretically mistaken, since the
invisible hand had failed to materialise, or practically corrupted, by the progressively more
“autocratic” domination of markets by large corporations since the later nineteenth century
(Hobsbawm 1996, 102-3). The collapse of parliaments across much of Europe over the 1920s and
1930s meanwhile made it clear that liberal democracy itself, especially where it was new, poorly
entrenched, and thus lacking a broad base of consent and legitimacy, as in Germany, could no
longer reliably command the confidence of its electorates (138). In short, the calamity of “total
war” and its fallout that the liberal system itself had provoked was its own undoing: at the very
moment when, in Hobsbawm’s (1996) words, “it became essential for governments to
govern” (140), in Germany they discovered that they could not.

The upshot was that everyone suffered, and no one looked to liberal remedies anymore
for relief. In Germany, a rapid succession of cabinets had ended in impasse by 1930.
Unemployment reached 44% in the Republic’s last year; 85% of the membership of the new
German Communist Party came from the ranks of the jobless, and overall the Communists’
numbers increased apace, with the party’s rate of growth overtaking that of the young National
Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, NSDAP) at the
end of 1932 (Hobsbawm 1996, 92-94). Yet it was not enough. National Socialism succeeded
because it appealed to resentments felt by a larger share of the electorate, across all social classes:
it drew its core support from the Mittelstand, the broadly middle and lower-middle classes of
“little” men and women—including shopkeepers, artisans, bureaucrats, officials, professionals,
and students, but also veterans and some of the unemployed—who felt themselves to be either
squeezed out of competition between mass labour and big business, or otherwise threatened by the growing power of one or the other or the potential fallout of conflict between both. While the party’s rhetorical focus on protecting the middle classes offered less to class-conscious labourers and steadfast cosmopolitan-liberal elites, nevertheless some among them too were attracted to Nazism, whether by its antisemitic nationalism or its anticommunism.

Thus in an atmosphere of virtually universal anger at the crisis of capitalism brought about by the old liberal order in Europe, but also widespread fear and loathing of the communist alternative, fascism was able to present itself as a third way that rejected both. It would be more accurate, however, to say that it combined elements of both: while typically claiming itself to be a movement of and for the multitudes and opposed to the avaricious and inegalitarian dominion of big business, fascism had no interest in abolishing capitalism and indeed happily reconciled with it in each of the countries in which it actually came to power. In Hobsbawm’s (1996) words, capitalism “can come to terms with any regime that does not actually expropriate it, and any regime must come to terms with it” (129). Fascism proved no exception.

In Germany, as much was suggested by the very name of the “National Socialists”. Nationalism, as we have seen, was not at all incompatible with liberalism, despite the finite, exclusive quality of the former in contrast to the theoretically infinite, borderless “progress” espoused by the latter. Come the nineteenth century, such progress was after all not possible without the engine of a large, modernised, economically viable state; for such a state to cohere over expanses of space and time, and over and above the class system that sponsored and structured its very existence, there needed to be some ideological “cement” (Hobsbawm 1987, 149) binding its individual inhabitants to it. This was the vital role played by nationalism in the liberal order, and functionally at least it did not alter significantly under National Socialism: it too needed a large, modern, viable state to accomplish its version of progress, and it too relied on a certain variety of national sentiment to incorporate the German populace into this state’s structures. Apart from the development of a parallel party organisation alongside them—which for the sake of simplicity I mean to include within the term “state” throughout this work—these structures were not radically altered.

The structure of the German economy, meanwhile, where it was affected at all, was only altered in favour of business: where the old liberal order had only dreamed, the National Socialist regime dared. It destroyed independent labour movements, transferring their membership to a state-controlled front whose function was to organise workers into an optimally efficient force for the furthering of their employers’ interests, not their own. A steady fall in real wages was achieved without the National Socialists even having to sully their hands, simply by not intervening during the process of monetary reflation; as a result, labour was cheapened, with the wage and salary share of national income falling from 66% to 55% between 1932 and 1938,
while profits rose inversely (Maier 1988, 100-101). Business itself, meanwhile, was left largely to its own devices. The sanctity of private property was respected, if the private initiative behind it was increasingly “gently directed by the state to achieve the highest welfare of the German people” (Buchheim and Schemer in Baker 2006, 235). There was no intention of nationalising industry, however, and indeed privatisation of state enterprise was pursued where possible (235-36). In the end, it was the big businesses against which the National Socialists had campaigned that flourished in this environment: despite the rapid economic recovery, the rate of failure of small firms actually increased in the 1930s on the previous decade, with very few benefits accruing to those that survived (Milward 1980, 58). Despite the promises of protection for the middle classes, then, many of those “little people” who voted Nazi in the lead-up to 1933 were disappointed.

“Socialism”, meanwhile, suggests more of a departure from the liberal order. Nazi Germany’s recovery from the Great Depression was outstanding within the world system, thanks to state-run work-creation programmes including the construction of the Autobahn, which absorbed many jobless up to 1936, and rearmament, which sustained the boom after 1935 (Maier 1988, 96-97). The country had the most rapid rate of re-employment in the industrialised world during the 1930s, with unemployment falling to almost zero by 1938 (Maier 1988, 102; Baker 2006, 233). Of course, a good rate of re-employment after the crisis was politically expedient for the new regime, but at least one leading Nazi economist also claimed a sincere ideological conviction of the “right to work”: mass unemployment and under-consumption were to be combatted not only as a source of discontent and instability but equally as the result of the “selfish” capitalist forces of the liberal era; full employment was also viewed as a vital statistic of the country’s new national strength (Dietrich in Baker 2006, 233). The undeniable benefits accruing to privately-owned industry under Nazism meanwhile were explained away by stressing the distinction between “good” and “bad” capital, also expressed in the idea of the “productive” industrialist as opposed to the “rentier” (Maier 1988, 77). The former was a useful member of the community; the latter a mere parasite who took profits without giving back anything of value.

Just how far this is from real socialism becomes apparent in Goebbels’ contorted attempt to distance the Nazi regime from capitalism by redefining the latter as the abuse of capital—itself rhetorically reinterpreted as the Volksgut or “people’s property”, although it was certainly not nationalised and redistributed accordingly—rather than the system of which capital is the cornerstone (in Combs 1986, 315). If it is only those who promote the undefined “misuse” of capital who are capitalists, then the big businesses which are working for whatever the regime proclaims to be the common good are rather irreproachable members of the community of producers. Some capital of course was irredeemably bad, regardless of how it was used, simply by virtue of who disposed of it, just as some people could never claim the “right to work”: it was
not the bourgeoisie but the Jews—of every class—who were expropriated outright. They were excluded preemptively from the community of producers not for what they did or for the social or economic role that they had occupied in the old order, but for what they were, intrinsically, unalterably, or in a word, racially. It is therefore clear that National Socialism was not socialism in any widely-accepted sense of the term. The socialism of a government that had no intention of toppling capitalism was bound to be atypical; the introduction of an essentialist principle of racial division meanwhile made a grotesque mockery of the labour movement’s transformative principle of class solidarity.

What National Socialism promised then was not in the end a revision of the economic system in order to achieve a more equitable redistribution of the goods of production, with a view to eventually placing the means of production themselves in the hands of the masses. Rather, it promised an implementation of the formula of abilities and needs that left fundamentally untouched the great disparity of the latter so characteristic of capitalist society. Class distinctions would not disappear, but they would be reinterpreted: proletarians would become depoliticised “workers” and capitalists esteemed “leaders”; economic equality would be substituted with social egalitarianism, meaning that both the worker and the leader were entitled to equal respect for their hand in production, but not to equal power to partake of what was produced. In any case, the inequity of redistribution became irrelevant by fiat, for it was decreed that production was not for the private good of a few, but for the common good of all, and since “common good” and “all” were defined by the leader to whom rich and poor alike were at last equally in thrall, this could not be effectively contested. Ultimately, it must be borne in mind that the National Socialists abhorred Marxism of every sort both more conspicuously and far more sincerely than they did capitalism. As the new National Socialist order was capitalist in all but name, so it was socialist in name alone.

And yet there was some truth in the rhetoric of the National Socialist “third way”, insofar as it was nationalism of a sort never before imagined, and socialism of a society that did not yet exist. It preserved the nation-state and the economic framework of the liberal order because they suited its purposes insofar as it too was oriented toward progress, yet this was progress in a completely different and unheard-of direction. If nationalism is a centripetal force holding the nation-state together as it hurtles along on its progress, under National Socialism it also set the trajectory: for Nazi nationalism was racial in a way that exceeded the instrumental brutality of the old imperialists. Race-thinking was no longer merely a rationalisation but a firmly-held ideological principle—racism—and it was practised not only in expansion abroad but on home turf. German society under Nazism was radically different to what it had been before 1933 because the nationalist “cement” that held it together took the form of a wall of racial segregation. “National Socialism”, then, meant socialism in which the parameters of membership
in the society that was to be transformed were restricted to an intrinsic national identity rather than an extrinsic socioeconomic position, while national identity itself was narrowed to admit not all individuals who chanced to be born to parents belonging to a certain territory, under the laws of a certain state, but only those whose “blood” was pure.

The fact that a basically irrational, immaterial notion of race served as a motivation for Nazi policy does not however mean that the way the regime acted on it was necessarily irrational; it certainly did not lack materialist motivations. The most characteristic expression of these motivations and the core of National Socialist political economy was the policy of autarky, that is, the planning of the economy for national self-sufficiency. In practice, the aim of becoming independent from foreign trade—never actually achieved—was nevertheless a way to “cut through contradictory interests at home” (Maier 1988, 86), for example those dividing newly empowered industry and newly disempowered labour, by forcefully subjecting them all to the economic requirements of this particular, isolationist version of the “common good”. On closer consideration, however, it becomes evident that the broader economic rationale of National Socialism cannot be separated from its ideological motivations. On the one hand, a “National Socialism” based on the principle of the nation’s racial superiority and the society’s exclusionary egalitarianism demanded self-sufficiency: a true master race should not rely on its inferiors to sustain itself; nor should anyone but its own members benefit, whether by the taking of profit or of goods, from the business of production and consumption that goes on within its society. Conversely, economic self-sufficiency in the German case demanded the ruthless racist dynamic of Nazism. The resources contained within Germany’s borders were not enough to sustain its growing population; more land and more raw materials, to use the characteristic Nazi expression, more *Lebensraum*, were required. Inferior neighbouring groups could be removed from competition, expropriated, and exploited to fulfil this requirement.

Thus the significance of autarky stems from the fact, crucial in its own right, that Nazi racism was not static but expansionist: the goal was not racism in one country, but racial empire in Europe and ultimately, by logical extension, across the globe. On the one hand, this meant that war was an inevitable, indeed integral part of the National Socialist programme, and the regime certainly could not rely for its survival on trade with countries that it was bound to go to war with. As I have limited my scope to the prewar years, however, what I wish to emphasise particularly is simply that National Socialist imperialism was at least as much a product of ideological as of material motivations—better yet, that its material motivations were determined by the ideological lens through which it saw the world, one tinted by the fundamentally irrational, immaterial idea of race. For it is ideology that delimits the field of possibilities in any given setting, and thus determines what courses of action are sensible. Thus in the imperialism of the liberal era, too, it was not the economic motor of capitalism alone but also an ideological one,
this time to do with the idea of progress, that drove Europeans to consume continents. Yet while
thought specifically about race was certainly used to justify the expropriation and exploitation of
the inhabitants of colonised lands in this process, it was not a motive force for these abuses.
Classical imperialism did not get underway both because it was thought that other peoples were
inferior and therefore that they must be deprived of land, livelihood, and sometimes life itself,
regardless of the advantages or disadvantages to the imperialists; Nazi imperialism did.

We can attain a better grasp of this distinction by briefly comparing the German
imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Africa with National Socialist
imperialism in Eastern Europe. Madley (2005) has demonstrated some continuities between the
Wilhelmine colony of German South West Africa (GSWA, now Namibia), taken in 1884, and the
Nazi annexation of its eastern neighbours, beginning with Poland in 1939. He argues that the
concept of Lebensraum, which the geographer and Pan-Germanist Friedrich Ratzel originally
proposed in 1897 and elaborated until his death in 1904, was directly inspired by German policy
in GSWA. In keeping with the national and racial dogma that prevailed in Europe during the age
of empire, the concept of Lebensraum dictates that as the population of a people or Volk expands,
so must it expand its territory by migration, colonisation, conquest, or some combination of
these, and even explicitly connects European expansion with the “dying out” of “inferior
peoples” (432-33). Ratzel’s ideas were mirrored in practice as the great and growing German
empire continued its inexorable expansion, with the imperialists of GSWA justifying their violent
expropriation of the indigenous Herero and Nama peoples with reference to German superiority.

Ratzel lived just long enough to witness the most violent episode in the acting out of his
concept. In the year of his death, the bloody suppression of two indigenous rebellions against the
German occupiers was followed by an explicitly genocidal order against the defeated peoples,
resulting in the slaughter of between 50,000 and 80,000 Herero and Nama men, women, and
genocide, and moreover an “incubator” for some of the specific ideas and practices that the
National Socialists used, including notions of the “subhuman” and the “war of annihilation”, the
legal institution of racial discrimination, and the use of labour and death camps. He also notes
that some prominent figures of the National Socialist regime had been involved in the genocide,
including the leader of the Nazis’ Colonial Party Office, Franz Ritter von Epp, and leading racial
policymaker Eugen Fischer.

Certainly, there was not only a similar logic, but also identical practices and actors at
play between Germany’s nineteenth-century imperialism and the National Socialist articulation
and implementation of the policy of Lebensraum. As the Wilhelmine colonists regarded the
enslavement and extermination of the Herero and Nama as a means to an end justified by race-
thinking but primarily motivated by political and economic interests, so the National Socialists
regarded the Slavs: on the bottom rung of the new racial order that the Nazis envisioned and sought to implement in Europe, their lives could be exploited or ended according to German needs. Yet there is also a significant difference in the National Socialist case. For one racially-defined group in particular,\(^1\) it was thought not merely that they could be annihilated with impunity but that they should be, regardless of the practical advantages or disadvantages for doing so. The destruction of the European Jews was not primarily economically motivated, although benefits certainly did accrue to German industry through the appropriation and redistribution of their property and jobs, not to mention through their enslavement. Nevertheless this extermination campaign, along with all the material benefits that privileged Germans reaped from it, were first and foremost the necessary consequences of an irrational ideology that saw the Jews, both in the spaces that Germany considered its rightful Lebensraum and within the country’s existing borders, as parasites who would not only passively obstruct German expansion but actively destroy the German people itself if not preemptively disenfranchised and ultimately eliminated.

This doctrine will be elucidated in the next chapter. It will also be linked to the National Socialist revision of the nation along racial lines and the conceptual significance of language in this process, and, in the following chapters, to the corresponding reconstruction of a society in which class divisions were to be suppressed and the practical role of language to this end. In painting the backdrop for this work, the major idea I wish to convey is simply that continental expansionism, the most recognisable movement or physical expression of National Socialism’s racist ideology, represented not a wholly different phenomenon, but a certain elaboration of the liberal imperialism that had dominated the previous century. Race-thinking was no longer an ex post facto justification for expansion motivated by political and economic reasons in accordance with a certain ideology of “progress”, but had developed into full-blown racism—a sincerely held ideology and principle of action—and thus into a motive in itself. Racism was a third piston, alongside the necessities of politics and economy, in the motor that drove the National Socialists’ inexorable expansion through Europe. This movement, however apocalyptic, is inseparable from the history of European imperialism.

\(^1\) In particular, but not alone: the motivations for the Nazi genocide of the Sinti and Roma, as for the policy of persecution and murder perpetrated by the National Socialists against other groups including homosexual and disabled people, are unfortunately beyond the scope of this work.
How were ideas about language and ideas about community connected in National Socialist ideology, and why did this make sense in the particular political economic context of the National Socialist regime’s emergence and duration? The previous chapter painted the backdrop of political, economic, social, and ideological movements upon which National Socialism was able to present itself as a sensible response to changing conditions in Germany. In this chapter, I take more precise measure of the conceptual construction of the National Socialist version of Germany, with particular attention to the way in which the National Socialists’ peculiar vision of German community was equally a vision of how language, nation, and state fit together.

2.1 Defining the Volksgemeinschaft

Eley (2013) writes that “‘Germany’ was only ever defined within complex and uncertain fields of relations linking nationhood, cultural belonging, and the state” (132). The Nazi concept of the Volksgemeinschaft or “people’s community”, as the most salient attempt to define this “Germany” during the interwar years, therefore delimits a complex and uncertain field of its own which must be charted. Wildt (2012) traces the origins of the “people’s community” to the outbreak of World War One, and specifically to Kaiser Wilhelm II’s rapturously received declaration on that occasion that he would henceforth recognise no political parties but only Germans among his people (16). The Volksgemeinschaft that the Kaiser thus forged from the wartime spirit of his subjects was not broken with the reversal of his fortunes in 1918; rather, it became legally entrenched in the 1919 Weimar Constitution. This charter’s articulation of the nation-state as Volksgemeinschaft was distinctive in comparison with the relationship between nation and state that obtained in many of the older European countries. The liberal democratic authors of the Weimar Constitution phrased its articles so as to suggest not the organisation of free individuals into a classically liberal collection of citizens bound by social contract—and implicitly fractured by the classically Marxist divisions of social class that liberalism had engendered—but the convocation of a Volk, a unified people that was not in fact “constituted” by any legal document but that preceded and indeed gave unto itself constitution and law alike (27-28). This was not a nation by virtue of the state, but a state by virtue of the nation.

The origins of this Volk, an actively assembling nation or people as opposed to a passively assembled state citizenry, were therefore not to be sought in political history. The wording of the constitution opened the Volk instead to interpretation as an organic entity, whether cultural and rooted in shared folk history or language, or “natural” and defined by shared “blood” or “race” (Wildt 2012, 29). There is a contradiction inherent in the invocation of such a culturally- or racially-inflected unity as the guarantor of a necessarily divisive and conflictual
democratic system, in a modernising society riven by class tensions (266). The Germany of the early twentieth century was evidently a better example of Tönnies’ (1963) large, impersonal Gesellschaft than of the small, intimate Gemeinschaft. Thus the very idea of the homogeneous Volk settling down together into harmonious communal coexistence was immediately and ironically given the lie, as a glut of democratically-advanced challenges to the democratic form of the Volksgemeinschaft itself were made from 1919 onwards. Taking advantage of the political system it was represented as having founded, yet with which it was manifestly discontent, the supposedly unified Volk disputed continuously up until 1933 over a discordant range of visions as to how it should organise and govern itself—in a word, as to what form its community should take. During this time, “Volksgemeinschaft” could simultaneously denote everything from a postclass communist utopia to a republican form of national solidarity to a radically racist and antisemitic “society of descent” (Schmiechen-Ackermann 2012, 42-43).

In other words, the remarkable “semantic openness” (Schmiechen-Ackermann 2012, 42) of the term brought forth as many competing concepts of the “people’s community” as there were parties contesting the eight federal elections between the establishment of the Weimar Republic and the last ostensibly free vote in 1933. Precisely because all of the old parties were attempting to turn the phrase to their own sectional advantage, however, their invocations of the “people’s community” rang false with voters who yearned to redeem the shame of defeat, and the squabbling factional stalemate that had followed it, with a unifying revolution of the national spirit such as Wilhelm II had abortively invoked. The compelling leader of the young and untried National Socialist party, on the other hand, promised them exactly this. Hitler successfully presented his NSDAP as a truly class-transcendent “Volkspartei”, uniquely lacking vested interests and thus uniquely positioned to represent the entire Volksgemeinschaft (Wildt 2012, 35); its total takeover in 1933 could therefore have appeared to many as “a continuance of the illusion of the ‘national uprising’ by other means … after it had foundered on the level of political coalition” (Bracher 1970, 248). What many of these observers failed to recognise was the order of the Nazis’ priorities: the National Socialist objective was not first and foremost national revolution, with only a radical fringe advocating the subsequent establishment of a racial community. It was rather precisely racial community, necessarily established through national revolution.

Conversely, then, those who were threatened by the Nazis’ antisemitic rhetoric could not fail to recognise from the outset that this vision of the Volksgemeinschaft did indeed represent another sectional interest, albeit one that drew its boundaries between “races” rather than classes. Moreover, this version of the “people’s community” and the interests it represented could no longer be contested as one possibility among many, after the republic had been dismantled and replaced with a state that aspired to total control over all aspects of not only political but also
social life. Thus the Nazi-affiliated political scientist Max Boehm presented the racial
*Volksgemeinschaft* as an inevitability, freely pronouncing it “an objective of *völkisch* politics,
invested in the heritage of blood and spirit with which every national comrade begins his earthly
journey” (in Schmiechen-Ackermann 2012, 45). The concrete form that this objective finally
assumed was “a *völkisch*-racist empire with an unlimited claim to *Lebensraum* resting solely on
the needs of the ‘core nation’ and the hegemony of the superior over the inferior race” (Bracher
1970, 250). The means to this end are equally important to our understanding of the National
Socialist vision of community: the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* did not only substitute static racial
divisions for class divisions, but active racial struggle for class struggle. Weisbrod (2001)
therefore suggests a more dynamic definition of “*Volksgemeinschaft as Kampfgemeinschaft*”, a
“fighting community” in which violent self-sacrifice for the nation was understood as the way to
long-sought national redemption (12); the people shared not merely a community, then, but a
communal mission.

“*Volksgemeinschaft*” would thus appear to describe a society of interclass solidarity
within a state aspiring to total control over its population and geared toward racial struggle. Such
a definition, however, implies that an understanding of German society under Nazism, including
the fact of its members’ greater or lesser toleration of or even participation in staggering
atrocities, can be read off from the objectives expressed by the regime itself. In short, it sheds no
light on the perpetual question: how did this happen? We find a better expression of the synthesis
of “racial empire” and “community of struggle” in Frei’s (2001) concept of the “people’s
community” as “power machine”. On this view the *Volksgemeinschaft* appears as a mechanism
whose coordination, achieved through the inculcation of social and above all racial solidarity,
empowered the Nazi regime to engage both the construction of its empire and the struggle against
its enemies (62). For Germany, with its history of unstable national identity, the traumatic years
of World War One had cemented a political myth of national unity finally emerging from just
such a communal struggle for survival against a world of enemies. At the moment when German
society was reeling from the shock of a defeat that seemed to indict its very national identity in
thwarting the fulfilment of this myth, the National Socialists successfully exploited a rich vein of
popular antisemitism in order to revive it with a specifically racist turn, calling on “Germans” to
enter a new redemptive struggle against “Jews” in order to restore Germany to greatness.

There were of course more prosaic aspects of the “people’s community” proclaimed by
the Nazi regime. Promises of full employment and enhanced social status were held out alongside
the prospect of membership in an even more exclusive racial elite than that to which all white
Europeans had belonged during the preceding age of empire. Yet while class distinctions may
well have been softened by immersion in a political atmosphere that emphasised racial solidarity
above all, as the earlier imperial era had stressed shared national identity, in both cases their
salience was scarcely blunted in practice, much less levelled. The National Socialist union of all producers was contained by a capitalist system; rather than seeking to abolish the “inherited liberal macroeconomic structures” of the pre-Nazi era, the regime tended to work within them (Baker 2006, 232). Its objective for Germany was not socioeconomic parity but the harmonisation of unequal strata, who were to learn to place cooperation for the sake of the communal good above their own individual needs and wishes, be it for a higher income or for the elimination of the class system. As Payne (1995) puts it, psychological revolution was to substitute for material revolution, with awareness of the equal respect due to all members of the Volksgemeinschaft replacing real changes in a system of wealth distribution that remained inequitable. Ultimately, then, old socioeconomic categories were not so much eliminated as reoriented, with old class loyalties uniformly reassigned to the Volk (194). The rich remained rich and the poor poor; it was not in their economic relationship to one another, but in their attitude towards that relationship that the greatest changes took place, or at least were intended to take place.

If we are to do justice to these facts, our understanding of the Volksgemeinschaft must penetrate beyond the surface of National Socialist rhetoric. The “people’s community” that the Nazi regime sought to establish was not simply a static body from which certain racial others were excluded, but an ongoing practice of continual exclusion, as the empire of which it formed the centre continually expanded. Nor was this activity the result of a truly spontaneous sense of communal mission, but a product of the deliberate inculcation of objectives which may have been aligned with popular prejudice, but were designed and implemented by a political elite. Socioeconomically, in much the same way that it served more effectively as an incitement to this kind of racial struggle than as the name for that struggle’s end at some as-yet undefined future time, the concept of Volksgemeinschaft did not so much identify real changes in the circumstances of most of its members as mobilise a majority to recommit themselves to old, inequitable socioeconomic structures in the attempt to realise certain new goals (Bajohr and Wildt 2009, 8). Despite the rhetoric surrounding the “people’s community”, then, on the whole these goals—a prosperous Volk united in violent struggle for the foundation of a strong, continually expanding, racially pure German Reich—entailed as much division and exclusion as unity and inclusion (9). “Volksgemeinschaft” must not therefore be regarded as a straightforward analytic term for the society which the Nazi regime claimed to inaugurate. It is better understood as the claims themselves, the sum of the influential visions and promises presented by the regime to its subjects, than as the state of their fulfilment; better still, as encapsulating the actual processes of inclusion and exclusion that made up daily social practice for all those drawn into the attempt to move from vision to reality (Eley 2013, 62).
2.2 A brief history of German linguistic thought

This processual or transformative quality of National Socialist community, and the particular role of language therein, will be the focus of the next three chapters. Yet thought about language had as significant a part to play as discursive practices in constituting the *Volksgemeinschaft*, for it informed National Socialist ideas about the definition of the *Volk* itself at a fundamental level. So far I have discussed the form of Nazi community, but not yet who belonged to it: who were “Germans”, who were “Jews”? As Burleigh and Wippermann (1991) describe, scholarship had an important role to play in responding to these questions (51); Frei (2001) goes so far as to argue that “those who defined what could be done” by the regime in the first instance were the experts and not the leaders (68). While it is the experts of the natural sciences, particularly biologists and geneticists, who typically bear the brunt of this charge, the science of language was by no means exempt from complicity.

Hutton (1999) has produced an encyclopaedic work devoted to the history of German linguistics in this capacity. He takes pains not only to highlight the contributions of linguists during the Nazi period, however, but to retain the shadows obscuring the nature of their relationship to the regime: for National Socialism by no means represented a complete break with every way of thinking that went before 1933 or indeed came after 1945, as the scholarly heirs of certain ideas that the Nazis too used may wish to believe, but was a link in the chain of many disciplinary histories (1-2). Thus while academia was by no means free under Nazism, those scholars who continued to work retained a relative degree of intellectual individuality (15); a diversity of views on language circulated in publication, no single one of which necessarily encapsulates the linguistic ideology of Nazism. It is only with regard to the breadth and historical depth of thought about language during the Nazi period and over the years preceding it that we can attempt to construct that object—and with it, a more complete image of Nazi community.

We might begin this process as far back as the Enlightenment, with the philosophy of *Volksgeist*. The eighteenth-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder is generally credited with having invented the idea of a “spirit of the people” or national character from which all cultural expressions of a group spring, including customs, ethics, and language (Römer 1985, 13); it was Wilhelm von Humboldt, meanwhile, who developed this notion of *Volksgeist* to greatest effect within the nineteenth-century philosophy of language. Both men lived their lives in an era characterised by the expansion of the original European colonial empires, and thus by the encounter of Europeans and hitherto unfamiliar peoples and cultures of the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Both were concerned with explaining this human diversity, and particularly its striking expression in the variety of human languages (138). Yet whereas Herder laid great emphasis on the idea of a universal *Geist* or spirit, and therefore on the fundamental global unity of the “human race” and the higher-order unity of all the languages and cultures it had produced
Humboldt’s explanation of linguistic diversity was more intently focused on the idea that different peoples are differently “natured” (Römer 1985, 138). For him, the true explanatory principle of linguistic diversity is the “human mental power” (“der geistigen Kraft des Menschen”) with which the universal Geist is conveyed (Humboldt 1907, 18)—or, more precisely, the disparity between the mental powers of different peoples. For while all peoples are endowed with geistige Kraft, the creative power to channel the universal Geist into a distinctive form, some are more gifted than others.

Languages are not merely diverse, then, but more or less “successful” (Humboldt 1907, 19) depending on this greater or lesser genius of their speakers (27). Yet the relationship is in fact one of mutual dependency, for perhaps Humboldt’s most enduring assertion is the inverse claim that speaker mentality depends on language: in other words, language determines worldview. As the entire framework of differing “mental powers” and distinctive national characters would seem to suggest, the diversity of human languages is not only understood on the Humboldtian view as a superficial diversity of linguistic forms influenced by the diverse physical constitutions of the individuals who articulate them—although he does in fact suggest that “descent” may have an influence on national character and language (170). Rather, linguistic diversity is taken more significantly to reflect a diversity of possible arrangements of the inner linguistic form that determines the speaker’s interpretation of reality (Römer 1985, 155)—and I would argue, to complete the analogy, to suggest the possibility of fundamentally different metaphysical essences for different peoples. Finally, when Humboldt declares languages always to have a national form (1907, 38), this shadowy essence is inextricably linked neither to the individual nor to humankind, but to the intermediate entity of the “nation”, protean and divisive and therefore always conflictual.

Thus while Humboldt was interested in all humankind and its manifold languages, his work always insists on difference more strongly than on unity. Because of this, the philosophy of Volksgeist and its relationship to language was easily reinterpreted with the more and more drastic “provincialisation” of linguistics that accompanied the rise of chauvinistic nationalism in late nineteenth-century Germany, shrunk eventually to the praise of a “German essence” reflected in the German language (Römer 1985, 154). Moreover, the concept of Volksgeist proved itself very conducive to forging a link between the venerable science of language and newly aggressive nineteenth-century ideas about race (133). The notion of differently-“natured” peoples with different “mental powers”, who channelled the universal human spirit into different “national characters” of which language was one expression, was conveniently transposed onto a vision of “national character” and language as reflections of the innermost “essence” of a people, determined purely by “race”; the “universal human spirit” was easily excised.
How are we to understand this linguistic-ideological progression, this ever narrower “provincialisation”? What intervening developments joined the linguistic thought of Herder and Humboldt, liberal humanists both, and the ideology of language that informed fascism in Germany? Hutton (1999) makes a compelling case for interpreting the latter through the concept of *Muttersprache* or “mother-tongue”, a case that we can strengthen yet further by tracing the interactions between linguistic ideology and the historical processes of modernisation and imperialism that preceded the Nazi period. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the term *Muttersprache* denoted the standardised variety of German that was in the process of being imposed across the new country with its numerous regional dialects, as well as on its newly acquired colonies; the word’s connotations of familiarity and kinship, meanwhile, elevated this referent to the status of a fetish of German national identity and unity. I will begin by historicising this moment with reference to the political, economic, and social conditions that influenced the production and export of a standard German language—the better to understand how the subsequent dehistoricisation of the concept of *Muttersprache* in the early twentieth century enabled a radicalisation of linguistic ideology along racial lines (Ahlzweig 1989, 50).

As Townson (1992) emphasises in his historical outline of linguistic consciousness in Germany, Herder and Humboldt were but two links in a continuous tradition of regarding language as a major constituent of community in that country, one which dates back as far as Luther’s championing of the vernacular as an instrument of emancipation and symbol of identity (76). The strength of this tradition is manifest in the parallelism between historical shifts in the role and conceptualisation of the German language on the one hand and in the political circumstances and the conceptualisation of community in Germany on the other, which Townson (1992) exposes with a particular concentration on the transition from the Enlightenment to the age of nationalism. He identifies one of the most significant aims of the former as the development of a standard language as a medium of common public discourse, citing in particular Leibniz’s efforts to replace the scholarly use of Latin with German in the interest of bringing enlightenment to a more general audience (83). Leibniz’s aim was not merely the generalisation of a linguistic variety per se, but the provision of a means of intellectual self-expression, self-definition, participation in and thereby formation of an effective public sphere, without which the political emancipation of civil society from the overbearing authority of an aristocratic elite would be impossible (84).

It briefly appeared that Leibniz’s vision might be fulfilled in 1848, when revolution swept Europe. The fraught coalitions that drove it forward in most countries, consisting of the liberal bourgeoisie on the one hand and the working poor and democratic radicals on the other, had two major aims. The most broadly shared one was the achievement of autonomy for groups of people who were beginning to conceive of themselves as nations; the second and more
divisive one was the creation of a “democratic and social republic” to replace the old monarchical and aristocratic regimes that still ruled most of Europe (Hobsbawm 1975, 36). For while the Romantically-informed objective of national emancipation could be shared by patriots rich and poor alike, it seemed to the bourgeoisie that every advantage of democratisation and social reform for the workers was a weakening of its own standing in the social hierarchy, indeed a weakening of the social hierarchy itself (30). Across Europe, revolution foundered on the moderates’ concern to maintain the social order and the privilege that accrued to them within it.

Thus the year of revolution did not achieve Leibniz’s central objective of civic emancipation in Germany. Indeed, in that country the uprisings of 1848 failed even to bring about a unified German state, much less a more democratic and socially just order. Even had they succeeded, however, the particular political inflection of linguistic concern had evidently changed with the times as nationalist fervour grew within German lands. The desideratum was less often articulated in a liberal idiom, as a standardised language that would contribute to the public good by providing an effective medium of public discourse, but in more parochial terms, as a shared language that would contribute to the vaguely-defined national good by prefiguring political unity with linguistic unity. An essential, unified German language came to be imagined as inhering within a set of idioms spoken in various regions of central Europe, and therefore to be regarded as both symbol and latent instrument of national unity (Townson 1992, 91). Only when speakers of the German states’ regional varieties became speakers of “the German language” (Ahlzweig 1989, 45; original emphasis), oracles of the shared German Geist, would Saxons, Bavarians, and Prussians alike truly become Germans (46).

The notion of an essential German was legitimated by the linguistic scholars of the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps most notable among them Jacob Grimm, who projected it back onto a supposed “golden age” of unity between a single German people and a single German language (Townson 1992, 92). As a philologist, Grimm belongs within the tradition of a basically comparative discipline, insofar as the study of language change over time—and especially over a time before there were nation-state borders to provide even a coarse delineation of the boundaries between those ways of speaking only lately grouped together as “national languages”—requires the student always to maintain consideration of where one linguistic entity ends and another begins, both in time and in space. This comparative aspect grew more prominent over the development of the discipline during the nineteenth century when, as Said (1978) has argued, it became a science for setting the modern, European self apart from the earlier or foreign other (132). Like the thought of Herder and Humboldt, then, philology was undeniably influenced by the European colonialists’ ongoing discovery of the great diversity of human ways of life. Yet as Said (1978) notes, its comparisons and classifications typically set the European not only apart from but above the non-European (142). I would add that its specifically historical mode also
allowed philologists to corroborate the idea, increasingly widespread from the mid-nineteenth century following Darwin’s presentation of the theory of evolution, that the former were temporally beyond the latter, with the two descriptors “earlier” or “foreign” fusing into the single idea of the “primitive”.

Thus philology seemed to offer a possible source of validation in a specifically evolutionary mode for the idea, growing in importance along with the European empires themselves, that different peoples could be ranked hierarchically, as more or less advanced and thereby as superior or inferior. And as is ever the case, the development of this new way of thinking about the other was simultaneously the opening of a new horizon on the self. Philology’s development had important implications for the development of ideas about German nationhood over the nineteenth century, if necessarily setting out along a slightly different track at a time when Germany was not yet a state, much less an empire. If philologists such as Grimm could use the historical comparative method to show that the diversity of “Germans” spoken within Europe were the coeval children of one parent language, then surely German-speaking people too made up a single national family, whose current fragmentation was only a temporary and remediable disruption. On this view, the unified German language that was envisioned as having brought forth and still inhering within the many variants of German spoken in central Europe appeared not merely as a convenient standard-bearer for this family unit, one of many possible symbols, but as a necessary and sufficient condition of Germanness. For according to Grimm and his contemporaries, this unitary German was nothing less than the manifestation of its speakers’ unique “spirit” or “soul” (Townson 1992, 93): in a word, their Volksgeist.

If the German people were therefore defined by their language, then this essential German not only spoke to them of a mythical, unified past, but underwrote German ambitions for a future of expansion as well. Of course, the ever more prominent notion of European superiority to non-European peoples, backed up by the tendency of many philologists to portray the rest of the world’s languages and by association their speakers as more or less primitive in comparison to their own, seemed to legitimate the processes of expropriation and exploitation that defined expansion in the age of empire. At the same time, in a sense at once more abstract and more specific to pre-imperial Germany—and one which would cause problems once that country did establish its first overseas colonies and began to implement race-thinking, as we shall see—philology’s support for a definition of Germanness based on language seemed to guarantee that the boundaries of the German people would coincide with the spread of the German language. This was articulated by Grimm with the idea of the Sprachnation, “the nation defined and represented by its language rather than by any political entity” (Townson 1992, 94). Of course, the notion that a unified state was not required for national unity did not actually militate against the foundation of such a body. Nevertheless, in the thickening atmosphere of chauvinism that
surrounded the belated entry of unified Germany into the bitter international competition of the great European powers, it was the German language and not the German state that was held to be the highest expression of the German nation.

If any form of civic emancipation could be said to have been realised amidst this nationalist ferment, it was not of the sort traditionally extolled by the likes of Leibniz during the Enlightenment. The fact that the creation of a more accessible political sphere such as he envisioned had largely disappeared from the agenda before 1871 did not mean that the German language no longer had an instrumental as well as a symbolic role to play in the formation of the German state, however. That functional role had simply shifted focus, in tandem with the late nineteenth-century “fusion” of political and economic power, to the latter sphere. While 1871 marked a significant political change, the entire second half of the nineteenth century was a time of socioeconomic transformation in Germany: the processes of internal migration, massification, professionalisation, and institutionalisation it entailed could not but have an effect on individuals as speakers, for they were equally processes of dialect mixing and adjustment (Ahlzweig 1989, 44). In a rapidly modernising, industrialising society such as Germany’s around the time of its unification, then, linguistic nationalism became an economic necessity as much as a symbolic desideratum, insofar as a standardised language was a precondition for the reliable integration of individuals from different regional and social backgrounds into the industrial process and the national economy (Coulmas 1995, 58).

By the end of the nineteenth century, of course, national boundaries no longer sufficed to mark the full extent of the German economy. In its ambition to become a world power to rival the British empire, the increasingly militaristic, expansionist Germany set to work creating colonies in Africa (Cameroon, Togo, GSWA, German East Africa) and the Pacific (including a number of South Sea territories and the portland of Kiautschou in China) (Hutton 2005, 67). As discussed in the previous chapter, however, the European powers of the late nineteenth century quickly learned that the establishment of empire was not only of vital importance to their international political and economic status, but of great significance in maintaining the social order at home: empire was the glory of the nation, and the glorification of the nation was crucial to the promotion of a form of popular identity above classes. Language in particular was of at least equal importance to this forging of German identity in an imperial context as it was to the domestic negotiation of a German nation-state. Corresponding with Germany’s imperial advance and the advancement of its national cult, then, came an onslaught of talk about German as a “world language”.

Townson (1992) amasses a number of texts on this topic from the publications of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein (General German Language Association), an organisation founded in 1885 to defend the integrity of the German language in the face of the perceived
threat of foreign influence. This threat was inevitably seen as on the rise in the age of globalising imperial economies. Townson’s (1992) sources evince an ongoing concern with German’s international status at the beginning of the twentieth century, lighting variously on its condition in the German-American community or its “triumphs” in the Baltic and Russian regions (103). The rhetoric of competition is notable here, with the most common arguments for German’s status as a “world language” including not only its geographical spread and number of speakers, but also its widespread use in trade, especially in comparison with other “world languages” such as French and English (104). Equally notable is the imagery of language as organism, a metaphor that was common throughout the nineteenth century, but which at the turn of the twentieth is frequently framed in terms of susceptibility to the attacks of parasites or weeds (100)—a risk that was perceived as growing in tandem with the global scope of the German language. For where triumph is measured by exposure, it is necessarily accompanied by a certain vulnerability.

Empires are the ultimate example of this paradox, and in the German discourse around language in colonial settings we therefore find the roots of the anxiety around race and mixing which was to become so prominent during the Nazi era. Townson’s (1992) sources bespeak fears of linguistic corruption in Germany’s colonies, through the adoption of “xenologisms” from the languages of subject peoples—described not only as Fremdwörter, foreign words, but Feindwörter, enemy words (105)—but also through the acquisition of German by non-Europeans. This latter concern is strikingly reflected in the controversy with which one colonial officer Schwörer’s proposal to introduce a simplified Kolonial-Deutsch as the lingua franca of Germany’s overseas territories was met, not least by the Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein (Orosz 2011). The objections raised demonstrate clearly how the fear of linguistic corruption ran parallel to that of racial corruption. To modify the German language, bearer of the German Volksgeist, was to corrupt it (108), even or perhaps especially if only for use with colonised peoples whom philology seemed to have proved linguistically inferior. To mix with the racial other—whether socially, in colonial settlements and institutions, spiritually, through sharing a language, or physically, through interracial unions—was to threaten the integrity and thereby the superior racial status of the German people “at home” (Hutton 2005, 67). Colonised peoples may have been thought inferior, but that did not mean that they were not also, or rather for precisely that reason, dangerous.

Yet in Arendt’s (1968) words, “expansion gave nationalism a new lease on life and therefore was accepted as an instrument of national politics” (154). Imperialism was as crucial a means of promoting patriotism and loyalty to the nation-state, particularly a new nation-state like Germany, as it was necessary for the maintenance of the state’s own political and economic status. Here again, as in the establishment of the German nation-state itself, language was important both symbolically and instrumentally. It was the major expression of that patriotism
which the state sought to promote in its pursuit of imperial glory: to take pride in being a citizen of the German empire meant pride in speaking its language. Practically speaking, language was also an indispensable tool for the efficient management of an empire that expanded over continents, as of colonies that exploited speakers of different languages. But here the notion of racial difference, on which all European imperialists relied to justify expansion and exploitation, intervened between the symbolic and instrumental functions of the German language. The ability to communicate with subject peoples, that is, a shared language, was a prerequisite of colonial administration. A second prerequisite, however, was the maintenance of a distinction between the colonised and the colonisers. If language alone defined identity, as the idea of the Sprachnation suggested, then this distinction was no longer quite so distinct.

The anxiety that this encounter with the racial other engendered, while it would seem to have left a significant imprint on German collective memory, was not at the time immobilising. Nor was racism yet a motive force, as opposed to a mere justification, for German imperialism. Thus despite uneasiness with the interracial colonial dynamic, a more boisterous, indeed triumphalist rhetoric of militarism and expansionism prevailed in the discourse around language from 1914, as Germany’s obsession with world power led it into world war. It was only after its defeat, which saw it stripped of its standing in Europe as of its overseas colonies, that this bombast was finally displaced by hyperbolic expressions of anxiety not only as to the status of the German language, but indeed as to its continued existence (Townson 1992, 104). These were accompanied by equally hyperbolic exhortations to nurture German, the German people’s most treasured common good and the bulwark of their identity, as “the kernel of Germany’s rebirth and future greatness” (105). The empire lost, the focal point of the threat to the integrity of the German people and therefore of this anxiety was no longer exotic lands and primitive peoples, but the homeland’s old imperial rivals, now its vanquishers and even occupiers. In a country with a long history of antisemitism, it is unsurprising that this paranoia was projected onto the European Jews above all.

The hyperbole surrounding German expressions of alarm at this state of affairs at times reached levels that would appear preposterous but for the very real influence it would later exert on the Nazi regime’s “extension and radicalisation” of the colonial vision (Hutton 1999, 12). Thus in 1901, the racial ideologue Houston Stewart Chamberlain declared that the expansion of the German linguistic domain in step with that of German power goes hand in hand with the very “advancement of mankind” (in Townson 1995, 105). By dint of the repetition of such assertions in a climate of national hopes shockingly dashed and severely depressed national self-esteem, the remit of the language was inexorably connected to the remit of the country, the purity of German to the purity of “Germany”, whether culturally- or, increasingly, racially-defined. For while “mankind” was certainly not among the key terms of Nazism, the spirit of Chamberlain’s remark
was in keeping with later Nazi pronouncements that portrayed Germany’s expansion through Europe as the way to the rightful reordering, if not “advancement”, of the world’s peoples along racial lines. On this view, as in the eyes of some defeated nationalists post-World War One, the biggest threat to German integrity did not come from supposedly obviously racially distinct and inferior peoples such as Germany used to count among its colonial subjects and would again enslave, but from its neighbours or perhaps even from within. The danger was all the more serious because those who posed it, not necessarily marked out by a different skin colour or other characteristic physical features, were racially “invisible”.

The intense symbolic value that came to be stored up in the German language from Herder to Hitler is aptly encapsulated in the term Muttersprache, “mother-tongue”, the language of the entire German family. Both its affective and its instrumental significance are suggested by this word’s ever more frequent usage from the unification of the German nation-state in 1871 onwards (Ahlzweig 1989, 47). Ahlzweig (1989) goes so far as to argue that the entire ideology of language as a nation-shaping, worldview-imposing force that came to be attached to the idea of Muttersprache with the intensification of nationalism, and that would come to such prominence during the Nazi period, was only made possible as a result of linguistic standardisation (50). While the precedent of Herder’s and Humboldt’s works seems somewhat to undermine this claim, Ahlzweig is justified in the sense that the actual processes of linguistic standardisation and nation-state unification together, channelled through Germany’s imperial and wartime experiences, did indeed constitute a necessary step between the Herderian-Humboldtian formulation of linguistic Geist in the abstract and its attempted actualisation as a political force under the Nazi regime. It is this latter process, whereby an ideology of language as symbol and instrument of national identity that had developed over a series of specific historical moments was dehistoricised in support of an essentialist ideology of language as worldview, that I consider next.

2.3 Muttersprache and race

Of course, the expert study of language had not been stifled by the increasingly chauvinistic atmosphere of the new Germany’s baptism by fire during the First World War and the postwar period. Professional linguistics proceeded in company with a more public, nonspecialist discourse on linguistic topics; that Muttersprache had been a rallying cry for nationalists in the latter arena during the later nineteenth century did not prevent it from coming to prominence as a term of linguistic analysis in the early twentieth. In fact, the distinction was none too clear in practice. For scholars such as Leo Weisgerber, “the key linguist in Nazi Germany” (Hutton 2005, 202), Muttersprache was not a word like any other. It was not regarded as an ordinary lexical unit that, along with its cognates in other languages, had undergone a
number of semantic changes connected to a number of historical changes across Europe, designating originally the vernacular as opposed to the learned language and ultimately, as we have seen, the language of one’s nation-state (Ahlzweig 1989, 39). Rather, the very word Muttersprache was the unique and essential, primeval and continuous, worldview-defining shibboleth of specifically German identity; its referent, standardised German, was not first and foremost a historical product but an elemental, community-constituting force (50).

That is to say that by the early twentieth century language was increasingly theorised in Germany not so much as a part of culture, a Humboldtian “work of Geist”, but as the very source of the radically unique Volksgeist, existing outside history (Weisgerber 1939, 112). The historically-developed characteristics of the German language were thereby transmuted into ahistorical characteristics defining the essence of the German people (Ahlzweig 1994, 217). The emphasis here, as in Humboldt’s thought, was on difference; the prevailing ethos of interwar Germany was not however one of liberalism and humanism, but rather one of increasing chauvinism and ultimately racism. Nevertheless, the involvement of linguistics in the specifically racial ferment of Nazism was not without complications, which must be understood as comprising part of the bigger question of how to reconcile Nazism’s idée fixe of race with the “key politically mobilising collective concept” of the Volk culturally and linguistically defined (Hutton 2005, 19). Earlier I alluded to the way in which the German people, no longer understood as a constitutionally-defined body during the Weimar era, came instead to be seen as a “natural” or cultural unity. Neither of these interpretations, “natural” or cultural, were compatible with the premises of division and difference on which the democratic system rests, nor with the existing divisions of class that ruptured modernising interwar German society. More problematic come the Nazi era, however, was the fact that “natural” or specifically racial and cultural interpretations of the German people did not in fact seem to be compatible even with each other.

The problem as it appeared to the scholars of the early Nazi period was that the “natural” racial boundaries mapped out within Rassenkunde or racial anthropology, the premier discipline of race theory in the first decades of the twentieth century, did not correspond in the slightest to the also “natural”-seeming boundaries delimiting the Völker of Europe, defined above all linguistically (Hutton 2005, 23). The German Volk was therefore not coterminous with the blond, blue-eyed, long-skulled “Nordic race” identified by the racial anthropologists and given pride of place in the public racial rhetoric of the Nazi regime; it was instead thought to comprise a mix of the “Nordic” and five other relatively inferior races (the “Mediterranean”, “Dinaric”, “Alpine”, “East Baltic”, and “Phalian” types). Nor were representatives of the “Nordic race” confined to the German population (24). The result was widespread uncertainty as to how the dual emphases
of German Volk and Nordic race were to be reconciled: how could an extreme nationalism abide by a doctrine that implied the existence of a transnational racial elite?

This uncertainty afflicted linguistics, the “central discipline of Volk” (Hutton 2005, 201), in no small measure. If race was everything to the ideology of Nazism, as has popularly been supposed both then and now, did the German language really merit the “reverence”, the outright “veneration” of the mother-tongue ideology? Were there not German-speakers who would not belong to the ideal racial community, and was German not therefore to become at best an instrumental lingua franca for a multilingual racial elite (Hutton 1999, 6, 187)? The fact that language, unlike race, can be acquired, would seem to be another blow for linguistics—even a fatal one, according to Coulmas (1995), who suggests that Nazi ideologues were not overly concerned with language because of its social permeability (62). As Hutton (1999) scrupulously documents, however, it was precisely this quality that was the source of the only too evident concern and anxiety about language within and beyond linguistics under National Socialism—indeed a concern that was expressed by Hitler himself in Mein Kampf (1942, 337, 342)—and it was around this very concern that the whole mother-tongue ideology came to dominance within linguistics, an ideology whose essential point is that one cannot acquire a native language at will (Hutton 1999, 281; Weisgerber 1939, 45).

To begin our delineation of this mother-tongue ideology in earnest, we must start from its Humboldtian first premise, namely that language is worldview (Hutton 1999, 5). Muttersprache, the language one learns from one’s mother, bestows on one a unique vision of the world, different from that contained in any other language, along with membership in her linguistic community—a community of the most fundamental kind because premised on a shared (linguistic) relationship to the world unlike any other. Inseparable from these baptismal gifts, however, comes a malediction in the form of the ever-present threat of the “horrors of assimilation”: if one should ever “lose” one’s mother-tongue, it represents equally the loss of worldview and indeed identity, as well as of membership in one’s true community (6).

Where does “race” fit on this view? As the worrisome discrepancy that was perceived between the boundaries of the races and those of the Völker was taken to show, race was not in the language but in the blood (Hitler 1942, 342). The resultant disjuncture of racial and linguistic boundaries was taken to reflect not a natural state of affairs, however, but the dereliction of a former natural order, in which race and language—and thus Volk—had indeed been congruent (Hutton 2005, 98). Within the political climate of its production, this subtly normative explanation of the state of human diversity was legible as the prescription of a certain response, namely to stop or ideally to reverse the perceived drifting apart of race and language; with this precept in place, the latter came to be thematised as a vulnerable point, a bridge to racial mixing (Hutton 1999, 301). For while no one can acquire a native language at will, it is quite possible to
determine one’s children’s mother-tongue: racial outsiders once allowed in can beget racially mixed offspring who will not belong racially to their mother’s community (or father’s, as the case may be), yet will nevertheless acquire her (or his) language and thus be able to pass as members, further corrupting its racial integrity.

The notion that it is possible to have a somehow fraudulent or unnatural relationship to one’s first language reveals a second foundational premise of mother-tongue ideology, namely that the link between race and language is a “quasi-natural” and therefore vulnerable one. Language is not fully natural, in the sense of innate, like an animal’s unique cry, because human infants can learn any language from birth—an observation in fact made by Herder (Hutton 1999, 295). Nevertheless, there still exists a natural in the sense of correct mother-tongue for each individual, determined by his or her ethnic, or, on the ideal Nazi vision, racial heritage (286). The “horrors of assimilation” were therefore two-fold: first, there was concern that the German Volk would be sapped as its diaspora, German-speakers and their children cut off from the German nation-state under the perverse post-Versailles European order, lost their “natural” (authentic) language and with it their identity, in assimilating to the language and worldview of the people surrounding them if not actually mixing physically with them. Conversely, there was the fear that racial strangers to the German Volk would be able to insinuate themselves into it by means of its language, contaminating and weakening it from within. It was this latter case that came to be the central preoccupation of linguistics during National Socialism, with a particular fixation on an enemy hewn out of the engrained antisemitism of German society, “the Jew”.

Seen as a racial “mirror-image” or “evil twin”, the Gegenrasse or “racial opposite” of the Germans (Hutton 1999, 5), the Jews were nevertheless not generally considered by racial anthropologists of the Nazi era to be conventionally racially “inferior” so much as “radically unnatural”, bypassing humanity’s “natural ecology of difference” geographically, culturally, and linguistically (Hutton 2005, 16). For whereas German history was widely seen by linguists under National Socialism as a stateless “exile”, in which “the will to language” had been the key to the survival of the German people as an ethnic entity, the Jewish people were seen to have somehow endured as an extraordinarily cohesive Volk in spite of both statelessness and the lack of a shared mother-tongue (Hutton 1999, 5-6); Yiddish was presumably ineligible because seen as a creole of German, and therefore not the unique expression of the historical experiences of the Jewish people and the Jewish people alone (202). The Jews were considered loyal not to the rooted European communities into which they were born and with which they usually shared a first language, then, but to a dispersed community and a dead “father language”—that is, the universalising, repressive, prohibitive voice of an otherworldly god as expressed in the Hebrew scriptures, divorced, unlike the mother-tongue, from the unique, living connection of a people to one another and to the patch of earth that sustained their ancestors before them (7). Paternity
could be ambiguous; only maternity was unmistakable, providing a people with its distinctive and indisputable identity and place in the world.

Supposedly “untouched and unshaped by the mother-tongue” (Hutton 2005, 203), the Jews were therefore able to exploit other Völker’s languages as mere means of communication without authentically sharing in their worldviews. More precisely and more insidiously, they used these languages as means of entry into other peoples whose link to language, in the form of a shared, ethnically-appropriate mother-tongue, was more “natural”. Finally, this means of entry was also a means of weakening these natural links between peoples and their languages, worldviews, and identities, as the racially foreign Jews and the universalist ideologies they supposedly espoused, such as liberalism, capitalism, and communism, simultaneously corrupted the discrete European peoples and blurred the distinctions between them (Hutton 1999, 5-6).

These were the ideas that constituted the background for the characteristic Nazi representation of the Jews as “parasites” who “speak the most languages” and can thereby “take over and ruin other cultures” (300). The fear they ultimately betray is that the Jewish people, with apparently no need of either territory or mother-tongue, were not racially inferior but indeed “the fittest”, in Darwinian terms (Hutton 2005, 111), evincing a “capacity for racial survival” (Hutton 1999, 5) that was superior to that of the Germans, and supremely threatening to the particularly vulnerable German people.

This particular vulnerability was rationalised, once again, in that unlike the Jews, for whom “mother-tongue” was nothing more than a contingency despite their dispersion, the German nation was both historically lacking a heartland and crucially defined by its shared mother-tongue. After World War One, the defeated German people felt themselves especially endangered both within and without their young country, having departed Versailles for a now partially-occupied, weak state, leaving a far-flung diaspora cut off behind redrawn foreign borders (Hutton 1999, 288). The key to warding off the increasingly oppressive “horrors of assimilation” in such a situation was thought to be the expansion and strengthening of the German state to accommodate all and only the German Volk. Only within a more powerful state could the effort of collective will required to protect the primal, familial, language-transmitting bond from parasitic racial infection be effective (13); only within a more total state could the decisive action needed to treat the existing outbreak be taken, beginning the process of realigning race with Volk and language.

The ascendant paradigm of linguistics within this stronger state, and the one which we must therefore study further in order to develop our understanding of what the antiassimilationist mother-tongue ideology actually stood for, is Weisgerber’s (Hutton 2005, 143). The Weisgerberian school sees language, or more precisely Muttersprache, as simultaneously the community’s shared link to its past, its unified worldview on the present, and its future destiny.
As Römer (1985) notes, in their concern with language’s function relative to society Weisgerber and his contemporaries were essentially pursuing the same line of enquiry as do present-day sociolinguists. In the National Socialist era, however, the “society” in question was of a very particular sort, namely Volksgemeinschaft (159). Without suggesting then that any sociolinguistic paradigm before or after Nazism has ever operated on a somehow neutral or value-free model of society, we must nevertheless bear in mind that the chauvinist and racist premises of the Volksgemeinschaft were equally presuppositions underwriting every aspect of Weisgerber’s influential view of language. Seen as children of the same mother, the rightful speakers of a common national language can no more shed their spiritual kinship than they can cut their own blood ties.

For Weisgerber, this spiritual mother, Muttersprache, was the first principle of human society. The notion that Sprachgemeinschaft or “linguistic community” was the essential prerequisite for all other kinds of Gemeinschaft (Weisgerber 1939, 101), combined with the reality of linguistic diversity, establishes Weisgerber’s thought as a variant of the Humboldtian tradition: fundamentally premised on difference, it is inscribed, in keeping with the spirit of the times, with an implicit linguistic nationalism. In keeping with the idea of “spirit”, too, the foundational status attributed to the idea of Geist by Weisgerber evinces a strong affinity with Humboldt, whose work he in fact laments has been more widely praised than understood (4). In his seminal 1929 work Muttersprache und Geistesbildung Weisgerber therefore attempts to elucidate his predecessor’s ideas on language and Geist through the concept of linguistic “inner form”, a term coined by Humboldt, and which he himself develops to denote the deep semantic structure unique to each language. The pattern of categories and relations that defines a language’s inner form is said both to show through its distinctive exterior form, that is, in the way each language organises sensory experience into verbal signs and syntactic structures, and to decide the very interior essence of its speakers, by determining how they comprehend the world, think, and behave (85-86).

In centring “inner form” in his basic understanding of language, Weisgerber emphatically rejects structuralist and “materialistic-individualistic” approaches (1939, 69)—a wording which implies most notably the rejection of the principles guiding the Junggrammatiker school, whose endeavours to discover a set of scientific laws governing diachronic sound change by empirical methods had achieved international preeminence at the end of the nineteenth century. Weisgerber argues that studying language as nothing more than a system of sounds cut loose from their speakers allows no access to the “actual problems of language” (47)—namely social problems, and centrally, the problem of what language accomplishes for society (49). This question is ultimately framed as pertaining to the precise nature of the relationship between the titular phenomena of Geistesbildung, the unique “spiritual formation” of a people, and Muttersprache,
defined not as the language learned from one’s mother or one’s first language, but as “the
language of one’s linguistic community” (44). Weisgerber thus abides by the notion that there is a
natural or correct mother-tongue for each individual according to his or her heritage, which is not
necessarily the same as the first language he or she actually learns. German is the “common
property” not of all those who speak it, but more ambiguously of all those “who belong to the
German linguistic community” (45).

What Weisgerber sets out to demonstrate is that this “common property” is not just a
means of communication, not only a set of shared associations between elements of superficial
“outer form” and those of semantic inner form. It is rather a “social form of cognition” (1939,
87), inasmuch as the categories and relations of that inner form determine nothing less than the
categories and relations according to which the speaker interprets and inhabits the world. The
relationship between language and worldview, common linguistic property and the unique
spiritual formation of its shareholders, Muttersprache and Geistesbildung, is therefore intimate
and inextricable (125), with language mediating the individual’s every experience in a manner
specific to the community of speakers to which he or she belongs (87). Yet implicit in this is the
claim that language, although the stated “property” of this community and the acknowledged
product of cumulative human endeavour (99, 130), has the upper hand over its speakers: for in
determining a people’s essential mode in the world, their Geistesbildung, language effectively
“thinks for” those who speak it (121). Indeed, Weisgerber concludes by asserting that it is
impossible to escape the influence of language, describing individuals as biding “under the spell
of their Muttersprache for the duration of their lives” (164).

What freedom do speaking individuals have, on this view? Certainly not that which they
may appear to exercise in their choice of expression: for in addition to the quotidian
responsibility of making oneself understood by abiding by the linguistic norms of the community,
Weisgerber attributes to each speaker a duty to the Muttersprache itself (1939, 129). It is the
individual’s responsibility to preserve the worldview instilled in his or her Muttersprache by past
generations of his or her community, for example by rejecting superfluous Fremdwörter,
loanwords which do not derive from the experience of the organic, rooted community and
therefore do not belong in its language (130). The importance of this duty of preservation, which
derives from language’s status as the fundamental, decisive, and distinguishing attribute of the
Volk, under a view which sees outer form, inner form, and worldview as inextricably linked,
cannot be overstated. For, harking back to Grimm’s notion that a people sets its boundaries
wherever it takes its language, in determining the shared identity and thus the unity of the Volk,
language is also understood by Weisgerber to determine its territorial boundaries and ultimately
its fate (101-2). In his own words, “Muttersprache is destiny for individuals, and the language of
a people the force of destiny for the community” (164).
In practice, however, the setting of boundaries was not such a tidy business. With the Nazi regime’s expansion of German territory toward the east, the already linguistically heterogeneous population within its borders became even more diverse. Meanwhile, how to incorporate a discrepant set of racial distinctions into the Weisgerberian model of mother-tongue community was and is still unclear: indeed, race is not once mentioned in his 1929 work. Hutton (1999) relates how Heinz Kloss, another prominent linguist in the service of the Third Reich, offers some indication of how we might fill this gap (287). Writing after the Second World War, Kloss claimed that amongst his colleagues during the Nazi era there were thought to be three ways of managing the interwar situation of racial and linguistic diversity. The first two prioritise the linguistic community, the *Volk*, over racial divisions, either by acknowledging and preserving the autonomy of non-German-speaking “minority cultures” within the Reich—on the principle not of tolerance but of antiassimilationism—or by a process of “linguistic levelling”, whereby all languages other than German would be eliminated by suppression or the expulsion of their speakers. The third approach, however, suggested that a racial criterion, however defined in the midst of the confusion engendered by *Rassenkunde*, could establish a sort of outer circle of potential members of the *Volk*, while belonging to the German linguistic community would define the subset of actual members. According to Kloss, it was this third, racially absolutist approach that prevailed.

Kloss’ account helps us to understand how it is that Weisgerber, National Socialism’s “key linguist”, did not so much as mention race in one of his most important texts, insisting instead on the fundamental role of language in the constitution of community. After all, his colleague and fellow founding father of mother-tongue ideology, Georg Schmidt-Rohr, had been threatened with expulsion from the NSDAP for persisting in the view that language was more important than race in determining membership in the *Volk* (Hutton 2005, 142). The difference was that Weisgerber, unlike Schmidt-Rohr, had never denied either the validity of racial criteria in the definition of the *Volk* or the existence of a link between race and language. Indeed, he was able convincingly to profess his belief in the greater significance of the former in response to his critics (Simon 1985, 116), for read with attention to the context of their production and reception, his arguments are in fact positively amenable to racial interpretation. For example, as Hutton (2005) notes, the idea of speakers owing duty or “loyalty” to their language must be read as implicitly antisemitic, given a climate in which Jews were already considered “notorious” for their lack of loyalty to a mother-tongue (203). Moreover, there is on the whole nothing precluding Weisgerber’s brand of linguistic nationalism from incorporation into just such a higher-order racial system as Kloss describes (202): nothing in Weisgerber’s foundational 1929 text speaks against the introduction of a racial criterion that would determine who, exactly, “[belongs] to the German linguistic community” (1939, 45).
Weisgerber certainly owed much of his success to his elegant presentation of a mother-tongue ideology that established language as at once literally essential (because it determines the Volk’s entire Geistesbildung), yet “vulnerable” (because not fully “natural”, or innate) to “infiltration” (by “unnatural”, alien elements), and therefore finally crucially important, insofar as it presents its speakers with both rights (to speak it and take up their place in the community of its speakers) and moral duties (to preserve it and thereby preserve the Volk). Yet Weisgerber was also successful precisely because he did not pronounce too boldly on the subject of race (Hutton 2005, 143). He presented a theory that was optimally flexible in relation to this key Nazi theme rather than risking politically sensitive declarations which could too easily and too dangerously be falsified by the changing official tune. In order to appreciate fully the adaptation of Weisgerber’s work to the intellectual and political climate of his time, I conclude with reference to one of the most salient of these official ideological modulations—that which finally resolved Rassenkunde’s destabilising claims about racial and linguistic boundaries in Europe.

It was the international advance of genetic science that finally caused Rassenkunde, as well as the problems it posed for Nazi ideology’s dual emphasis on race and Volk, to fall by the wayside. From the genetic perspective, there existed no pre-established racial groups and worryingly, irreversibly fading racial boundaries. There were only myriad hereditary lines which it was the task of the eugenicist to evaluate and coordinate to best advantage (Hutton 2005, 201) —a task whose ultimate apparatus took the form of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which I discuss in the next chapter. There therefore emerged a “division of labour” (203) between a scientific, deterministic, and optimistic race theory based in genetics, which accounted for the inheritance of physical qualities and underwrote the Nazi programme of racial hygiene, and a vitalist, voluntaristic, and teleological variety of linguistics, which explained the transmission of acquired characteristics, restoring credence in the significance of culture and the effectiveness of education in creating the ideal Nazi community (202). Race therefore could not be everything to Nazi ideology. The unique German worldview and spiritual culture clearly inhered not in the genes, but in the Volk, whose central discipline, linguistics, would revolve around a theory of language just such as Weisgerber’s: one that did not aim to elaborate or pronounce on race, but that would accommodate and work in tandem with it.

This development was not a matter of consensus or a party line, however, but an emergent, functional situation. As scholarly debates continued, the concept of race was not only allowed but even encouraged to retain a felicitous ambiguity both within and without the academy (Hutton 2005, 210). That is to say that the displacement of Rassenkunde and its problematic racial map by two separate disciplines of race and Volk, genetics and linguistics, was not in fact a resolution of the race-Volk tension in any positive sense. In keeping with contemporary scientific orthodoxy as with the mother-tongue ideology’s assertion that the link
between race and language is only quasi-natural and hence always vulnerable to interruption, no attempt was made to posit a causal relationship between the two (208). Of course, this did nothing to resolve the anxiety about assimilation engendered by the mother-tongue ideology. Nevertheless, the easy silence between the study of race and that of language permitted “a complementarity between determinism and voluntarism, science and ideology” (211), that lent the two pillars of Nazi community, race and Volk, an ambiguous blend of scientific authority and participatory potential in the public eye, rigorous systematicity yet expedient expansibility at official will.

It also permitted language as Weisgerber envisaged it, as Muttersprache, the ideal unifying and distinguishing feature of the ideally homogeneous Volk, to be invoked in public and political discourse to prefigure the unification and separation of an as-yet submerged and indefinite “race”. No matter if the precise nature of the connection between the two was never thoroughly disambiguated for the layperson: all that was required was that Muttersprache, the unity and the boundary of the Volk, should be understood to stand in and “speak for” latent race, to “recreate race in its own image and be its voice” (Hutton 1999, 9), without superseding it as the fundamental criterion of belonging. The Muttersprache had to be protected by the community of its true speakers that they might protect themselves, for it was the Muttersprache that would “bring race into the realm of historical action” (5) in tandem with the efforts of the eugenicists—without thereby imposing binding ideological commitments on the regime to those who spoke German and nevertheless did not belong.

Mother-tongue ideology thus represented another station of the long German tradition of viewing language and community as connected. As my presentation of the linguistic component of National Socialist ideology has sought to demonstrate, this tradition itself was in turn connected to the German nation-state’s peculiar history: its late development, inflected by a long-standing tension between the idea of a fractured German-speaking nation and the reality of the disrupted, discontinuous state; its accelerated establishment of an industrial order which brought members of hitherto local economies and their vernaculars into a newly far-reaching system that demanded an operational standard language; its increasingly chauvinistic ethos of militarism and finally expansionism, expressed in the drive to gain colonial territories and with them world power while negotiating the perils of “world language” status, and leading to an increasing anxiety about the relationship between Reich and language boundaries. Finally, the tradition of linking community and language connects directly to the disastrous aftermath of the war this aggressive ethos helped to spark, which compounded the sense that the community of German-speakers was once again unnaturally divided, now more than ever before at risk of decomposition, and thus in dire need of a leadership that could reunite and reinforce the Volk.
politically, economically, and, for lack of a better term, essentially—through a rigorous if ambiguous programme of racial and linguistic hygiene.

On Hitler’s assumption of this leadership and the establishment of the Nazi regime, a suitably essentialist theory of language such as that propounded by Weisgerber appeared as the ideal grist for the mill that had to produce “Germans”, Volksgenosse and Volksgenossinnen or “national comrades” united in cross-class racial solidarity, out of individuals who were materially still caught up in an inequitable capitalist system within an oppressive state that aimed at total control of its population. Represented as the essence of a unified, uniformly German-speaking Volk, language became a foundational element in the construction of an ideal vision of that people’s community, a socially united and racially purified Volksgemeinschaft for the good of which these individuals could be convinced to endure some hardship, and in whose construction they could be persuaded to participate. Language itself had a complex connection to race, however, which informed the regime’s ambition to reestablish the linguistically-defined Volk along racially determinate lines, with the help of the eugenicists. Ultimately, this goal was not confined to Germany. The regime’s devouring of Eastern Europe represented an imperial project, not only racially informed but racially motivated. The “new order” at which it aimed was to be cleanly divided into racial strata, on a model of intra-(racially homogeneous)-group equality within strict intergroup racial hierarchy (Hutton 1999, 29). From this racialised “from each according to their ability” the Jews, whose relationship to language marked them out on the mother-tongue ideology as constitutionally bound to corrupt and pollute other groups, were irredeemably precluded.

Having considered how the theoretical uses of language within National Socialist ideology followed from the series of developments that led to the rise and rule of National Socialism itself, I will now turn to its practical uses. To this end, we might reflect on a certain contradiction inherent in the prestige accorded to the Weisgerberian school of linguistic thought in the Nazi context: namely that while mother-tongue ideology held that speakers were totally subjected to their language, the various authors of National Socialist discourse succeeded in actively transfiguring German. The resolution of this apparent contradiction, which brings us directly to the topic of the next chapters, is to be found in the sincere belief of Weisgerberian linguists and those political agents whom they influenced that language was worldview. For if this was the case, then the active and thoroughgoing manipulation of language—which may not have been customary on the mother-tongue view, but was nevertheless not ruled impossible by it—was equally the manipulation of its speakers, of the way they viewed, thought about, and finally acted in the world (Kämper-Jensen 1993, 177). The ultimate end, to which mother-tongue ideology was a not at all incompatible theoretical means, was to make a new essence for Germans and German alike.
2.4 **Making sense, making subjects**

Precisely how this end was achieved—how, in short, language contributed to the functionality of the National Socialist apparatus—will be the subject of the next three chapters. In them, I ask what linguistic practices, in what fields, actually forged new sensibilities in the context of German fascism and its linguistic ideology. To prepare the ground for my response to this question, I wish first to make a clearer statement of what was already implicit in this chapter: namely, that political economic circumstances do not work directly on linguistic ideology, nor for that matter on linguistic practices. The ideology of *Muttersprache*, for example, was not articulated as a direct response to the problem of Germany’s postwar political and economic instability. Rather, the political economic conditions that obtained under the German fascist regime influenced its ideology and practices in a more general, insidious manner, by influencing which kinds of thought and behaviour appeared sensible and therefore capable of establishing new norms. It was this process, rather than any more conscious deliberation vis-à-vis political economic conditions, that informed the way language specifically was thought about as part of an overarching ideological constellation with nation and state, and used so as to make a practical reality of this ideological constellation in a new form of community.

The sites in which this process took place may be broadly construed as fields of education, where new standards of sense and new subjectivities are made. It is not then in terms of what Maas (1984) calls “das Schema von Oben-Unten” (“top-down schema”) nor any “Manipulationsvorstellung” (“notion of manipulation”) that the apparent “Ausschalten der Intelligenz” achieved by the National Socialists must be understood (11, 189). Indeed, we must understand the Nazi achievement to be not a “shutdown of intelligence” but an education, a “drawing out” of new forms of understanding. The language used to this end was not a sinister, extra-ordinary super-force, but a pre-existing inter-personal medium of communication. It was used not to practise an occult form of mind-control, but to persuade the mass public to underwrite a political cause. Despite the antipolitical image of Nazism, then, which sought to represent itself as the parthenogenetic begetter of a united German people rather than as one participant of many in the negotiation of those people’s diverse aims and interests, we might follow Gorr (2000) in remarking that the National Socialist technique was in fact to make *everything* political by saturating the discursive environment with texts that only rejected the *appearance* of the political (151). Where everything is political, steeped in an ideology that aspires to totality and brooks no opposition yet is nonetheless deeply divisive, nothing appears political and hence potentially gainsayable: where everything is incorporated into ideology, everything appears as though natural and incontestable.

As concluded earlier with reference to the idea of “totalitarian language”, this aspiration represented an ideal upper limit toward which fascist regimes could tend but never achieve.
Nevertheless, the power of language in the atmosphere that Gorr (2000) describes is not “totalitarian” as such, stemming from words that are magic wands, capable of bewitching otherwise intelligent individuals: its potency derives simultaneously from its necessary degree of constancy as a socially-structuring system, and its inevitable degree of exploitability as a socially-structured system. National Socialism did not create a wholly new language, as Klemperer (2000) reminds us (16). Rather, it modified the existing one to attach new sense to its existing terms in a specifically hortatory mood, so to appeal to the hopes and fears of its audience (Gorr 2000, 152). The texts through which this was accomplished, while they may appear an outrage to sense to those who confront them after the fact, did indeed make sense in context: both because they formed a comprehensible response to the sociopolitical conditions of their emergence, as we have seen, but also inasmuch as they were responsible for gradually establishing new standards of sensibility through their complete saturation of public and to some extent also private discourse.

How, precisely, was such thorough discursive saturation and such extreme discursive shift in the ideological substance of the “nation” achieved by the Nazi state? Gentile (2004) has argued that, despite the apparent irrationality of the fascist project, “its myths were politically efficient because they were combined with the rationality of the organisation and the institution. The organisation and the institution define norms of rational behaviour, formalised and directed in order to achieve a goal” (365). The systematic propagation of Nazi ideas throughout German society, not only repeated at every turn but incorporated in every social institution and backed by the threat of ostracism or violence, made the notion of the Volksgemeinschaft “the most morally coercive category possible”, in Eley’s (2013) words; yet it also made it real, in the sense that it attained a “powerful purchase on social experience” (74). Its accompanying categories of “German” and “Jew” also became socially real, interpellating every member of pre-Nazi society into a role of either belonging or alienation as the new “people’s community” was created. Thus Gentile’s and Eley’s perspectives urge us to “[broaden] the concept of ideology by following the impact of ideas into society and seeing how they became converted into practices” (Eley 2013, 141; original emphasis). Only by tracing this progress can we understand how the boundaries of sense were set.

Yet we must also acknowledge that this impact was bidirectional. Nazi ideas ended up changing German society, but they began by drawing strength from the “actually existing world of practices and thought” in which they were rooted (Eley 2013, 75). Both Maas (1984) and Gorr (2000) have articulated this idea using metaphors of a discursive “ferry” (Maas 1984, 11) or “bridge” (Gorr 2000, 152), built out of language and connecting the German audience’s actual experiences of the world to the National Socialist project. The stability and efficacy of the passage is attributable to the fact that it was constructed out of elements of the passengers’ own
lives and language, and so managed “pseudo-communicatively” to imply a shared understanding of the world—even if the destination to which it led appears retrospectively as an alien shore. My main concern in the following chapters is to examine the practices that effected discursive shift and saturation in order to make the new standards of sense that constituted this alien shore. I seek to grasp how the individuals who lived and died under Nazism were brought over, by means of the discursive “ferry” or “bridge”, to inhabit new subjectivities provided to them by the categories created by the regime.
What was the nature of the relationship between the vision of national society and the practices of the state under the Nazi regime? In the previous chapter, I discussed how the establishment and development of fascism in Germany, along with a particular ideology of how language and community fit together, made sense in the historical context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the next three chapters, I ask what linguistic practices, in what fields, actually made new standards of sense in the context of German fascism and its linguistic ideology; in this chapter, I begin my answer with a discussion of the foundational legal categories established by the National Socialists and the practices through which they took hold among the German population, creating new subjects in both the political and ontological sense of that word.

The German fascist regime was a legal dictatorship. What facilitated the atrocities of the National Socialists was not the withering away of a regulative apparatus that might have kept their excesses in check, but the gradual and deliberate reinterpretation of the due limits it set. Not only the outer limits of state power, however, but also the inner articulation of the population it disposed was reconstituted, as some half a million Germans found themselves suddenly redefined as non-German “Jews”. In reflecting on the legal discourse and practices of the National Socialist regime in particular, it is instructive to reflect on law more generally in its performative aspect. I would argue that legislation can be regarded as a kind of authoritative utterance, one that enacts practical relationships between individuals whose conduct is conditioned by specific rights and responsibilities at the same time as it expresses these relationships, rights, and responsibilities in words.

The Nuremberg Laws, promulgated on September 15 at the NSDAP rally of 1935, are emblematic of this performative quality. Their discursive distinction and attribution of Germans and non-Germans to different and unequal categories with different and unequal rights, backed with the escalating power of the young Nazi state, initiated a process of segregation and deprivation whose practical consequences could not have been greater for its targets. The more infamous of the two racial laws promulgated at the 1935 Nuremberg rally is the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, which regulated contact between Germans and Jews in marriage, sexual intercourse, and domestic employment. The more insidious, however, is the Reich Citizenship Law, which undertook to define who exactly belonged to the categories of “German” and “Jew” and to distinguish the rights accorded to each, thereby laying the legal foundations for persecution and eventually genocide. The focus of the following analysis will therefore be the citizenship law, as the logically prior of the two rules.
Although it was the first of the Nuremberg Laws, the Reich Citizenship Law was not the first racial legislation of the Nazi era. The first supplementary decree to the Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service of April 11, 1933 had already attempted to define as “non-Aryan” any person “descended from non-Aryan, particularly Jewish parents or grandparents”. “Jewish”, in turn, meant having one or more parent or grandparent who “had belonged to the Jewish religion” (in Pegelow Kaplan 2009, 67). There were clear flaws in this formulation. The term “Aryan”, actually borrowed from the domain of linguistics, was soon recognised to be of dubious value to racial classification, in light of the incongruence of language, Volk, and race discussed in the previous chapter. More obviously, the law’s reliance on religious affiliation for the practical identification of Jewishness did not agree with its racial motivation (69): confession was convertible whereas race was not. Further efforts were needed to reconstitute the German population along truly racial lines.

The Nuremberg Laws were the crowning achievement of these efforts. Pegelow Kaplan (2009) has called them an instrument used to “accelerate the linguistic and legal remaking” of Germans and Jews (103); in fact, their creation was in itself an “accelerated” process. The decision to introduce racial legislation represented a hurried attempt by the state to regain a legislative lead over the “chaotic” popular antisemitism that had overtaken it over the summer of 1935 (Essner 2002, 108). Moreover, due to an abrupt change of plans on Hitler’s part, the laws were only actually drafted the day before that autumn’s party rally was scheduled to take place (Kershaw 2008, 250). Bernhard Lösener, racial expert in the Reich Ministry of the Interior and one of the architects of the last-minute legislation, later recounted how Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick conveyed the Führer’s orders the night before the rally: “it is just to be a couple of concise words … a sort of privileged status for the pure German-blooded” (in Essner 2002, 130-31). The draft returned by Lösener and his colleagues was, in his words, “as meaningless as possible” (in Essner 2002, 131), establishing only the principle of a racial division. The monumental and momentous task of defining who fell to each side of it, the “German-blooded” and the “Jew”, would take much longer.

Indeed, the Reich Citizenship Law proper does not refer to “Jews” at all. Its wording attributes an elevated status to those of “German or related blood” (as opposed to “Aryans”), rather than diminishing the status of non-“German” others. The key elements of the text run as follows:

§1(1) A subject of the state is a person who belongs to the protective union of the German Reich and therefore has particular obligations to it. …

… §2(1) A citizen of the Reich is only that subject who is of German or related blood and who demonstrates through his conduct that he is willing and able faithfully to serve the German Volk and Reich. …
§2(3) The citizen of the Reich is the sole bearer of full political rights in accordance with the law. (In Lösener and Knost 1936, 30)

It is therefore technically the “Germans”, and not the “Jews”, who are set apart. Lösener, in his account of the drafting of the Nuremberg Laws, confirmed that there had been consensus among the collaborators that the citizenship of the Jews should remain untouched (in Essner 2002, 131). The objective was presumably to ensure that “particular obligations” continued to bind the non-“German-blooded” inextricably to the state that sought their obliteration.

In the absence of provisions detailing how to determine the “Germanness” of blood, however, the law remained a dead letter. For two months after its promulgation, a struggle raged between various racial experts and party dignitaries over the precise situation of the dividing line between “German-blooded” and “Jewish”; specifically, the challenge lay in the assignment of individuals with half “German” and half “Jewish” ancestry, the so-called *Mischlinge* (Essner 2002, ch. 3C). The resolution of this dispute is recorded in the first supplementary decree to the Reich Citizenship Law, finally issued on November 14, 1935. Here again, a substantive definition of “German or related blood” is lacking. Presented in elaborate detail, however, is the all-important foil against which “Germanness” became meaningful: “the Jew”.

§4(1) A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. …

… §5(1) A Jew is whoever is descended from at least three fully racially Jewish grandparents. (In Lösener and Knost 1936, 31)

The old difficulty of determining race without recourse to religion, however, remained unresolved, as the decree states also that “a grandparent counts as fully Jewish by implication if he has belonged to the Jewish religious community” (in Lösener and Knost 1936, 31). As Lösener and Knost (1936) explain in their commentary to the laws, it is simply not feasible to make a finite determination of racial origins without this provision: since race is a matter of ancestry, definitively manifested not in the individual person but in the hereditary line, the only alternative to drawing conclusions from religious affiliation would be a process of interminable genealogical investigation (42). This problem was ultimately insoluble.

The remaining provisions of the all-important Section Five of the decree address the question of how to categorise individuals with both “German” and “Jewish” heritage, the “Mischlinge”. Lösener and Knost (1936) clarify the principle of this categorisation in their commentary: the “half-Jew” counts as fully Jewish who, “according to the voice of his blood, has decided for Jewry” (45; original emphasis). Thus
§5(2) Also counted as a Jew is the subject who is a Jewish *Mischling* descended from two fully Jewish grandparents,

a) who at the time of the law’s issue has belonged to the Jewish religious community or is subsequently received into it … (In Lösener and Knost 1936, 31)

Religious affiliation, in Lösener and Knost’s (1936) regard, constitutes “a fully valid commitment to Jewry” (45; original emphasis). The choice of spouse made by “a half-Jew or half-Jewess”, too, is evidence as to whether or not “the influence of their Jewish inheritance predominates” (45). The “Mischling” is therefore also counted as a “Jew”,

b) who at the time of the law’s issue is married to a Jew or subsequently marries one,

c) who is descended from a marriage with a Jew … that is performed after the coming into effect of the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour of 15 September 1935,

d) who is descended from extramarital relations with a Jew … and was born out of wedlock after 31 July 1936. (In Lösener and Knost 1936, 31)

That is, any “mixed” couple who conceived together six weeks or more after the promulgation of the law—long enough not to plead ignorance of it—were to bear not only the child but the responsibility for its rejection from the German community as a “Jew”.

Lösener and Knost (1936) claim that the Nuremberg Laws represent not the propagation of racial hatred, but on the contrary the beginning of a settlement between the German and the Jewish *Völker* (17). The citizenship law’s severance of the “German” from the “Jew” is represented as the swiftest and therefore the kindest cut in a vital operation to save the life of the German *Volk* from the “mortal danger” of Jewish assimilation. It will leave both peoples at last with “the healthy feeling, free from violent emotion, of mutual estrangement [*Fremdsein*]” (18). In their efforts to convey the reasonableness of the new laws, the authors go so far as to explicitly attribute a particular subjectivity to their primary target, the “Jews”: even the staunchest Zionists cannot object to the principle of the legislation, “since they know that for the Jewish *Volk*, too, these laws represent the only real solution, and since they know moreover that the German *Volk*, reawakened to consciousness of itself, has only given itself *just the same laws* that the Jewish *Volk* decreed for itself thousands of years ago” (17; original emphasis). In Lösener and Knost’s interpretation, then, both the legal personhood and the personal subjectivities of “Germans” and “Jews” are sharply separated; through the laws themselves, this separation was to be effected in practice.

The authoritative pronouncements of the law, however, were not in themselves enough to bring about the new order its creators envisioned. Rather, the discursive demarcations of texts like the Nuremberg Laws were necessarily both supportive of and supported by a state apparatus designed to implement them. This apparatus was diffuse, drawing on the capacities of a variety of
existing and dedicated institutions; the practice that linked them was the accumulation of “ancestral proof”. The “ancestral proof” or Abstammungsnachweis was the documentation of non-Jewish heritage required from every person falling under any of the supplementary racial ordinances issued pursuant to the racial laws of 1935, which by some estimates numbered as many as two thousand (Ehrenreich 2007, 58). These ordinances introduced a racial status requirement into everything from membership in the NSDAP and its organisations to professional and commercial admissibility to changes in civil status and especially marriage, leading Ehrenreich (2007) to conclude that “virtually every Reich citizen” would have needed to make such a proof at some stage in their life (61). The necessity of providing the state with the details of one’s genealogical history, which were simultaneously the details of one’s new racial identity, was thereby established as a new norm under the Nazi regime.

There were a number of ways of making the proof. The standard method was the compilation of the birth, baptismal, and marriage certificates of the applicant’s parents and grandparents; in the most extreme cases, as for entry to the elite Nazi organisations, proof of a pure “German” line as far back as 1750 was required (Ehrenreich 2007, 61-63). Another popular means was the Ahnenpass, a genealogical chart in the form of a small “ancestral passport” (68). The individual could usually compile his or her ancestral proof by him- or herself, or with the assistance of a genealogist, before turning it over for official certification by the relevant authority. Where there was cause for doubt on the part of any authority, however, the nexus of offices collectively labelled the Reich Genealogical Authority (RGA) by Ehrenreich (2007) could be called upon to intervene. The task of this institution was to scrutinise complex cases through a combination of private investigation, genealogical research, and physical examination, after which it would issue an official “ancestral decision” on the racial acceptability of the examinee (94). Ultimate jurisdiction over the borders of the categories set out in the Nuremberg Laws thus remained firmly in the grasp of the state, whose judgement no one could evade. A validated proof meant the validation of the individual’s rights and his or her continued enjoyment of them; it was equally a validation of his or her continued Germanness or, in the new law’s other, new words, “German-bloodedness”. An invalid proof meant the revocation not only of rights, but of German identity.

Central to the immediate effects of the Reich Citizenship Law, then, was the institutionalisation of this peculiarly racialised practice of genealogy, a practice which in turn effected the interpellation of individual subjects to the new legal categories of “German” and “Jew”, and finally the manifestation of these categories in broader social practice, as privileged and persecuted individuals acted out rights retained and responsibilities gained. Of course, such a schematic description does not do justice to the complexity of each of these moments. Particularly difficult was the practical application of the new, racialised legal categories to human
beings with complicated histories and the absolutely uncomplicated need to evade the regime’s fatal determination. The records of countless attempts by individuals awaiting or challenging the results of an “ancestral decision” to assert their own self-identity against the classification imposed on them by the state, detailed in Ehrenreich (2007) and Pegelow Kaplan (2009), are the best testimony of the complexity that intervened in the regime’s attempt to put its discursive demarcations into practice.

“At no point, however,” as Ehrenreich (2007) remarks, “did the authorities seem to worry about whether the population thought the requirement [to prove ancestry] ‘made sense’” (70). Individual challenges of the classificatory system did not contest its overall validity. How could the principle at the root of such an unprecedented disruption of the civil liberties and personal identities of millions of people have been so widely and so easily accepted? As discussed above, part of the answer certainly lies in the troubled political, social, and economic grounds in which National Socialism took root. Racial policies benefited the majority of non-Jewish Germans. The same racist ideology that actually motivated such policies also allowed a rationalisation of the expropriation and exploitation of a supposedly death-dealing other. The endorsement of these policies that genetics seemed to provide, meanwhile, had the added benefit of making them appear the result of scientific necessity rather than of self-serving choice (Ehrenreich 2007, xii).

My argument then is that legislation like the Nuremberg Laws, against the backdrop of an ideology that was able to adduce scientific authority to legitimate its racism and racism to legitimate its exploitation, made sense because it offered the majority of the troubled German population a new way of seeing the world, a racial perspective that reassured it of its future and purported to show it the way there.

Yet I wish to argue that the Reich Citizenship Law in particular also made sense in another way, namely by preserving elements of continuity and retrospection alongside the forward-looking changes it introduced. Lösener and Knost (1936) declare in their commentary to the new legislation that it serves merely to restore the ancient identity of Volk and state, Volksgenosse or Volksgenossin and citizen, that was lost over centuries of migration and fragmentation, and whose nadir came with the French Revolution’s declaration of the liberty, fraternity, and equality of all humankind (6). In overturning this principle in favour of that of racial inequality, the Nuremberg Laws merely overturn a perverse order that led Germany into decline in favour of its original, natural one, thus returning it to health. The wording of the law proper, too, duly underplays its act of rupture with the more recent past: rather than overtly stripping Jewish Germans of their status, it merely excludes them from the smaller circle of privilege drawn around the majority who were—according to the only definition it proffers—not Jewish. Finally, the ideas about race and genetics surrounding the implementation of the law, still
relatively new to most Germans in 1935, are rendered palatable by their incorporation into the practice of genealogy or family history, familiar to all.

This desire to effect change via continuity, easing the transition from the distant past through the crises of recent decades to a brighter future, is most perfectly attested in a document on the Nuremberg Laws by their final arbiter, the RGA. In a 1936 issue of the Genealogical Authority’s journal, Familie, Sippe, Volk, readers were counselled:

It is essential today to again bring to the consciousness of the German Volk … the significance of one’s own blood for German culture and the prestige of the state, to arouse an appreciation of the racial-political demands actualised in the Nuremberg Laws and, in this connection, to cultivate blood-aware kinship studies. This will allow the proof of German-blooded ancestry to become an easy and self-evident duty. (In Ehrenreich 2007, 90; my emphasis)

The German people had “again” to be made aware of the importance of their blood, an awareness they had implicitly lost since the days when Volk and state were one; in the recaptured light of this long-lost “blood-awareness”, restored by the Nuremberg Laws, the proof and, presumably, the protection of “German-blooded ancestry” would not only make sense, it would be “self-evident”. A beam was thus projected between a mythical Germanic past and a fantastical Nazi future, in hopes that the perception of continuity would coax the contemporary German to participate in the construction of a sturdier bridge.

I contend that this attempt succeeded, at least in the context of the implementation of the racial laws. The new legislation’s institutionalisation of racialised genealogy, administered and enforced through a massive state apparatus, laid the foundations on which new subjectivities were formed by both “subjects” and “citizens”: in creating their “ancestral proof”, certified “German-blooded” individuals distinguished themselves from paperless “Jewish” interlopers. The resultant possession or dispossess of legal status, now equally racial status, altered the relationship between “Germans” and “Jews” in the broader social context. The former continued to enjoy the same rights on a different basis, bearing a new kind of responsibility toward the new racial community to which they now belonged; the latter were abruptly thrust into a strange new world apart, where most of their former rights were replaced with new responsibilities that marked them out as alien to this racial community—to identify themselves as Jewish from 1935, to assume the added name “Sara” or “Israel” from 1938, to bear the star from 1941. Thus the sum total of “ancestral proof” collected by the National Socialist regime represented a new understanding, effectively shared by an entire population, of what it was to be German. Each and every Ahnenpass was a point on the newly redrawn borders of the German nation-state; each and every bearer a sentinel for the coming Nazi Volksgemeinschaft.
The early twentieth century was characterised for many Euro-American societies by the development of increasingly sophisticated mass media, with radio broadcasting and film joining the proliferating press to reach a larger audience than ever before. That this progression overlapped with the development of the modern, industrialising nation-state is not coincidental: the expansion of supralocal, mass communications was vital to the consolidation of unified, homogeneously nationalised communities (Ross 2008, 380). At the same time, the fact that these forms of communication represented an equally indispensable toolkit for democratic nation-states like the United States and the United Kingdom as for fascist regimes such as National Socialism, whose objective was a unified, homogeneously nationalised, but also racially homogeneous *Volksgemeinschaft*, precludes any argument that mass media have either inherently democratic or inherently “totalitarian” affinities (381). It is not therefore the generic form of the media, but how this form was exploited specifically by the National Socialists, with what discursive techniques it contributed to the end of creating the linguistically- and racially-defined “people’s community”, that I seek to illuminate here.

The proliferation of mass media opened new avenues for the application of old principles of propaganda such as those presented by Gustave Le Bon at the end of the nineteenth century and favoured by Hitler in the early decades of the twentieth. From the beginning of his career as an orator, the Nazi leader relied on simple, repetitious, emotion-laden messages to win over his audiences (Welch 2002, 12); in Joseph Goebbels, he found a highly efficient organiser under whose direction the NSDAP quickly acquired the most sophisticated propaganda apparatus of any Weimar-era party (15). Goebbels, charged with the leadership of the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (RMVP) soon after the Nazis assumed power, saw his office as “the living contact between the National Government as the expression of the popular will and the people themselves” (in Welch 2002, 24)—on Hitler’s view, the ministry’s task was nothing less than the “spiritual direction of the nation” (in Welch 2002, 28). Typically of all institutions in the polycratic National Socialist system, the RMVP led a complex coexistence alongside the Nazi party’s own *Reichspropagandaleitung* and the government’s newly implemented corporate organisation for the artistic and cultural professions, the *Reichskulturkammer* (RKK), both of which also fell under Goebbels’ purview (30). By these means, the Nazi regime managed to establish complete control over the German mass media by the end of their first year in power.

Even the most elaborate propaganda apparatus, however, could not reach beyond the media outlets themselves to enforce the desired coordination of popular opinion and political will where there existed no prior correspondence between the two. Propaganda functions by latching onto and reinforcing existing attitudes and beliefs (Welch 2002, 9). The propaganda created by
the Nazi regime was designed to align with “everyday German understandings”, for example of the injustice of German suffering after the First World War and of the need to create a unified front to combat this injustice. Aided by the real economic and foreign policy advances achieved early on by the regime, its portrayal of the new government as a true “expression of the popular will” could not fail to be convincing (Gellately 2001, 259). Perhaps the cornerstone of this self-presentation was the by-now familiar concept of the Volksgemeinschaft. Representing both thematic means and policy end of Nazi propaganda, the “people’s community” was a point of connection between widely-shared yearnings for social equality and material ease and the regime’s own desire to initiate a new, socially cohesive but also linguistically homogeneous and ultimately racially pure order (Ross 2008, 306). Establishing such a connection on the terms of German citizens’ present experience was the necessary first step to transporting them to this unfamiliar end.

We must therefore take care not to reduce the effect of the beguiling messages and dramatic accomplishments of the Nazi regime to a mysterious “brainwashing” of passive, undifferentiated media consumers. Rather, media under National Socialism—the term is effectively interchangeable with “propaganda” in this setting, given the strict state control of all established media outlets in Nazi Germany—served to inculcate new types of knowledge among a subsection of the German population. That is, the Weltanschauung or worldview seen as inhering within the German language was channelled and elaborated in the utterances of the National Socialists into a system of meaning that was new insofar as attached to an unfamiliar moral matrix, one which drew a impermeable boundary around a fundamentally racially-defined “community of shared moral obligation” and consigned all those outside it to oblivion (Koonz 2003, 5). In such a context having an understanding of the language of the text, being a German-speaker, while important, was not enough, for the texts spoke only to those who fulfilled both the linguistic and the prior, essentialist, ultimately racist criterion of belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft. The knowledge system contained in these texts was by definition inaccessible to those whom it redefined as moral nonentities, for it constituted the epistemological foundations for a community in which they did not exist.

My view then is that while these new parameters of knowledge were established in part by “experts”, including scholars such as Weisgerber, racial researchers, jurists, and others, their actual implementation and crystallisation involved complex forms of discursive engagement between the mass media and its audience. What I will argue makes this interaction so complex is that it resulted in not only the assimilation of new knowledge by the targeted section of the German population, but the assimilation of this group’s energies into the undertakings of the National Socialist regime. That is, behaviours as well as ideas had the potential to be shaped in the process of engagement with the ideologically-saturated texts of the mass media. Goebbels’
diaries reveal that he would have had the RMVP named the “Ministry of Public Education” (Welch 2002, 28): it is my contention that we should understand the state-coordinated mass media under National Socialism as a massive educational apparatus designed to bring German citizens into new ways of knowing and acting in the world, and ultimately thereby into a linguistically- and racially-bounded Volksgemeinschaft that could not materialise without their practical participation.

4.1 The National Socialist radio

Of the technologies that constituted this educational apparatus, that most prized by the National Socialist regime was the radio. It was considered the paradigmatic Führungsmittel or “medium of leadership” for its appealing novelty, its centralised broadcasting structure, and its potential for simultaneous transmission (Ross 2008, 330)—in short, for its ability to convey a single text, carefully composed in advance, to the entire population of the inchoate “people’s community”. To Goebbels the radio was an “essentially authoritarian” medium, the “spiritual weapon of the totalitarian state”, in contrast to the older and more heterogeneous press, which he labelled an “exponent of the liberal spirit, the product and instrument of the French revolution” (in Zeman 1995, 186). For unlike the press, in Germany radio broadcasting had been understood almost from its very beginnings during the Weimar Republic as the exclusive instrument of the state (Marßolek and von Saldern 1998, 23). As early as 1925, the first regional broadcasters were compulsorily incorporated into the majority state-owned Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft (RRG); effective government censorship was imposed from 1926 (Sarkowicz 2010, 205). The transition to National Socialism was therefore remarkably smooth, with the responsibility for a heavily purged RRG simply being transferred to a department of the RMVP while the nine original regional broadcasters officially became RMVP-controlled branch stations (Welch 2002, 39). The occasion of these stations’ first compulsory National Socialist transmission was the very evening of Hitler’s appointment to the chancellery on January 30, 1933 (Sarkowicz 2010, 206).

The function of the newly coordinated radio was, as the recently appointed Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda told the directors of the RRG in March 1933, “to let the Volk take part in all public affairs”, but more than this, to “inwardly imbue them with the spiritual tenor of our time so that no one can break away any more” (Goebbels in Sarkowicz 2010, 209). Thus a certain ambiguity is revealed in the new regime’s vision for the radio: was it first and foremost to “let” or to compel? Was it primarily a medium of free access to public life, albeit a closely controlled one, or a means of holding the entire public captive? Ross (2008) asserts that the RMVP considered radio-listening a “‘national duty’, quite literally a prerequisite for participation in public life” (330); less clear is the listener’s intended disposition toward this duty.
In the National Socialist government’s first year in power, it opted to barrage listeners with political broadcasts and overt propaganda. In the first three months of 1933 there were seventy-seven obligatory transmissions from the Reich government, up from five in the quarter before the Nazis came to power (Sarkowicz 2010, 210-11). While the intensity of the propaganda broadcasts relented somewhat after the elections of March 1933, the deluge of often elaborately staged political coverage continued for special events such as the “Day of National Labour” on May 1, while a daily “National Hour” and an interminable roster of lesser officials seeking a platform on the radio filled much of the remaining airtime (Ross 2008, 330-31). Goebbels himself was displeased with this strategy (Sarkowicz 2010, 211). It certainly offered the German people access to public affairs, but in a form that they had little interest in taking advantage of; the very unpopularity of the political programming, meanwhile, made manifest the radio’s inability to compel its audience to dutiful attention (Ross 2008, 331). The programmers had overlooked a vital third component of Goebbels' message to them in March 1933: the key to reconciling audience interest with the interests of the government was “only not to be boring” (Goebbels in Sarkowicz 2010, 209). So long as the radio did not appeal to its listeners’ existing preferences, it could neither invite nor compel.

The solution was a reorientation toward entertainment. After an unsuccessful attempt to attract listeners with rarefied cultural offerings of classical music, poetry, and philosophy in 1934, in 1935 the RRG and the RMVP mutually agreed that lighter entertainment was to be prioritised (Ross 2008, 333). By 1938 no less than 70% of airtime was dedicated to music, with prime-time variety shows or Bunte Abende proving particular favourites (Sarkowicz 2010, 218). Political broadcasts were still transmitted on certain special occasions; in a 1939 survey of listener preferences conducted by the Deutsche Radio-Illustrierte in which Bunte Abende programmes were voted the country’s best-loved, however, news and political broadcasting were not presented as a choice, with the magazine declaring “one hundred percent interest” in these items “self-evident” (in Sarkowicz 2010, 221). Already two years previously, Goebbels had forbidden regular presenters from referring on air to politics, state, police, army, and religion (Pater 1998, 215). The strategy into which National Socialist broadcasting ultimately settled, then, was to use depoliticised popular entertainment as “bait” with which to attract and hold as many listeners as possible to their radios, thereby ensuring that as many citizens as possible were listening when less appealing but more important political broadcasts were aired (Sarkowicz 2010, 209). In this way access to public affairs was cut with entertainment that, in speaking to audience demand, went far toward ensuring that listeners would not so much as want to “break away”.

Nevertheless, Goebbels’ desire to thoroughly imbue listeners with the “spiritual tenor” of the Nazi era was not renounced in the development of more entertaining radio programming, and here the boundaries of the “political” begin to blur. Pater (1998) argues that the RMVP ultimately
fused its own objectives with its audience’s wish to be entertained by simply redefining the “entertaining” (143-46). “Entertainment” became that which moved the audience by distilling strong emotions from the familiar and the everyday, the Lebensnähe or “true-to-life”. Insofar as the texts of this form of entertainment wrung these emotions from themes that resonated with broader political objectives—encouraging listeners to feel love for their homeland, for example, or the resolve to make sacrifices for the good of their neighbours—they were as thoroughly political in subtext as they were meticulously depoliticised in appearance. The actual subject material varied. Many programmes took German culture and national heritage as their explicit object; some invited German listeners to participate directly, for example by sending in folksongs, riddles, anecdotes, and other items from their lives. All such programmes functioned more or less surreptitiously to define what and by extension who belonged to the German Volk, who was or was not a legitimate listener-participant in the “people’s community”. In the following paragraphs, I will consider examples both of the encoding of new knowledge and political values into radio entertainment, and of its identity- and behaviour-defining function.

One particularly rich concoction of Lebensnähe sentimentality, German culture, and National Socialist values was the monthly programme Deutscher Kalender: Ein Monatsbild vom Königswusterhäuser Landboten (German almanac: A monthly scene from the Königswusterhäuser country messenger). The programme, broadcast from 1933 until 1940, was a long-format, “Blut und Boden”-inspired “pastoral idyll” (Pater 1998, 172-74). Each episode followed the ramblings of the titular messenger, a kindly old man, from one German village to the next, as he participated in the various goings-on of fictionalised country life. The messenger’s travels and encounters served as a vehicle for the presentation of the seasonal traditions of Germany’s various regions through scenes setting up the recital of traditional stories, poems, and songs. The self-described aim of the producers was none other than to share these “most precious treasures of German folk culture” with the listening public (in Pater 1998, 173). At the same time, it is possible to discern amidst the presentation of the “precious treasures” a narrative arc that consistently led to the assertion of certain “eternal values” stemming from Germany’s particular völkisch-nationalist tradition and bearing a particularly National Socialist inflection. These values—love for one’s own “blood and soil”, national unity, faith in the “fatherland”—were a balm to popular anxieties over the changes to social life that accompanied modernisation, and particularly urbanisation and industrialisation, in Germany. The programme’s nevertheless resolutely depoliticised presentation makes it in my view an interesting example of the covert transmission of new, politically significant knowledge—a new way of seeing the world—through superficially “entertaining” means.

The episode of Deutscher Kalender entitled “The Königswusterhäuser country messenger’s Christmas journey” is one case in point. On December 25, 1934, listeners heard the
messenger set out from Königswusterhausen, the site of the programme’s regular transmission, to visit “all of the German clans” for “German Christmas”. Each of the regional stations participated in the broadcast by welcoming the “journeying” messenger on air with a Christmas tradition from their area, for example by staging an encounter with the mythical figures of a traditional Christmas song or transmitting the sound of their cathedral bells. Back home at the programme’s end, the messenger drifts off to happy thoughts of “the manifold ways Christmas is celebrated all round in the German way” (in Pater 1998, 175). Here, I would suggest that the private, personal celebration of Christmas with one’s own family is subtly subordinated to the public and in fact thoroughly political presentation of a nation of regional clans, bound to their lands by unique traditions, yet united into one big German family on the occasion of a Christian holiday by the figure of the wandering messenger. The political content is not overt: no hymns of praise for the Führer nor excoriations of Judaism are apparent. Even so, the listener receives the message that Germany has come together as a single community, diverse in its traditions yet unified in its essence. If neither the person responsible for achieving that unification nor the people most obviously excluded from it are actually mentioned, both nevertheless remain conspicuous in their different ways against the background of the Germany evoked by the messenger.

At the same time as conveying this type of knowledge—in this case knowledge of what Germany was, of its unique regions and their overarching unity—Deutscher Kalender in fact discouraged listeners from exercising the intellectual initiative to make their own politically-conscious operations with it. A consistent theme of the programme was its praise of simple living and personal modesty, encapsulated in the assertion that “the world is nowhere else but here”, in the “small things” of daily life (in Pater 1998, 176-77). The qualities of just “getting on” with things, of interiority and domesticity, were elevated to the status of virtues by the character of the messenger. The effect was to promote among listeners a contentment with the everyday “private idyll” of their immediate circumstances, and by implication an attitude of personal indifference to political events (177). Of course, it was expected that abstract, emotive values such as those evoked by the “Christmas journey” episode were shared by all listeners—that is, in the estimation of the regime, by all Germans. Nevertheless, the sentiments of love, harmony, faith, and so forth contained in programmes like Deutscher Kalender constituted nothing more than the normal and normative backdrop against which its anodyne action unfolded; they were thus effectively purged of whatever alternative political thematisation they could conceivably have received. I would argue that this superficial depoliticisation of entertainment—that is, its erasure not only of the object of hate against which the love it promoted was defined, but also of the potential for discord, doubt, or simply other ways of seeing things—was what made even the most innocuous of its texts so deeply political.
Here the role that the radio played in forming not only knowledge but the way it was to be used, ways of behaving alongside ways of seeing, begins to reveal itself. For a more concrete example of how this role was performed, I turn to one of the most popular radio programmes of the National Socialist era, the Wunschkonzert. The first broadcast of this live fundraising request concert took place in January 1936, with a five-hour Wunschkonzert für das Winterhilfswerk ("Winter relief agency", the RMVP-coordinated annual charity campaign for Germans living in poverty) (Pater 1998, 228). From 1939, the four-times-yearly broadcast became the Wunschkonzert für die Wehrmacht, in aid of the German forces. The concerts featured a combination of popular classical, folk, and dance music interspersed with poetry, skits, dedications, and announcements, for example of births and marriages, all requested or submitted by listeners; each civilian request had to be backed by a donation to the Winterhilfswerk or the Wehrmacht respectively, either of money or in kind (Koch 2010, 258-59). Along with renowned musicians, a variety of public figures including actors, athletes, and politicians made appearances on the programme; the live audience was made up of invited guests prior to the outbreak of World War Two, and soldiers and medics thereafter (Koch 2010, 260; Pater 1998, 232). The format was wildly successful: no less than 15.5 million Reichsmark had been donated by the point of Goebbels’ abrupt termination of the Wunschkonzert format at the height of its success in 1941 (Koch 2010, 262). The reasons for its discontinuation are unclear.

The significance of listener participation to the Wunschkonzert is self-evident. The audience was an integral part of its format: every radio transmission requires listeners, but whereas programmes such as Deutscher Kalender aimed to temporarily minimise the self-consciousness of an audience intended to become engrossed in its fictional world, the Wunschkonzert sought to heighten it. Its most basic function was to create a sense of familiarity and shared space, in short, a sense of community, for the duration of the broadcast. Its long format, the formulaic repetition of its sequences, the recognisable voices of its presenters, and the knowledge that millions of others were listening at the same time all around the country—and indeed across the continent, come wartime—all contributed to this function (Koch 2010, 266-67). Particularly during the war, when German soldiers far from home were also tuning in, the communal format of the Wunschkonzert permitted a public invocation of “the loyalty and love of the homeland [Heimat] across space and time”, staging a soothing “temporary closeness” for families, friends, and lovers enduring separation; it was routinely characterised as a “megaphone” between home and front (258), or more intimately as the front “extending its hands to the Heimat” (Pater 1998, 226). In a qualitatively different manner to other types of radio broadcast, then, the Wunschkonzert relied on its audience to create a temporary collective space and collective consciousness by listening.
Equally important is what actually took place within this space. During the Wunschkonzert, the Volksgemeinschaft was convoked and transformed into a Leistungsgemeinschaft, a community of the deed (Pater 1998, 230). The “national duty” to listen to the radio became the duty to support those national comrades in need, a duty that was certainly lightened by the entertaining atmosphere amidst which it was imposed, and indeed a duty that could seem a privilege to those fortunate enough to be acknowledged by name on air for their contribution. If the basic function of the Wunschkonzert was to coordinate the passive participation of listeners, the primary purpose to which it was put was to secure their active participation and thereby their investment, both literal and figurative, in the Volksgemeinschaft: in responding to the injunction to make a material contribution for the good of the community, donors were validated and in some cases publicly recognised as worthy members of that community. In other words, whereas programmes such as Deutscher Kalender modelled a fictionalised, idealised version of community for their listeners, the Wunschkonzert actually enacted the “people’s community” live on air through its audience’s participation by way of material and immaterial contributions.

Yet the Wunschkonzert’s version of community, too, was idealised. That is, it was only in the absence of certain sections of the population of Germany that the Nazi vision of Volksgemeinschaft came into presence on the airwaves. Of course, the sense of community that programmes such as the Wunschkonzert sought to cultivate was not an invention of National Socialism but a characteristic aspect of nationalism; the National Socialists’ innovation was rather to connect this sense of community to the notion of a society of “descent” or “shared blood” (Pater 1998, 225-26). The Wunschkonzert is thus an example of how the German public was brought aboard a transport from banal nationalism to fascism. Those not wanted on the voyage were of course excluded materially—first by a gradual process of dispossession, which eventually included the confiscation of radios in the case of the Jews, and ultimately by physical abduction and annihilation—but they also underwent a parallel process of discursive exclusion (231). Broadcasting’s role in this regard was not necessarily to make decisions about who did not belong, but it had an important part to play in reproducing and legitimising these decisions, for example by constructing a vision of the German countryside devoid of Jews in Deutscher Kalender or determining whose requests would be received by the producers of the Wunschkonzert.

To better understand how the discursive instrument commanded by the Nazi state in the form of the radio contributed to the actual materialisation of the Nazi vision of national society, we must briefly consider the context in which texts such as those described above were transmitted and received. Given the relative novelty of the technology, this context itself was largely the achievement of Nazi radio policy: the accomplishment was threefold, comprising the
creation of a “Germanised” radio, of a German listening public, and at least partially of the 
\textit{Volksgemeinschaft} itself.

Of these achievements, the first was the simplest. Of course, the radio industry and radio 
programming were rapidly purged of non-“German” persons following the implementation of the 
first antisemitic measures in 1933 (Sarkowicz 2010, 210). At the same time, in a bid to win more 
listeners while contributing to the implementation of economic autarky, in August 1933 Goebbels 
presented a German-made “people’s radio receiver”, the \textit{Volksempfänger}, at half the price of 
other receivers on the German market (212). With this development, many thousands of German 
citizens and particularly workers previously unable to afford a radio set not only gained access to 
programming that articulated a new social identity centred on “Germanness” for them, but came 
in a practical way to inhabit an economic identity centred on communal consumption as opposed 
to the division of those who produced and were poor from those who were rich and consumed. 
One step was thus taken toward the inauguration of the new “National Socialism”, which the 
party had promised would open the consumption of the products of German labour to all—and 
most especially to the labourers themselves.

With increased consumption of radio sets, the way was cleared to the creation of a 
German listening public. From 1933 to 1938, the number of registered sets in Germany more 
than doubled from 4.5 million to 9.6 million; by 1941 that figure was 15 million (Ross 2008, 336; 
Koch 2010, 254). Nevertheless, even with the introduction of the cheaper \textit{Volksempfänger} many 
agrarian and worker households simply could not afford the monthly radio licence fee; as a result, 
the demographics of radio ownership remained weighted toward middle-class households in the 
more industrialised north of the country (Sarkowicz 2010, 214-15). The solution to this 
conundrum was the promotion of communal listening. The National Socialists’ grandest vision, 
involving the installation of 6000 “loudspeaker pillars” in German streets, was never achieved 
(Zeman 1995, 188). Mobile systems were, however, set up in central locations for important 
broadcasts, during which offices, schools, and state factories too were required to switch on all 
radio sets, while private establishments were strongly encouraged to do so (Sarkowicz 2010, 
215). The regime also deployed a contingent of “radio wardens” not only to run these special 
public broadcasts but to popularise the radio, promote the sharing of private receivers, and collect 
public feedback, as well as to monitor for compliant listening during important broadcasts (Welch 
2002, 42). As a result of these measures, the 15 million sets registered in Germany as of 1941 are 
estimated by Koch (2010) to have reached at least 50 million listeners (254).

A further result was therefore the blurring of private and public space. Between its 
penetration into the home and its saturation of public space, preserving a private refuge away 
from the new knowledge, values, and identities that the radio attempted to foist on listeners 
became increasingly difficult (Marßolek and von Saldern 1998, 33-34). My argument, finally, is
that the Nazi-coordinated radio exploited this disintegration of private and public in order to prefigure a national community in which the personal and the political were no longer effectively distinguished: an all-(German)-embracing, ideologically saturated, incontestable Volksgemeinschaft. This was partly achieved through the discursive techniques employed in the broadcast text itself, as exemplified in the case of the Deutscher Kalender. As we saw in the case of the Wunschkonzert, however, radio broadcasting went beyond the discursive prefiguration of the Nazi vision of community to contribute to its practical configuration. Indeed, insofar as real socioeconomic equality was never actually achieved under the Nazi regime, we might even concur with Schmidt (1998) that the Volksgemeinschaft existed only in the virtual space created by media such as the radio (357). Unfulfilled in practice, the National Socialist promise of an egalitarian, unanimous “people’s community” was perhaps most nearly realised in the gathering of many millions of listeners who, hushed round their millions of radios to receive an important broadcast, received at the same time their own interpellation as citizens of the Volksgemeinschaft.

4.2 The National Socialist press

Whereas the regime’s central problem with regard to the radio was audience-centred, concerning how to get people listening and thereby incorporating the Volksgemeinschaft, the initial problem it faced with the press was one of institutional coordination. Germans needed no encouragement to read, and voraciously: pre-1933, Germany published more newspapers than any other industrialised country (Hale 1964, 3). The primary issue for the National Socialists was rather how to get Germans reading the right messages, for the older, more multifarious commercial press proved less adapted to the convocational technique and unifying effect of the state-directed radio. The regime’s solution was legislative. Germany’s professional editors’ and publishers’ associations were taken over by Nazi deputies, purged of “Jews and Marxists”, and subjected to new membership requirements of “racial and political reliability”; the Schriftleitergesetz of 1933 redefined editors as state officials in the role of “public educators” and therefore as responsible to the state rather than to their employers; the implementing ordinance of the RKK meanwhile gave its press division, the Reichspressekammer (RPK), absolute power to grant or deny the membership now required for employment in the industry, as well as to establish the rules according to which enterprises would be opened, closed, and regulated (80-91). These rules were duly redefined in 1935 with the “Amann ordinances”, named after the president of the RPK, who thereby arrogated the right to eject both businesses and workers from the industry on economic, moral, racial, or ideological grounds, among others (148-151)—in other words, virtually at will.

The result was an inexorable concentration of press ownership and control in National Socialist hands. Over 400 papers closed in Germany between 1935 and 1937 alone (Hale 1964,
by 1939, publications directly owned or otherwise controlled by the Nazis represented two-thirds of the general German circulation (267). Even once the regime had established material and operational control over most of the German publishing industry, however, there remained the problem of controlling the press in content, in spirit, and above all in its entirety rather than in the mere majority. Certainly, following the draconian reconstruction of the industry journalists had to begin to police themselves, writing carefully for fear of proscription or worse; it was at least partially for this reason that the implementation of a distinct press censorship body was deemed unnecessary by the National Socialists (Stöber 2010, 281). Yet a dedicated censor was also made redundant in other ways, which reveal the extent of the regime’s power to determine even the content and general disposition of the press. One of the first steps of its coordination had been to establish a state monopoly over the wires: having quickly acquired Germany’s two major news agencies, the National Socialists created the Deutsches Nachrichten Büro (DNB) in December 1933 (Hale 1964, 137-38). By some estimates (Wilke 2007, 249), no fewer than half the texts in the average German newspaper between 1934 and 1945 originated with the DNB.

Even with state-produced content in every newspaper, however, the regime’s reach still exceeded its grasp: original content, too, was targeted for regulation. This was carried out by means of Presseanweisungen or “press orders” delivered to journalists at the regime’s daily press conference in Berlin. Chaired by RMVP personnel, the conference existed to convey information from the Chancellery and Ministries, along with detailed instructions as to how to present this information, to the German press (Wilke 2007, 126). Every paper with an office in Berlin was obliged to send a representative; papers without a presence in the capital were reached through the regional offices of the RMVP (134). While the total number of press orders issued by the regime is unverifiable, estimates range from 50,000 to 100,000 for its entire twelve-year period (142). The instructions pertained to all domains from the political to the cultural and came in a variety of forms, ranging from straightforward publication orders and bans, to stipulations on what attitude or mood to strike on a particular subject matter, to directives as to an item’s placement or formatting; they even went so far as to regulate journalists’ very choice of words, with certain phrases prescribed and others banned (179-86). Further below, I will consider the combined effects of this and other components of the Nazi matrix of press control on the industry as a whole and on readers. First, however, I examine two examples of its surface manifestation in two different publications.

The first of these publications is the Völkischer Beobachter (Völkisch Observer), the official organ of the NSDAP. Noller (1967) has described the development of this paper following its purchase by the party from a völkisch-nationalist group in 1920. By early 1923, the Nazi daily had already achieved a readership of 30,000. Banned following the failed Munich putsch at the end of that year, it was refounded in 1925; after 1933, aided by the requirement that
all party members and officials subscribe, its circulation rose steeply, passing the million mark in 1941. Before the National Socialists came to power, the *Völkischer Beobachter* had been a short-format *Kampfblatt* or “fighting rag” written mostly by its chief editor, Alfred Rosenberg, and a handful of activist journalists. It regularly reproduced speeches by Hitler, along with articles from other party notables preaching antidemocracy, hypernationalism, and above all hatred of the Jews. As the paper grew over the course of the 1920s, however, a concentrated effort was made to transform it into a respectable paper, beginning with a shift away from this “crude anti-Semitism” toward a more scientistic emphasis on eugenics and racial hygiene (Mühlberger 2004, 61). At the same time, more professional journalists were hired and more news and entertainment content produced (Noller 1967, 11). By March 1933, the *Völkischer Beobachter* boasted five regional editions reaching all of Germany as well as Vienna; the “fighting rag” was now a stalwart of the new German press.

Racism remained inescapable within the pages of the paper. Hitler continued to provide esoteric contributions rewriting human history as the history of racial struggle; yet the same theme also pervaded lowlier offerings on all topics from politics and economics to sport to the arts (Mühlberger 2004, 56, 61). “The” Jew—the homogenising “collective singular” was employed regularly in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, as in other antisemitic papers (Zeck 2002, 392) —was the chief object of this hatred, and was inevitably linked to every one of Germany’s perceived afflictions. Among the methods of retribution suggested by the paper were variously the registration of Jews in Germany, their exclusion from the professions, the confiscation of their property, their expulsion from the country, and their internment in concentration camps (Noller 1967, 8). What I will argue is that the primary function of the *Völkischer Beobachter*’s relentless drumming on the racial theme was to incite its readers to turn against their Jewish neighbours, not necessarily with violence, but nevertheless with the resolve to force these non-“Germans” out of the new “people’s community” both imaginatively, through their reading, and practically, through their actions. In the imaginative sense, the paper presented itself not so much as informing but as confirming the mentality of the reading *Volksgemeinschaft*, which it explicitly claimed to represent in its pages (13). In practice, it performed a critical role in the Nazi propaganda apparatus as a direct conduit between the leadership and its followers, through which not only ideas but orders were conveyed (Mühlberger 2004, 18). One example in particular, from March 29, 1933, illuminates both aspects.

The headline on the front page of the *Völkischer Beobachter* on the Wednesday before April 1, 1933 announces that “On Saturday, at the stroke of 10, Jewry will know who’s at war!” (facsimile in Noller and von Kotze 1967, 130-31). Beneath this bold, underscored title follows an “appeal from the NSDAP leadership”, addressed “to all party organisations of the NSDAP”. The text begins with an admiring description of the “singular national revolution” that
the German people has come together to achieve. Yet despite this success, it continues, certain ungrateful “guests” among the German people have initiated an international campaign to defame their hosts in the eyes of the world, falsely accusing them of murder, rape, and pillage. “Responsible for these lies and calumniations are the Jews among us,” the text states baldly. “Whoever watches on any longer as these lunatic crimes are committed,” the reader is warned, “becomes an accomplice themselves”. The leadership therefore issues a series of decrees to the party, which the text presents in a numbered list. “Action committees” are to be formed across the country to organise a general boycott of Jewish businesses and professionals, beginning on Saturday the first of April at ten in the morning. The committees must popularise the boycott among the German people, as well as ensuring that they understand its necessity as a defensive measure. They must also monitor the papers for their compliance in rebutting “Jewish atrocity agitation”; every German with connections abroad is commanded to use them to this same end. “The government of the national revolution … is the representation of the productive German people,” the text concludes. “Whoever attacks it, attacks Germany!”

At first glance, the six-column-wide call for the boycott of April 1, 1933 is a riot of different emphases and font sizes, subheadings and insets, freeform text and punctuated lists. It is a case in point of managing editor Wilhelm Weiß’s statement that the Völkischer Beobachter’s role was to stand in for the mass rally on the printed page (Noller 1967, 13). The opening interpellations alone—“Nationalsozialisten! Parteigenossen! Parteigenossinnen!”—convey the atmosphere of the public meeting. The text’s use of colloquial or “volksnah” language, too—“Marxist-Jewish spook [Spuk]”, “Jewish-Marxist bigwigs [Bonzen]”, “hasn’t hurt a hair on their heads [ihnen kein Haar gekrümmt]”—bespeaks the paper’s desire to reach “the ‘little man’ in the big crowd” (13). The overall narrative structure, meanwhile, with its polarised presentation of self and other—the long-suffering, disciplined, reasonable German people beset by “Marxist-Jewish” “lunatics”, “liars”, and “parasites”—unambiguously demarcates the camps between which the reader is explicitly asked to choose. Of course, those identified as “Marxists” or “Jews”, whether by their own volition or by the authoritative discourse of the paper and the ultimate authority of the regime behind it, are not confronted with this choice in the same way: for it is clear from the first look at the page in question, with the disparaging reference of its headline and the unequivocal identification of its addressees, that they are not counted among the legitimate recipients of the text, nor indeed of the paper itself.

The Völkischer Beobachter’s intended readers, meanwhile, are presented with a rhetorical choice between loyalty and complicity. This choice is put to the reader, hailed simply as a Parteigenosse or Parteigenossin, within a narrative frame that positions him or her less as an individual rational agent and more as a Volksgenosse or Volksgenossin, a racial incumbent from whom the fulfilment of a national duty is awaited. Following the establishment of this narrative
framework, the substance of the national duty itself is clearly presented in the form of a detailed list of actions to be undertaken, ostensibly in self-defence, against those who by definition do not belong to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In this way, the reader is at once implicitly pressured to accept the identity of “member of the *Volksgemeinschaft*” being attributed to him or her by the text and explicitly commanded to perform it in a highly specific way. What I argue this piece of discourse seeks to achieve, then, is twofold. First, it aims to give conceptual reality to the *Volksgemeinschaft* by asking the reader to orient him- or herself according to a schema which opposes the belonging self to the enemy other. Subsequently, on the basis of this “orientating knowledge” (Zeck 2002, 167), the reader is impelled to translate conceptual reality into practice, as the text bids him or her change his or her behaviour to protect the community against its enemies. Insofar as these two objectives are achieved, a community that did not previously exist—one from which individuals identified as “Jewish” are materially excluded first from the custom of “Germans”, on April 1, 1933, and in time from their very company—begins to come into being.

We cannot know how many individuals were convinced to participate in the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses by the appeal issued through the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Nevertheless, its exhortation to readers both to reimagine the boundaries of the “people’s community” and to alter their behaviour in a manifestation of solidarity against those redefined as its enemies represents a key instance of the paper’s use by the regime as an instrument of incitement. My second example, the weekly *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps), fulfilled a very different but equally important role in the Nazi propaganda apparatus: that of policing the *Volksgemeinschaft*, both rhetorically and actually, as it came into being. *Das Schwarze Korps*, published from 1935 until shortly before the collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945, was the official organ of Heinrich Himmler’s paramilitary Schutzstaffel (SS). The second-largest weekly in Germany, it was widely read outside the SS and had achieved a circulation of over 750,000 copies per week by the end of its existence. As it was also widely posted in public spaces, Combs (1986) judges that its total readership would have been greater still (20). Like the *Völkischer Beobachter*, *Das Schwarze Korps* did not purport merely to inform its readers; rather, it explicitly sought to present an assemblage of material organised according to the strictures of the National Socialist Weltanschauung (Zeck 2002, 335). By employing a wide variety of features, ranging from political analysis to tabloid-style exposé to poetry, the paper also sought to win over the widest possible audience to this worldview (Combs 1986, 40). The tone in which it greeted its audience, however, was unrelentingly and vociferously critical.

*Das Schwarze Korps*’ critical eye was by no means focused solely on the objective enemies of National Socialism. Its chief editor, Gunter D’Alquen, envisioned himself as the head of a “loyal opposition” within the party itself (Combs 1986, 24). Of course, as Combs (1986)
remarks, in reality the very logic of the fascist dictatorship ruled out “loyal opposition”: criticism of the regime itself was not tolerated from any source (35). What Das Schwarze Korps was free to do was to offer criticism of the Nazi state’s lower orders, and particularly those responsible for social regulation and control, especially the courts and the bureaucracy (254). It also presented a wide-ranging critique of German society, including for example an extensive discourse on the role of women; of cultural trends from fashion to fine art; and of ideological tendencies, particularly in relation to race (Zeck 2002, 315-33; Combs 1986, 69-70, 318-20). This critical stance was justified by the paper with reference to the position of “moral authority” that its editors had claimed for it from the beginning (Zeck 2002, 282). As the organ of the SS, representing the most racially and ideologically pure stratum of society, Das Schwarze Korps was able to arrogate the status of sole bearer and protector of the “pure ideal” of National Socialism (Combs 1986, 383). So highly did the editors esteem their paper as the voice not merely of the SS but of the spirit of National Socialism itself that they advertised bound copies of each year’s issues to the public as “weltanschauliches educational material” (in Combs 1986, 383).

This was not pure conceit: Das Schwarze Korps did indeed have an educational function. Like the Völkischer Beobachter, it propagated “orientating knowledge” that impelled readers to categorise and evaluate the world around them in keeping with the “pure” National Socialist values it espoused. I would argue moreover that, as in the NSDAP daily, the SS organ’s project of critical reorientation went beyond German society writ large to target the reader’s very self. Within its pages were presented role models that glorified the individual’s social, functional aspect, emphasising not individuality per se but the instrumentality of the person; the true and the good—that is, the German—were defined in terms of fidelity to the Nazi Weltanschauung and service to the Volksgemeinschaft that was its custodian (Zeck 2002, 314). In my regard, then, Das Schwarze Korps’ function was only partly to persuade its readers of the justice of its critiques of state, society, culture, and ideology, although this persuasion was of course a prerequisite to asserting the legitimacy of its authority over readers themselves. Nevertheless I believe that this secondary, interpellative function was the more significant, in that it aimed to reshape the reading subject by attributing to him or her certain attitudes, for example of racial hatred, fear, or disgust, and moreover by prompting him or her to adopt certain behaviours. Here, however, the projects of the Völkischer Beobachter and Das Schwarze Korps diverge strikingly. For whereas the former’s objective was to impel readers to cooperative action with those they had been brought to identify as fellow members of the Volksgemeinschaft, the latter asked them not only to modify their own behaviour according to the doctrine it promoted but to practise the form of critique they found in its pages against their neighbours.

The clearest examples of this regulatory function of Das Schwarze Korps are found among the personal denunciations it routinely published. These usually took the form of short
reports harassing named individuals for perceived violations of the principles of National Socialism. The victims were sometimes also identified with a photograph or even an address (Combs 1986, 81). Jews were of course a frequent target, especially in the years before official measures had largely removed them from the public eye. They were not the paper’s exclusive victims, however, nor arguably even its primary ones: whereas Jewish nonconformity with the standards of its racist worldview was a foregone conclusion, the infractions of “German” individuals were both more newsworthy and more harshly judged. One notable case involved no less a figure than Carl Schmitt, a well-known jurist who had played an important role in the establishment of the Nazi state. Schmitt was the subject of an extended attack by Das Schwarze Korps in 1936 on account of his alleged pre-1933 contacts with Jews, connections to political Catholicism, and criticisms of racial ideology; the paper charged that his affiliation with Nazism was purely opportunistic (Zeck 2002, 247). In its own way more remarkable, however, is the 1938 case of a Berlin butcher who was denounced by a Schwarze Korps reader in a letter to the editors. His offence had been to wrap his customers’ purchases in newspaper containing advertising for a Jewish-owned firm (141). That this inconsequential act was perceived as grounds for public shaming is in itself an indication of just what an effect the discursive saturation and shift of media outlets including the SS paper itself had wrought in a mere five years’ National Socialist rule.

The critical function assumed by Das Schwarze Korps was not therefore a closed affair between its journalists and the notables of German society. Everyone could and was encouraged to participate, by regulating their own behaviour according to the weekly’s tenets, by observing and correcting the behaviour of others who deviated from them, or even by sending in a letter denouncing a deviant. Yet the practical effects of Das Schwarze Korps’ rhetorical techniques went beyond the behavioural adjustment of the self and the monitoring of others. The allegations against Schmitt, coming from a source backed by no less an authority than the SS, effectively ended his career (Zeck 2002, 247). More telling than the fate of a man very much in the public eye, however, is the case of the unknown butcher. Records reveal that for the offence of wrapping meat in the wrong newspaper, he became the subject of an investigation by the SS’s intelligence agency, the Sicherheitsdienst (SD). In fact, forwarding denouncements to the SD was standard practice at Das Schwarze Korps. The two institutions had a symbiotic relationship, with the intelligence agency trading exclusive material in return for information about daily life in Germany, and potential targets for police action, from the paper’s correspondence (141). The SS weekly thereby gained a reputation as a truly powerful press organ, one whose condemnation of those who did not conform to its standards was more than just figurative (142). I therefore consider Das Schwarze Korps among the clearest examples of how the National Socialists sought
to use linguistic means, including in this case both the paper’s own discursive matrix and the reader responses it generated, to transformative social ends.

As discussed, the *Völkischer Beobachter* aimed to use its own discursive means to similarly transformative ends. Only the primary objectives of the two papers differed. The NSDAP daily’s aim was to incite its readers to the mindset as well as the practice of solidarity self-defence against a common, indeed communal enemy. The SS weekly’s goal meanwhile was to police the community itself, regulating its individual members’ behaviours according to and in defence of a “pure” National Socialism. Goebbels might then appear to have been justified in his insistence that “there [existed] only a German press” under the Nazi regime (in Hale 1964, 187; original emphasis), albeit one whose constituent parts had different primary functions. Nevertheless it is important not to overgeneralise about the efficacy of the Nazi state’s coordination of the media, nor to homogenise reader responses so as to suggest for example that all Germans who took the *Völkischer Beobachter* joined an action committee for the boycott of 1933, or that all who read *Das Schwarze Korps* became enthusiastic denouncers. Having delineated the intended functions of two major publications in some detail, then, conclusions as to the actual efficacy of the Nazi-coordinated press as a whole require a few final comments on the broader context in which it operated.

With the press, the relationship between the envisioned community and the state praxis geared towards its realisation was more disjointed than in the case of the radio. The threefold task in that field had been to create a Germanised radio and a German listening public, thus to support the creation of the Volksgemeinschaft itself. Because broadcasting had been a centralised, state-controlled medium for the duration of its short existence in Germany, and because the technology’s inherent affordances loaned it to the regime’s twin goals of discursive saturation and discursive shift, this task was fulfilled with relative success. In the case of the newspapers, however, there already existed a very well-established press in Germany with its own equally well-established reading public. Because this press was consumer-driven rather than state-controlled, and especially because it had been so for over a century, it was not as easily manipulated as the radio. Yet I would argue that even after the institutional coordination of the press had been achieved, its legacy of consumerism continued to cause difficulties for the National Socialists. The tension between this legacy and the exigencies of the new political situation prevented the regime from effecting the discursive saturation and shift of its subjects’ daily reading material; its attempt to lay down another thickness to the emergent Volksgemeinschaft by interpellating every reader into the role of Volksgenosse or Volksgenossin was therefore unsuccessful.

What I mean by the “legacy of consumerism” of the pre-Nazi press is its traditional advertisement and sale of a wide range of ideas and identities to a highly variegated readership.
Before 1933, Germans selected their reading material from a vast array of papers of all different political, professional, and confessional stripes. Each of these papers was ultimately responsive and responsible to its audience alone. If enough readers found the ideas and identities represented in its pages corresponded satisfactorily to their own, the paper thrived. The reader who did not find his or her interests adequately represented, meanwhile, was free to look elsewhere; a paper that ceased to speak to any sizeable portion of the public would inevitably lose its readership and fail. Despite the apparent individualistic, democratic affinities of this consumer-driven system, the National Socialists had no desire to destroy it once they were in power. The free press was a cherished institution of German society, a society of voracious readers; any attempt to transform it into a mouthpiece of the state would have seriously damaged both the popularity and the credibility of a government that represented itself as a manifestation of the popular will. Nevertheless, the regime was equally unwilling to maintain the press on a truly independent commercial footing with all the freedoms that standing entailed. Control was paramount, yet maintaining the illusion of consumer choice, too, was important.

The National Socialists therefore attempted to tread a line between the two. Every effort was made to maintain a reasonable simulacrum of a consumer-driven press that was responsive to popular demand rather than political decision-making. The coordination of the publishing industry took place behind closed doors, with only a very few aware of the extent to which the apparently wide variety of papers still available on the German market was in fact owned and controlled by the state (Hale 1964, 266). No amount of secrecy, however, could ultimately hide the hollowing-out of Germany’s press that was taking place all the while at the government’s daily press conferences in Berlin. The government itself was not unaware of this fact. Hale (1964) reports that some three years after the Nazis came to power, the RPK undertook a study into the “extent of uniformity” of one week’s worth of 650 different publications. Its findings are unfortunately unknown; the repeated official injunctions to the press to show more originality that preceded and followed the investigation, however, would seem to indicate that they were not positive (241). In reality, the dilemma was insoluble. As the medium that was centrally responsible for the daily information of the German public, the press had to be strictly regulated; as the medium that had traditionally been the most diverse in Germany, its regulation was bound to glare out at readers from the increasingly similar pages of their various papers.

Ultimately, the Nazi press apparatus proved unable even to hold the attention of its captive audience, much less to change their minds: what the papers finally gained in political reliability, they had irrevocably lost in readability. The continual admonitions to journalists and editors to produce more creative, varied, and appealing material out of the daily reams of rules they received from the government had no effect on the continual fall in circulation figures through the first four years of the regime (Hale 1964, 235). More damaging still were its final
years, when the discrepancy between the inescapable impact of the war on German civilians and the obviously dishonest appraisal of Germany’s position expressed through the papers made maintaining even a baseline of reader trust impossible. The regime’s final resort in late 1944 was to implement so-called “word-of-mouth campaigns” in the belief that civilians would trust the talk of “soldiers on leave”—actually propaganda agents in uniform—more readily than they did the papers (Birdsall 2012, 137). There is no way of telling how effective these campaigns were. That they were mounted at all tells a great deal about the ultimate failure of the National Socialist regime to balance political necessity with popular demand in its engagement with the German press.

The insurmountable problem was finally that the expediency of maintaining the popular appeal of the press could not be allowed to supersede the necessity of its political coordination. The attempt to sustain the illusion of consumer choice was therefore doomed to fail, for among the hundreds of papers that pretended to continue their old competition for the favour of the German reader there was now only one idea and one identity for sale. The only meaningful choice left to the reader was whether or not to accept National Socialism and the role of *Volksgenosse* or *Volksgenossin* it sought to impose on him or her. Of course, it is the very fact that so many Germans did choose to accept fascism and their own role in it that the present work sets out to explain. The point I wish to convey in concluding this section, then, is simply that the coordinated press was not the strongest element of the larger apparatus that brought about this widespread acceptance. With their tradition of representing a wide variety of voices, the papers did not lend themselves to the same kind of covert discursive saturation as did the univocal radio; when the regime persevered regardless, so much of the readership was lost that only a small portion of the German public could potentially have been taken along on the ensuing discursive shift. The press could not bear the load placed on the discursive bridge between familiar German past and unknown Nazi future alone.
The National Socialist approach to formal education relegated the traditional institution of the school to the status of a single subsidiary element within a larger network of educative fields, an apparatus that was oriented overall to the realisation of a new form of community, the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The part of the newly subordinated school was to cooperate in the pursuit of “total education”: that is, education through the immediate experience but also in the interests of this nascent community, for the sake not of the individual’s personal development but of his or her utility as a part to the whole (Pine 2010, 3). This organicist view of the role of the school and of the educated person, which I shall treat in greater depth below, is arguably the closest semblance of a theory of education brought forth by the National Socialists; it was more the exigencies of politics and less any abstract concept of education per se that dictated the regime’s dealings with the German schools. Its practices in this field were also conditioned by pre-1933 developments in the German education system, however, which were in turn a product of the deeper roots of mass state-sponsored education in Europe. I therefore begin this chapter with a short prehistory of formal education for the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

As it happens, the world’s first system of mass state education was first established in the heart of the future Germany. In 1763, little over a century before that country came into existence, King Frederick II ordained a system of universal, compulsory education for the children of Prussia, to be modestly funded by the state (Ramirez and Boli 1987, 4). Tracing the spread of similar developments throughout Europe over the nineteenth century, Ramirez and Boli (1987) argue that the institution of mass education was a part of the larger nation-building project of that period (3). This project itself was a direct outcome of the political and economic transformations of the early modern period in Europe, which had resulted in the emergence of an interdependent system of states with similar structures, motivations, and above all a shared regard for and reliance on the individual both as the executor of their political projects and as the basic unit of economic production (13). These newly significant individuals, no longer held in place within the traditional orders of divine-right monarchy and the preindustrial economy, were to be reintegrated instead into a “unified national polity”, that is, one in which their primary identification would be with the nation and their participation in national projects could be coordinated to the advantage of the state (3). Thus nation-building appears as a means of extending social control over a population for the benefit of the state that governs it.

Returning to the Prussian example, we see a highly sophisticated state using mass education as a means of transforming a fragmented population into a unified national citizenry, thereby consolidating its power both internally and relative to other nation-states (Ramirez and Boli 1987, 5). Ramirez and Boli (1987) suggest that the reason education in particular was
selected for this purpose was that certain “legitimating myths” institutionalised within the prevalent “European model of national society” just described served to make the creation of mass state schooling appear as “a sensible, even imperative organisational undertaking” (9-11). The narrative woven from these myths began by reiterating that the individual, rather than for example the family or the clan, was the basic unit of activity and source of value in society. The nation, meanwhile, as an aggregate of individuals, relied for its development on their development, which was in turn contingent on their childhood socialisation. The aim of this socialisation, then, in addition to preserving social order, was to create and sustain the newly national society itself, that is, to bring about “progress” toward national goals. The state, finally, as the guardian of the nation and the guarantor of its progress, was responsible for conducting the process of socialisation: that is, for education. Education, nation-building, and social control were therefore all closely linked at the emergence of the modern European system. Each of its states, dependent on a compliant populace for its survival and prosperity and already engaged in nation-building as a means to that end, lighted on mass education as a means of furthering both.

The very concept of the “nation” that mass state education is supposed to serve, however, is an ambiguous one; Ramirez and Boli’s (1987) nineteenth-century “European model of national society” cannot endure the tumult of that continent’s twentieth century without at least some qualification. Within the system of interdependent states sharing structures and motivations that they describe, Germany in particular is an exceptional case. To a certain extent, as described in Chapter 2, its development was indeed shaped by its position in the literal centre of this continental system, where it was suspended among its neighbours and the system of “institutional rules, agreements, and conventions” that existed between them (13); its history does resemble at least in broad strokes a project, or perhaps several successive projects, to establish a “unified national polity”. Precisely on account of the disjointed quality of its internal development, however, I would contend that the “legitimating myths” of the nation-state supposedly shared across modern European societies of the nineteenth century were less firmly institutionalised in Germany. A brief overview of the history of education in that country from the period of the German Confederation to the end of Weimar gives some indication of the fitful play of forces that governed it.

Germany’s history of education was certainly not a continuous history of “progress” toward a single stable national ideal. Budde (2012) describes its tortuous path. The first attempts to create a system geared toward liberal and socially integrative education, set forth in the Prussian reforms of the early nineteenth century, were quickly thwarted by conservative reaction to the failed revolutions of 1848. By 1871, efforts were once again underway to create an improved system capable of integrating all children into the modern society of the new Germany. The retention of a two-tier primary system of public schools for the children of the proletariat and
private schools for the children of the bourgeoisie, however, served only to deepen class divides. The progressive spirit finally seemed to prevail in 1919, when the architects of the Weimar Constitution mandated an eight-year primary school education that would qualify all children, and not only those attending private preparatory schools, to go on to the secondary level. Indeed, it was declared, although not ultimately seen to, that private schools were to be abolished altogether. The republican efforts were far from universally acclaimed. Middle-class parents and some teachers protested the proposed discontinuation of private education vociferously. The progressive pedagogy practised in the public schools, too, with its emphasis on educating whole individuals instead of training the “narrow minds of loyal subjects” (112), met with objections from those who believed education’s purpose was to serve the development of a national community. This latter nation-building project, debated in the context of the Germany of the 1920s, would have taken on significantly different overtones to those that had originally characterised the emergence of mass education in Prussia over 150 years earlier.

What I mean to say is that mass state education can serve many different kinds of nation-building, a multifariousness that is not captured in the “European model of national society” described by Ramirez and Boli (1987) but which is perfectly attested within the history of Germany itself. Education during the Wilhelmine period set out primarily to serve the newly united German state’s international interests, as it sought to consolidate and promote its status within and beyond Europe. The school system was therefore designed to contribute to the integration of the disparate populations of the German Länder into an imperial German nation united under the command of a strong centralised monarchy, while preserving a socially-divided status quo. Following the catastrophe of the war, the Weimar Republic diverged from its imperial predecessor by attempting to supplant the project of national integration with a vision of social and economic integration. The variety of “progress” reflected in its educational programme was thus oriented toward internal rather than external development, seeking to promote national unity only insofar as it served the cause of increasing socioeconomic equality. Finally, at the moment of Weimar’s crisis, its succession of governments having failed to push their republican goals through the ongoing political crisis and the economic disaster of the Great Depression, the National Socialists arrived. Their vision for Germany combined a nationalism of a new sort, oriented more toward race than toward the geographic, historical, cultural aspects of the nation, with a sort of socialism which nevertheless prioritised exclusive social unity over true economic equality.

The history of education in Germany thus renders explicit the diversity of potential “national societies” implicit in Ramirez and Boli’s (1987) “European model”. For here, where there was no continuous state as there was in for example France or Britain, ideas about the “nation” were unstable in that they were unattached to any concerted, unbroken programme of
nation-state formation. The extremity of German fascism’s divergence from anything hitherto witnessed in Europe, however, does pose the question of whether the “national society” it attempted to create really belongs under the rubric of the “European model” at all. Certainly, National Socialism represented an attempt to create a unified polity whose members would identify with a particular kind of nation and participate in its projects to the benefit of the state. Yet regarding the “legitimating myths” that Ramirez and Boli (1987) specify underwrite this project, the Nazi version of national society manifests significant differences. Nazi ideology did not recognise the individual as the basic unit of action and social value. That role was assigned instead to the nation, which was not a mere aggregate of individuals, but rather a being unto itself essentially defined by race.

Nevertheless, the rejection of these “legitimating myths” which Ramirez and Boli (1987) identify as having made sense of the project of mass state education by no means entailed that that project did not make sense under National Socialism. The Nazis were not radical nativists who wished to roll back mass education in favour of ad hoc upbringing in the one-room schoolhouse or the family; they understood well the importance of childhood socialisation to both the maintenance of social order and the making of “progress” toward the particular vision of the nation held by the state. As the new masters of the German state, the guardians of the newly envisioned racial nation and guarantors of its radical progress were not ignorant of the fact that their vision would remain such until they took measures to populate it with individuals educated for racial-national citizenry. Thus National Socialism, like the Wilhelmine and Weimar systems, and indeed like the Prussian system before them, did indeed use education as a means of simultaneously building a particular kind of nation and extending social control over its subjects. The school had long been the primary site of the socialisation of national citizens. Under National Socialism, this would come to mean the formation of the cognitive background of knowledge and subjectivity through which individuals became part of a new kind of community, never before seen: the racial-national Volksgemeinschaft.

The first step toward this destination was the passage of the Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service on April 7, 1933. This act, with its provisions for the dismissal of any official who was not “Aryan”, whose past political activity did not guarantee that they “would ruthlessly defend the national state”, or whose dismissal would merely aid the “simplification of administration”, permitted the state to remove teachers from their posts virtually at will (Eilers 1963, 70). The state’s authority within the domain of education proper was not centralised until 1934, however, when the Länder’s jurisdiction was transferred to the newly created Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung, und Volksbildung (RMWEV), under the direction of Bernhard Rust (54). All the while there proceeded a far-reaching coordination of the teaching profession within the party’s Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund (NSLB) or “teachers’ league”,
responsible for supporting the regime’s re-education of the educators and monitoring them for political reliability (Pine 2010, 15). The characteristic party-state rivalry that emerged between the NSLB and the RMWEV tended to swing in favour of the former, whose activities were bolstered by the educational efforts of other NSDAP organisations including the Hitler Youth, the Reich Labour Service, and a number of elite schools run by the party (22). As the present work primarily concerns state practice in the field of education, however, our focus must remain on the existing public school system.

In contrast to the ineffectual efforts of the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime did indeed succeed in making Germany’s education system completely public. Private education, including the confessional schools, was deemed incompatible with the socialistic spirit of the emergent “people’s community” and abolished by the new government; within the existing public system, coordinative measures were slowly implemented at all levels from kindergarten to university (Pine 2010, 28-30). Jewish students were completely excluded from 1938. Besides this radical purge, however, the most thoroughgoing restructuring affected only the secondary schools. These were dramatically streamlined under the regime, reducing the number of different kinds of institution available to secondary students from a staggering seventy to only three (Flessau 1977, 15): the boys’ Oberschule, with modern languages and natural sciences streams; the girls’ Oberschule, with a focus on modern languages or home economics; and the traditional Gymnasium, where only boys were admitted to study classics (Pine 2010, 28). Regrettably, the scope of the present work does not permit me to explore how gender intersected with other aspects of identity formation under National Socialism; the regime’s reconstruction of the German secondary schools nevertheless gives some sense of its reactionary ideology in this regard, according to which the woman’s place was in the family rather than the workforce, at least until the exigencies of war came into effect.

The process of aligning teaching resources with the newly coordinated school system was a surprisingly slow one. One educator of the time in fact declared this delay a “state of emergency of particular value”, with the potential to free students from the pernicious influence of the “bloodless” and “neutral” texts of the Weimar era (in Dithmar 2001, 66): teachers, following a restructuring process that had reduced them to a state of “existential dependency” on the regime (Eilers 1963, 73), were under immense pressure to select their materials wisely lest their political commitment be cast into doubt. In the interim, the enormous task of purging the inventory of schoolbooks from which they chose at the same time as producing an entire range of new, specifically National Socialist ones was pursued by both party and state at once. The party’s censorship board claimed to have eliminated over 700,000 “unusable, outdated, and hostile” books from the German schools by 1941 (Wegner 2002, 139); the first official textbooks, meanwhile, a new series of standardised primary school readers created by the RMWEV, were
distributed across the Reich between 1935 and 1939 (Eilers 1963, 28-30). The onset of war frustrated the goal of completing a similar set of official resources for the secondary schools. The remaining gaps were therefore filled by officially approved offerings from private publishers. Among the firms that had survived the restructuring of that industry, there was no shortage of willing collaborators.

The objective of the textbooks, where and when they eventually came, was to communicate to students both a certain cognitive schema applicable to the world around them and a certain sense of self based on this schema and translating into socially desirable behaviour. An equally important genre of scholastic text under National Socialism was the curriculum, which sought to communicate to teachers what the purpose of this educative activity was in relation to the community. The most remarkable aspect of curricular documents of the Nazi era, however, is that this community—the united, homogeneous, egalitarian Volksgemeinschaft—did not yet exist. As Flessau (1977) suggests, then, National Socialist curriculum must be regarded as both the blueprint for a new society and the means of its production at once (32). Thus the two curricular statements released by the RMWEV in 1937 and 1939 for the primary level, which specify that it should “educate for the Volksgemeinschaft and for maximum commitment to Führer and state” by educating in the Volksgemeinschaft (in Flessau 1977, 53, 55), were actually communicating to the schools that they bore some responsibility for that community’s very creation. The secondary school guidelines of 1938 have much the same cast. In reiterating the notion of “total education” within and for the community, what these texts prescribe is not in fact the initiation of the new person into an existing tradition, way of life, or social world, but the initiation of a new world through the new person.

In each of the RMWEV curricular guidelines of 1937, 1938, and 1939, particular emphasis is laid on a small number of subjects that formed the heart of the German fascist curriculum, the so-called Gesinnungsfächer. These “ethos subjects”, including German, history, and geography, were those that put less weight on factual knowledge and skills such as a student might acquire through the study of physics, mathematics, or foreign languages and more on his or her attitude or disposition to the theme of instruction. This theme was always reducible to that of race. Race was thus the bonding agent in what was, as Wegner (2002) notes, an extraordinarily highly integrated curriculum for its time (3): indeed, one of the very earliest educational directives of the era decreed in 1933 that an understanding of the importance of “blood purity” should be the foundation of all instruction and the central acquisition of every school-leaver (26). Yet the racial theme was not restricted to the level of subtext in the National Socialist curriculum. It was also taught in its own right in the form of biology, the lone science among the Gesinnungsfächer. The mandate of biology instruction in the coordinated schools was three-fold. It had to communicate to students a knowledge of race as the matrix of physical and spiritual
characteristics that arises from a distinct pool of “blood” or common genetic inheritance, but also to provide a pseudoscientific justification for the unique form of biological warfare waged by the Nazi regime, and to awaken in the German youth a sense of responsibility toward their own race.

We find each of these objectives illuminated in one of the biology textbooks approved for use in German secondary schools under National Socialism, Jakob Graf’s *Biologie für Oberschule und Gymnasium* (1940). My examples are drawn from its third volume, “Man and the laws of life”, which was intended for students of about fourteen years of age in the fifth class of secondary school. The text is divided into four sections: the first, “Man as the highest stage of development in the realm of organisms”, covers human origins, evolution, and anatomy; “Man as dependent member and responsible shaper of his native landscape” treats ecosystems and the environment, genetics, and selection; “Man as an element of his clan and race” deals with human heredity and racial anthropology; the final section, “Man, an element of his Volk, and the laws of nature”, is about individual and racial health and population policy. The entire 194-page volume is illustrated with numerous diagrams, graphs, and charts, and contains over two dozen photographic plates, mostly featuring blond youths with sentimental and propagandistic captions such as “Holy and inviolable is our blood” and “All life is struggle”. Besides the many tasks assigned in the text itself, the book is accompanied by a “tutorial booklet” with exercises to be completed by the student.

Graf’s (1940) writing is striking for its constant juxtaposition of neutral, factual language with mystifying, quasi-spiritual rhetoric. Paragraphs that would not be out of place in a present-day schoolbook, for example on the ecosystem of the forest, sit alongside doctrinal pronouncements about the importance of Germany’s woodland to the self-sufficiency of the Volk and the unbreakable inner bond between generations of Germans and their ancient trees (101). This thematic breadth, with regular digressions from natural science into politics, economics, geography, history, and culture, is another remarkable aspect of the text. Yet what initially appears as a confusion of topics is in fact accounted for within Graf’s understanding of biology as the “science of life” (192), where “life” is defined to include not only the physical, material basis of organic existence but also its organisation in the form of human society. Nor are these domains fundamentally separate: the text is characterised by an organicism that situates every aspect of human existence firmly within the natural realm, governed by natural laws. Individuals are thus represented as organisms like any other, naturally subject to the principles of selection operative in nature; yet they are also portrayed as single cells in a larger social organism which depends for its survival on their coordinated efforts to sustain it in health and strength.

We perceive each of the individual’s roles immediately in the founding principle of Graf’s (1940) thesis, the so-called “law of the preservation of the species”. This “natural law” finds two-fold expression through the organism’s “self-preservation instinct” on the one hand,
which impels it to secure its own existence, and its “breeding instinct” on the other, for the sake of the propagation of its kind more broadly (172). While all organisms have these instincts, the very surfeit of competing lives that stems from them makes it impossible for each and every one to survive and reproduce. Thus in the evolution of humans as of any other organism, as the text asserts in its second section, a “fierce struggle for existence functioned as the strongest mechanism of selection” (87; original emphasis). The central criterion for success, meanwhile, is the individual’s possession of a “healthy genetic inheritance” that will enable its offspring in turn to compete successfully (94). The “law of the preservation of the species”, however, is misleadingly named, for as a subtle shift in the text’s wording makes clear, it is not always for the sake of the “species” that the individual’s struggle goes on: in the human case, the continued selection of individuals sharing a common “genetic inheritance” results in “the survival of the race through the maintenance of its general powers of resistance, its purity and its numerical strength” (97; my emphasis).

For a clearer understanding of what it means to share a common “genetic inheritance” with other members of one’s race, students would have referred to the third chapter of their book. Here the text explains that racial differences emerged from the selection of different genetic traits among groups of people who had migrated to different parts of the world near the beginning of human existence (Graf 1940, 117). The Nordic race, of which the German Volk was a member, took to the fertile fields of northern Europe, where they became hunters and agriculturalists. The Nordic race is therefore a “settler race”, whose peoples have a close relationship to the landscape whose flora and fauna have sustained them over the centuries (119-20). The text goes on to draw a contrast between “the Nordic man as settler, founder of states and creator of culture” and his major racial antagonist in the “struggle for existence”: that is, “the Jew as merchant, nomad, parasite and destroyer of culture” (139-41). The Jews are not a race unto themselves but a Volk with a mix of “Near Eastern” and “Oriental” racial characteristics. Having originally inhabited the barren landscapes of desert and steppe, the Jews are by nature unsettled and unproductive, constantly invading other peoples’ territories and preying on the fruits of their labours. The natural law governing the entire conduct of the Jew, the text concludes, is “parasitism”; his starkest racial opposite is “the German man of Nordic race”, who will always reject the Jew as foreign so long as he maintains the purity of his own blood (146-47).

Together, Graf’s (1940) explanations of selection and racial evolution lay the foundations for the final section’s articulation of the relationship between the individual and the Volk. While this groundwork consists largely in the establishment of ostensibly objective “natural laws” and historical developments, as described, there are also consistent indications of the role of human agency in the continual “struggle for existence” of individuals and peoples. The “German man of Nordic race” maintains the purity of his blood; more abstractly, “man”, although he himself is
subject to the laws of nature, has the right to preside over a process of artificial selection on the basis of his knowledge of these laws. As the text portentously declares, “Man decides over the existence or nonexistence of races and species” (98). In the shadow of this assertion, the final chapter mounts a justification of the National Socialist regime’s population policy. The 1933 Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, for example, is presented as a restoration of the “law of the preservation of the species” in the human domain, whose neglect during the previous, republican era led to the corruption and decay of the *Volk* (177). Under the law of the new regime, only the fittest individuals will survive a process of “purposeful selection” (172) that functions to ensure the survival and strengthening of the German people. The precise power that this law actually gave the state, namely to sterilise those individuals it deemed carriers of hereditary illness, is declared nowhere in the text.

The regime’s concern with the health of the German population blurs together with its concern for the viability of the Nordic race; the *Volk*’s genetic “purity” was at least as significant as its “powers of resistance”. This of course was the purport of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, extolled by the text for their resolution of the “vital question” of the Jews in Germany. Henceforth “relations of the blood” between “Germans” and “Jews” are banned, ensuring in tandem with new regulations dictating what combinations of “German”, “Jew”, “half-Jew”, and “quarter-Jew” may or may not marry that only Nordic children will be born to the *Volk* in future (Graf 1940, 173-74). Whether there will be enough such children leads to yet another area of concern: “numerical strength”, too, is crucial, since according to the laws of natural selection “a *Volk* that no longer has strong and healthy new blood at its disposal will not be equal to the struggle for existence in the long run” (191). A vital third component in the regime’s artificial selection measures is thus the 1933 introduction of marriage loans: this programme, the text proclaims, enabled 300,000 weddings that had been deferred on account of the economic crisis to go ahead, leading to 830,000 more births in the past five years than expected (190). Here is proof that “t h e G e r m a n *V o l k* b e l i e v e s o n c e a g a i n i n i t s f u t u r e!” (191; original emphasis). The regime’s measures to promote hereditary health, racial purity, and fecundity have given the people cause to hope, as a new generation of genetically optimised individuals rises to bear *Volk* and race back to their natural supremacy.

As children born before the Nazis came to power, the text’s readers were not members of this new generation. As the youngest of young adults, however, they were considered to bear both great potential and great responsibility as its future parents. Alongside its explanation of the regime’s population policy, then, Graf’s (1940) final chapter translates the theme of maintaining the *Volk*’s health and purity in accordance with the laws of nature into terms of immediate practical significance to its readers’ young lives. The student’s life choices, the text emphasises, redound upon the continued existence of the *Volk* and ultimately of the race itself; with respect to
this greater good, the young person’s “instinct of self-preservation” and “breeding instinct” are transmuted into a “duty of health” and a “hereditary duty” (172). The attendant responsibilities are explained in the greatest detail. A set of “health rules” gives counsel on everything from nutrition to exercise to proper posture (149-57); another section deals with the recognition and prevention of infectious diseases (157-64); a third provides comprehensive instruction in first aid (164-71), including an extensive passage on the treatment of victims of various kinds of chemical attack. Proper care in each of these domains, students were reassured, would see them through to healthy and strong adulthood, at which point their first and foremost concern should be to choose a spouse with whom to start a family. The text therefore concludes with some advice on this business, reminding its readers to avoid the hereditarily ill and racially foreign and to plan on many children (192).

Students were expected to be more than passive recipients of rules and recommendations, however. Each section of Graf’s (1940) text is littered with assignments, often requiring pupils to study the exemplary family trees of illustrious historical figures or investigate the genetic traits manifested by their classmates. Most interesting in this regard is the “tutorial booklet for family study” included with the textbook, consisting in sixteen pages of blank charts and forms to be filled in by the student with the findings of his or her own genealogical research. The booklet opens with a verse by Walter Groß, addressing the student: “You too are a link in the chain of life / A droplet in your Volk’s great bloodstream …”. The following page provides a blank space for the student to map out the genetic traits of his or her family according to eye colour, hair colour, and skin tone; the next spread is a model family tree to be filled in with the pictures, names, birthplaces and -dates of the student and his or her parents and grandparents; the rest of the booklet is taken up with a series of more complex “descendant” and “kinship trees”, which are to be completed using an intricate code to record the minute details of each relative’s history and appearance.

The final page of the workbook is a template “ancestry card”. In the text proper, the “ancestral card index” is promoted as a more efficient replacement for the traditional family tree: unlike a single sprawling table which would become more difficult to maintain and interpret with every generation, a card system makes it easy to access and update detailed records on hundreds of family members (Graf 1940, 106). These cards could also be collated with a simplified, coded “kinship tree” like the one in the student’s activity booklet, permitting the entire history of his or her family to be referenced at a glance. No detail was to be omitted from this new system of genealogical record-keeping: the sample “ancestry card” provided to students has fields for the individual’s name, place and date of birth, religion, profession, marriage and death dates, place of interment, general state of health, disabilities, illnesses, cause of death, body shape, height, weight, eye colour, hair colour, skin tone, face shape, chin shape, nose shape, identifying
markings, character, general ability and aptitudes, honours, major life events, number of sons and daughters and their places of residence, accompanying documentation, and the place and date of the statement.

Whether students were actually expected to begin their own “ancestral card index” using this template is unclear, although they were certainly encouraged to do so within the text itself. We do know however that virtually every young person to have studied Graf’s (1940) textbook would have been required by law to submit genealogical documentation similar to that in their tutorial booklets to the state: all members of the Hitler Youth, which from 1939 meant all Germans aged ten to nineteen, were required to make an “ancestral proof” of their racial acceptability (Ehrenreich 2007, 59). Here, then, I believe we begin to see how Graf’s (1940) text and its accompanying workbook served not only to instruct students in the restricted sense of that word, by presenting them with information about genetics, race, and population policy on the one hand and advice about how to eat right, avoid illness, and start a family on the other, but to inculcate in them certain dispositions that gave more subtle shape to both their patterns of thought and their patterns of behaviour. I would argue that it did so in three distinct ways.

First and most fundamentally, the text gives the young person to understand that even the most minute details of his or her family’s history and state of health are of the utmost significance. These details are represented as having a decisive influence not only on the young person’s identity, but also on his or her intrinsic value, which is no more and no less than his or her value to a larger, genetically-racially-defined entity. This is straightforwardly achieved within the text proper, with its repeated emphasis on the subordinate role of the individual within the Volk and race; yet it is also supported by the requirement that students actively research and record their own personal history as part of their education, centring the practice of racialised genealogy in the production of the young German adult.

Second, the text communicates to the young person that those around him or her have a right to know these intimate details. They too are affected by his or her history and health insofar as they are connected to him or her by blood, whether more closely, as for instance the future mother or father of his or her child, or more distantly, as any other “racial comrade”. Again, this responsibility to disclose what has been defined as one’s innermost essence is conveyed directly in the text itself, for example its insistence on the importance of choosing a partner wisely. And again, it is also impressed on students in activities that force them to divulge personal information about their and their family members’ history and health to one another in their group tasks, as well as to the authority figure of the teacher.

Third and lastly, the text imparts to the young person the understanding that the higher authority of the state itself, as the protector and promoter of the entire blood-bound Volk, has a right to know and act upon his or her most personal details. Once again, this knowledge is related
through the explanation and justification of the National Socialist regime’s manifold intrusions into the life-courses of its citizens, from its regulation of all marriages to its nurturing of some families to its violation of the reproductive rights of other individuals. Less obvious in this case is how students were brought to assume a cooperative disposition vis-à-vis the state through the activities they were assigned. It is conceivable that students made to complete Graf’s (1940) workbook, should their research have revealed a hitherto unknown illness or Jewish connection, could have been reported to the authorities by a zealous teacher. It is virtually certain, moreover, that each young user of this book would have already had to perform a similar genealogical exercise at the behest of the state, since an ancestral proof was required from every ten-year-old child for his or her mandatory initiation into the Hitler Youth.

Graf’s (1940) textbook thus conveys to students a new standard of sense or system of knowledge calibrated to the eternal verities of the “science of life”, and thence a new subjectivity defining their own role and responsibilities to their Volk and race as young German people. New sense and new subjectivity are linked by what the text itself heralds in its final perorations as an entirely new ethic: “out of man’s bond to the blood there unfolds a new morality that places the Volk above individuals, for in the stream of ancestry the existence of the individual recedes behind that of the kin and the Volk” (193; original emphasis). The sensibility of the old system in Germany and indeed across Europe teetered on the flimsy humanistic conceits of a civilisation responsible for perversions of the natural order which, going against the grain of life itself, did the German Volk almost to death; the new sensibility is based on the immutable laws of nature, observance of which will necessarily lead to the resurrection of the naturally superior German Volk. The morality of the old system has been discredited by the destructive objectives of Germany’s enemies in the current war, chiefly to exterminate the Germans in an abhorrent violation of the “laws of life” and “a crime against the welfare and survival of all mankind”; the new morality recognises that just as each fit individual is an indispensable element in the totality of the Volk, each fit Volk is an indispensable limb of the “life-community ‘earth’” (193-94).

Thus I would argue that the new morality that Graf’s (1940) text founds on “man’s bond to the blood” points in turn to a prescription for action, indeed for the very actions being taken—most reasonably, in this new light—by the National Socialist regime. Its restoration of the “laws of life” within Germany, and its uncompromising defence of these laws in the “life-community ‘earth’”, now appear as a selfless struggle to rescue all humanity from the same evil ignorance that came so close to claiming the life of the German Volk. The assaults of its opponents, by contrast, take on the appearance of a thoroughly irrational campaign to prevent Germany from restoring both its and the rest of Europe’s population to health and prosperity; indeed, they appear as a criminal offence against the incontrovertible natural law. Finally, against the backdrop of this new understanding and new justification, the student is brought to occupy a new subjectivity by
means of active induction into the practices that bring the new Germany into being, centrally, the practice of racialised genealogy. The student learns how to identify the self anew in genetic-racial terms, and how to perform that identity in relation both to his or her peers and to the powers that govern his or her life-course. Only when this knowledge of and disposition toward Volk and race had been acquired was the young German person sufficiently educated to take his or her place in the ranks of the emergent community that embodied them: the Volksgemeinschaft.

I believe that the lessons of National Socialist biology can be transposed onto the more general constitution and purpose of education under the German fascist regime. As we have witnessed, the biology taught during the Nazi era was vitalistic and holistic in outlook, preaching that there was something more to life than its material foundations, the cell or the organism, removed from their living, breathing context (Scherf 2001, 309). Human existence was by no means exempt: the organic vision of society as akin to and inextricable from nature that is contained in texts like Graf’s Biologie recast human community as a symbiotic whole rather than an aggregation of “individuals” in the sense of independent centres of consciousness and intelligence. “Society” thus becomes a living organism unto itself, while “individuals” are reduced to integrated, productive cells whose sole purpose is to sustain it. So too the school: no longer permitted to maintain its position as an independent centre capable of dissecting and analysing a social body from which it stood apart, it was transformed under National Socialism into an organ of the nascent social body of the Volksgemeinschaft. Its task was to produce human units and incorporate them into this new body’s growing social tissue. The purpose of education itself was now only to integrate, not to individuate; its relationship to society was to be subordinate rather than antithetical, its role auxiliary instead of dialectical.

The teacher’s job was therefore to outfit his or her pupils to serve the regime’s ends as a purely functional unit in a great machine, rather than to encourage the holistic development of the young person in him- or herself. So much is evident in the 1938 RMWEV secondary school guidelines’ stated aim of augmenting the “true national wealth” of the country, consisting in the “strength … faith and … competence of its men and women” (in Flessau 1977, 68): here the young are characterised as a stockpile of raw resources, human material to be transformed into the very sinews of Volksgemeinschaft, racial state, and racial empire. What the example of Graf’s (1940) text reveals about the actual mechanics of this process of transformation, however, is that the student was required to take an active part in it. Thus while the desired outcome of education under National Socialism was the instrumentalisation of the person, I wish to emphasise that it is not warranted to conclude, as many authors have done, that the means to this end was simply “indoctrination” (Eilers 1963, 135; Pine 2010, 138), or worse, “brainwashing” (Kollmann 2006, 168). Autonomy, which was certainly denied to young people under the Nazi regime, is not the same thing as agency, which they retained as surely as they retained the ability to think about
who they were or do the tasks assigned by their teacher. The recognition that it was impossible for young people to deploy critical resources that they were not given does not exempt us from the task of considering how they actively engaged with those resources they did receive.

Moving away from the “brainwashing” paradigm, Gies (2001) ventures that National Socialist education functioned via the inculcation of belief or disposition rather than the formation of intellect or knowledge (209). I would rearrange the terms to suggest that knowledge was still imparted in the schools of fascist Germany, most significantly as a set of new standards dictating what beliefs and dispositions made sense and guiding their formation in the learning subject. Expressed differently, the knowledge and subjectivity mediated in National Socialist texts served as premises for patterns of argumentation, frequently repeated across all discursive domains, that normalised the persecution and killing of non-German others in the eyes of the German self. Graf’s (1940) statement that the “natural law” of the Jews is “parasitism” is a good example. The oft-uttered proposition “Jews are parasites” constituted a piece of new knowledge imparted by the National Socialists, the cognitive premise of an argument which, as Musolff (2013) has shown, borrowed from the legitimacy of the discourse and practices around parasites and their eradication in the fields of hygiene and medicine to provide a discursive justification in the sociopolitical field for the annihilation of the Jewish people (61). What I wish to emphasise is that at the same time as legitimating powerful practices of persecution, such propositions became new standards, normal ways of seeing the world which embedded themselves so deeply in the cognitive background of individual subjects as to delegitimate all objections to these practices. To criticise the ejection of the Jews from German society would have been no more sensible than to criticise the medical treatment of a parasitic infection.

Not a single cohort both began and ended its education under Nazism. It is therefore difficult to evaluate the efficacy of the regime’s measures in this field. Its system of mass state education would certainly appear to have performed the function of maintaining social control, judging by the number of ostensibly compliant bureaucrats, labourers, and soldiers turned out of the German schools between 1933 and 1945. Due to the ideological saturation of education under Nazism, however, this generation was as intellectually impoverished as it was instrumentally valuable to the regime (Eilers 1963, 139). That is to say, the Nazi-coordinated schools focused on producing ideologically proficient Volksgenossen and Volksgenossinnen for insertion into an inchoate “people’s community” at the expense of educating a new generation of technocrats capable of actually governing and running the modern society that provided that community’s substructure. Eilers (1963) therefore sees the National Socialist educational project as a disruption of the rational adjustment of the school to its modernising socioeconomic context begun in the Weimar era. Indeed, the very term with which the state legitimised its thoroughgoing reorientation of the school system, in claiming education as a function of the imaginary
"Volksgemeinschaft", obscured Germany's actual situation and thus disguised the active dislocation of the educational supply from socioeconomic demand (140). The National Socialists’ education system may have succeeded in maintaining social control over the German population, but it was a failure inasmuch as it was incapable of replicating the structural foundations on which their envisioned community was to rest.

Yet social reproduction, while a necessary condition of the National Socialist educational project’s success, was not a sufficient one; the function of mass state education was not only to maintain social control over the population, but to channel its energies into nation-building. A study carried out within the American zone of occupied Germany between 1946 and 1948 concluded that children who had attended primary school under the regime manifested the most antisemitic attitudes of any age group (Wegner 2002, 187). This seems to prove that the education system did succeed in instilling a racialised subjectivity in its youngest members, a crucial step toward the realisation of the Nazi vision of the national society. Even if the National Socialists’ engagement in the field of education did not secure the means of reproducing the structural basis on which the Volksgemeinschaft necessarily would have rested in future, I conclude that it did manage to dispatch at least a small convoy for the inchoate “people’s community”, comprising the small group of children who, born after 1933, knew no other kind of community to aspire to. In practical terms, this is of little significance in light of the deeper structural flaw of the Nazi education system, and of even less significance in light of the course that history ultimately took. In trying to understand how the National Socialists’ use of language contributed to their success in convincing the German public to support their seemingly unfathomable actions, however, the importance of the mentality of the youngest generation cannot be overstated.

Education was therefore an important section, albeit unsound, of the discursive bridge between German past and Nazi future. Wegner (2002) notes the regime’s “ability to fully exploit both continuity and change in addressing the question of the educated person” (182): we perceive this in its modulation and extension of ideas and activities more or less familiar to the young and indeed to all Germans, through which they were brought to new understandings of self and other. In the linking of rules of hygiene familiar to every child with the strange vision of a Germany without Jews, the powerful metaphor of the Jewish parasite resulted; in the connection of the traditional practice of genealogy with an unfamiliar vision of racial order, a new concept of what it was to be German emerged. In the end, however, the National Socialist regime’s overdriven exploitation of its ability to wreak change in the field of education came at the expense of its own continuity. Hitler himself had predicted before his rise to power that “the German youth will either be the builders of a new völkisch state or they will live to see the end of the bourgeois world, the last witnesses of total collapse” (Hitler 1942, 450). With the implosion of the new
world he had attempted to lay on their shoulders, the final act in the repudiation of the old world’s ways of making sense, he was proven correct.
In the above chapters, I have attempted to explain the nature of the relationship between how language was thought about in the historical setting of National Socialism and how language was used to shape that setting. My thesis is that a certain historically-contingent body of thought about language as the guarantor and voice of race played a part in the broader ideology of National Socialism at the same time as language use by the National Socialist state propagated new sensibilities among its subjects, leading the central vision of that ideology—the racial-national community—to begin to take shape both in the minds of its subjects and in the physical exclusion of those who were deemed not to belong to it. The remarks I have made on the National Socialist regime’s engagement with the German law, radio, press, and education system obviously do not represent a complete account of its language use. Nor can my treatment of the German case stand for a complete account of the relationship between fascism and either linguistic ideology or linguistic practices. Before reviewing and concluding the arguments I have made to support my thesis, then, I wish to briefly indicate some directions that future work might take to extend or indeed to challenge the ideas that I have presented here.

6.1 Further avenues of enquiry into National Socialism

The literature on National Socialism extends far beyond the scale of this investigation, into every field of politics, economy, society, and culture; I have merely selected the fields in which the discursive dimension of the Nazi endeavour is most obvious. Yet of the fields left unexplored here, there are many that I believe would support and indeed benefit from analysis of a similar sort. It is therefore fitting to conclude my discussion of Nazism with a survey of some of its potential restarting points.

One of the most obvious areas left to be examined is literature. Which books were burned in May 1933, and which were promoted? How were publishing and book-selling regulated? What changes affected the libraries? An especially interesting and surprisingly underdeveloped field of research is children’s literature: further analyses are required of what sorts of sensibilities and subjectivities were mediated to children of all ages through books such as the particularly notorious trio released by the publishing house of the virulently antisemitic paper Der Stürmer (Bauer 1936; Hiemer 1938, 1940). Archival investigation into the RMWEV’s official lists of recommended “national literature” for school libraries mentioned by Eilers (1963, 36) is a particular desideratum. We catch an intriguing glimpse into the changes that the book trade underwent during the Nazi years in the diaries of Klemperer (2001), who noted with characteristic perspicacity in April 1944: “English novels are banned of course, but there are books by A. J. Cronin in every shopwindow: He’s Scottish and exposes shortcomings of social
and public services in England” (307). Who made such finely discriminating decisions about the suitability of individual authors’ works to the regime’s cause, on what criteria, and backed with what system of implementation? Some authors have attempted to shed light on these questions (Düsterberg 2009-2011; Sarkowicz and Mentzer 2002); Barbian’s (2008, 2010) work in particular provides a good guide for further research into the Nazi regime’s restructuring of the entire literary domain from authorship to publishing and circulation to reading.

Another field to be explored is the cinema. One of the most useful recent works in this area is Stahr’s (2001) analysis of how the Nazi film apparatus engaged with German public opinion: how did film producers under Nazism gauge the balance between showing audiences what they wanted to see and showing them what the regime wanted them to see, and how were the results received by audiences? Stahr’s (2001) treatment of both the production and consumption of film as social activities lays essential groundwork for the interpretation of individual films themselves as discursive products and commodities. Branching out from this study of the social determinants and effects of cinema under National Socialism, a close reading of the texts of specific films such as Kanzog (1994) and Osten (1998) provide could help to illuminate exactly what kind of knowledge was conveyed and what subjectivities were promoted to viewers and how, as well as how this field of discursive practice connected to the broader ambition of transforming German society into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Klaus’ (1988-2006) encyclopaedia of German film between 1929 and 1945, including plot details of every film produced during the Nazi period, is a comprehensive key to the wealth of primary source material still awaiting exploration.

Theatre, too, was an important discursive instrument, yet has received far less attention than its mass media counterpart film. Drewniak (1983) provides a good historical overview of the field, including some discussion of the *Thingspiel*, a type of stylised, participatory historical drama performed for mass audiences in open-air amphitheatres. More recently, Strobl (2007) has written on the political and ideological context of theatre productions under Nazism. Further research might focus on close reading of specific texts; an examination of how the *Thingspiele* worked on the subjectivities of their audiences in inviting the participation of theatregoers would be of particular interest. Not unrelated to the field of theatre is Nazi oratory and the “scripts” of the NSDAP’s mass meetings. Particular attention is owed to the way in which the countless public spectacles staged by the regime led to the development of a sort of political liturgy. The classic work in this field is Mosse’s (1975) study of the nineteenth-century roots of the dramatisation of politics under Nazism. More recently, Zelnhefer (2002) and Urban (2007) have published detailed works on the Nuremberg rallies. Analysis of the texts of speeches by Hitler and other prominent figures could help to explain the discursive objectives and techniques that characterised their address toward the German public. This kind of close reading might also be
complemented by consideration of contemporary audio-visual documents such as Leni Riefenstahl’s *Sieg des Glaubens* and *Triumph des Willens*.

It is not enough, however, to research only those discursive contributions that stemmed from authoritative sources. A perspective from below, incorporating the “discursive engagements” of civilians (Pegelow Kaplan 2009), is necessary for two reasons. First, the efficacy of the technologies and techniques deployed by the regime in the effort to create the *Volksgemeinschaft* cannot be assessed with any degree of confidence in the absence of clearer insight into how they were received by their target audience. And second, the very process of creating the *Volksgemeinschaft* could not have gone as far as it did without the participation of those individuals themselves. As Pegelow Kaplan (2009) notes, even in those rare cases where people attempted to articulate a challenge to the regime, the line between contestation and reification was vanishingly fine (159): every uncritical use of the words “German”, “Jew”, or any other term whose valency changed under the auspices of National Socialism represented a token that served, whether intentionally or not, to confirm the validity of the new types cast by the regime. If we are to maintain that the materialisation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was carried forward largely by communicative means, we must include all parties to the communication in our enquiry.

One source of insight into how the kinds of knowledge and subjectivity that the regime attempted to instil in German citizens were actually engaged by individuals is wartime correspondence. Latzel’s (1998) study of the “meaning-making process” of letter-writing will be indispensable to any future research in this field. Humburg (1998) also offers some insight into how German soldiers understood World War Two and developed their own sense of self within it. The most promising avenues for new research lead of course to the many German archives holding collections of letters from the front (Schwender n.d.). Another possible source is the secret intelligence and counterintelligence reports of the regime and its opponents. The SD collected monthly reports on the state of public opinion from its surveillance network, which have been compiled by Boberach (1984). The organisation of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in exile (Sopade) too published the observations of its own secret network (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands 1980). These texts are plainly not unbiased, reliable reportage. Nevertheless, they offer direct insight into daily life under Nazism, and their relevance to the study of how individual Germans thought about the emergent *Volksgemeinschaft* and participated in its inception cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Neither war correspondence nor secret reports however allow us any insight into the sensibilities of those individuals forcibly excluded from the Nazi vision of community. Of course, those persecuted under National Socialism did not have uniform access to all discursive instruments. There was however a Jewish press in Germany up until the end of 1938, and the
Jewish community undertook the education of Jewish pupils excluded from the German schools until 1942. Many of those targeted by the regime also challenged the identities imposed on them in petitions to authorities like the RGA, as described earlier; many others carried on their daily efforts to make sense of a constantly changing, ever more threatening environment in the pages of a diary. Klemperer (1999, 2001) is among the best-known of these diarists, and his writings attest to the continual effort that “Jews”, as well as members of other persecuted groups, had to make to literally “come to terms” with their new reality.

Of course, Klemperer’s is only one of too many such individual discursive labours to acknowledge in this space. While each one attests to the experiences of a unique and irreducible centre of consciousness, a synthetic account of the features and techniques they share in the work of coming to terms with the new parameters of non-“German” existence could help us to understand how the new “Germanness” itself, and the vision of community that it defined, took hold in the minds of all those who had been Germans before 1933. Yet even if it were possible to incorporate every extant record of every life lived under National Socialism into such an account, our understanding of the experience of those persecuted by the regime would be far from complete. For as Fritzsche (2008) concludes, the destruction of eleven million lives represents eleven million testimonies lost: “The disparity in the ability to bear witness—this, too, was part of the German empire” (154). While the German empire was perhaps the most spectacularly destructive one of the twentieth century, however, it was not the only one whose atrocities have defaced the record of recent history: Italian Fascism and the Franco regime in Spain, too, have challenged our comprehension. A study of the linguistic ideologies and practices that characterised both, some outlines of which I will suggest in the next section, would make a considerable contribution to the work of filling the lacunae left by fascism.

6.2 Future avenues of enquiry into fascism in twentieth-century Europe

In Italy and Spain as well as in Germany, albeit in different ways, there was a common effort to place certain people beyond the pale by discursively redefining the community in such a way as to exclude the other from it. Where the unit of moral consideration is envisioned as a community of blood, those deemed to have the wrong blood are beyond moral community; their exclusion can or indeed must be marked materially, whether by domination or by annihilation, thereby making vision into reality. Perhaps less dramatically than in the German case, but no less a part of the same phenomenon, Italian Fascism under Mussolini and the Spanish state under Franco posited their own visions of national society linked to their own ideas about language, expressed in the efforts they made through language to enact their versions of the “people’s community”.

6.2.1 Fascist Italy: Unifying the language and the nation

The version of the “people’s community” envisioned by the Italian Fascists under Mussolini, like the National Socialists’ *Volksgemeinschaft*, was an inequitable and exclusionary community. On the first count, the two societies were much the same, with each regime dealing with its country’s economy in a superficially socialistic rather than truly socially just manner. Yet their exclusions, the way in which their boundaries were drawn, were rather different: the idea of race, while by no means absent from Fascism, was never as central to its concept of community as it was to that of the Nazis (De Grand 1982, 114). I would argue that in the Italian case, race was actually preempted by language as the primary determinant of membership in or exclusion from the “people’s community”. The Nazis, members of a population that had long shared a sense of nationhood in the absence of protective state borders to enclose it, were anxious about preserving the integrity of the German people, a concern which was articulated with the concept of race and linked to the idea of vital, vulnerable “mother-tongue”. Because of the vagaries of Italy’s own overlong path to nation-state status, however, the vast majority of its highly regionalised population lacked a sense of national identity that could consolidate their integration into the belated state. Italian Fascism’s task was therefore not to play on its population’s fears for its integrity, but to forge an entirely new sense of shared identity for a thoroughly heterogeneous citizenry.

Thus where my work on Nazism has focused on the idea of “mother-tongue” and its link to race, future research into the linguistic ideology of Italian Fascism might concentrate on the more nebulous, all-encompassing idea of unity. That is, the Fascists aimed to create both a unified Italian nation and a unified Italian language, as well as a congruence between the two, which were to expand together throughout the world in a restoration of Italy’s ancient Roman empire. Of course, wherever empire was at issue, race-thinking too was in play: thus antimiscegenation laws were introduced in Italy’s Ethiopian colony in 1937; in 1938, the Fascist Race Manifesto applied the same laws to Jews (Morgan 2004, 201). I would nonetheless argue that the racism of Fascism was more akin to that of traditional imperialism than to the Nazis’ racial imperialism. Certainly, the Fascists’ persecution of Italian Jews was a recent development, yet it was at least as much a tactical gesture of solidarity with the Nazis as a sincerely ideologically motivated policy, and was never pursued as intently as in Germany (199, 202). Racism simply did not play a strong role in determining the regime’s major ends, which were more a unified than a perfectly purified Italian nation, and an expanded rather than infinitely expansive Italian empire. Instead, it facilitated these ends as it had in classical imperialism, by encouraging Italian citizens to identify as members of the nation as against a class, and as against racial strangers, in the conquest of empire that nevertheless had rationally-decided limits.
My view that the Fascists chose to remain within a more traditionally imperialist paradigm than the Nazis seems to be reflected in their focus on language in creating a new Italian national identity. I would interpret this emphasis on language as an indication that the anxieties about population movements and racial mixing felt so keenly by the Nazis were not as strong an ideological motive for the Fascists: rather, they continued to subscribe to the nineteenth-century dictum that language and nation are naturally coextensive (Foresti 2003, 46). The Nazis, having redefined nationality as depending on the inherent attribute of race rather than the contingent one of first language, had concluded that this dictum was untenable in an age of mass migration and population mixing. Yet the Fascists, whose affinity for the racial principle was relatively weaker, never fully subscribed to their German counterparts’ resultant quest to eradicate the supposed root cause of the modern dislocation of language and nation, namely racial interlopers. Instead, the characteristic linguistic ideology of Fascism cut out the mediating term of race to envision a more superficial realignment of language and nation. Of course, this concern with congruence could be regarded merely as another aspect of the notion of integrity that I have used to characterise Nazism. What I wish to suggest by emphasising the specific theme of unity in the Italian case is only that where the Nazi concern with integrity was actually a fear of the German people’s dis-integration, conveyed in anxieties about the vulnerability of the “mother-tongue”, Fascism appears to have espoused a more optimistic chauvinism, looking forward to the creation of a unified Italian people through the creation of a unified Italian language.

I nevertheless describe this process of mutual constitution as a re-alignment between language and nation because the new, Italian nation was to be the heir of imperial Rome, and the new, national Italian language the successor to the great universal language of Latin. What this project of reconstitution amounted to in practice was the imposition of linguistic uniformity on Italians. Unlike the Nazis, the Fascists approached this task in part through direct linguistic intervention. What I see as an effort to make Italians inhabit a new, nationalised consciousness by effecting a conscious change of the Italian language is reflected in the regime’s campaigns against so-called “bourgeois” language, as well as in its legislation against the use of loanwords in public spaces in 1940 (Morgan 2004, 197; Klein 1982, 56). The Fascists also pursued a programme of “Italianisation” throughout the country, discouraging the use of local Italian languages instead of the standard “national” language and banning outright the use of minority languages, especially German in South Tyrol/Alto Adige and Slovenian in the Veneto (Foresti 2003, 47). The schools were of course another important field of Fascist linguistic practice: a 1923 ordinance making Italian the language of instruction in all primary schools, followed by the introduction of a unified state textbook in 1928, represented two further attempts to supplant a diversity of regional languages with a single national language (Klein 1989, 43-44). Finally, the
Fascists instrumentalised the press in much the same manner as did the National Socialists, albeit to their own particular ideological ends (Talbot 2007).

Further research into the Fascist state’s linguistic practices in each of these fields, as into its linguistic ideology, is required to develop a better understanding of exactly what role language itself played, as a concept and a tool, in setting and pursuing these ideological ends. An analysis along the lines of the one I have done of National Socialism would need to investigate in more depth the continuities and disjunctures between Fascism and the particular historical context of Italy; one of the more significant ways in which this country was set apart from Germany, and one that would be central to any such analysis, was the importance of the Italian state’s relationship to the Vatican and Italian society’s relationship to the Catholic Church. Future work should also build up a more detailed background of the political and economic structures of the Fascist state itself, with particular attention to its self-declared totalitarianism and corporatism. It could finally undertake to compare the ideas, practices, and achievements of Fascism with those of National Socialism, especially with the objective of elucidating the significance of race and imperialism (and their relationship to one another) to each regime. Whether such an analysis would ultimately elaborate or overturn the surmises I have set out here, it would certainly be of great value to our understanding of how fascism made sense in interwar Europe. It would not represent the last piece in that puzzle, however: the distinctive case of Spain, too, has something to add to our understanding of this era and its events.

6.2.2 Francoist Spain: Transcending nationalism through language

The Franco dictatorship in Spain makes an excellent point of comparison with fascism in Germany and Italy as much for its differences as its similarities, although I believe that it, too, if not as obviously as Nazism or Fascism, belongs in the category of imperialism. The Spanish version of the “people’s community” was distinguished socially by its lack of emphasis on the idea of an egalitarian “community of all producers”—perhaps unsurprising under a junta that came to power not through a populist mass movement but through three years of all-out war against a united front of leftists. The way this community’s boundaries were drawn was also distinctive. Francoist discourse made reference to “the superiority of the Spanish race”, but twentieth-century Spain had no empire of racially distinct (or rather racially distinguished) indigenous subjects onto whom it could project “inferiority”; Francoist “racial” policies amounted to indiscriminate pronatalism, concerned with population expansion within and not beyond Spanish borders (Nash 1992, 746-47). Antisemitism in Spain was of course as old as the modern state itself; nevertheless there were very few Jews left in Spain by Franco’s time, and his regime actually offered assistance to many of those threatened by Nazi persecution (Payne 1999, 395n.105). This is not of course to exculpate the Spanish regime, which was responsible for
widespread suffering and killed many thousands of its political enemies. It is merely to suggest
that the idea of “race” under Francoism did not have to do with biological commonality: instead,
it was used in an unorthodox manner to refer to traditional Spanish history, culture, and indeed
language.

Of course, the very idea of “traditional Spanishness” was as much a fiction as the
concept of “biological race”. Spain was a country not just of many distinctive regions, as Italy
was, but of several distinctive nationalisms, most notably Catalan, Basque, and Galician. I would
like to suggest then that the most characteristic expression of Francoist linguistic ideology was
not the effort to establish congruence between language and nation, as in Italy, but to subordinate
a multiplicity of self-identifying nations to a single state-imposed identity, rooted in the language
of Spanish empire, Castilian, and transcending mere “historical and geographic contingencies”
(Resina 2002, 121). Similarly to the Italian Fascists, Franco looked back to past imperial glories
to define this new identity. Unlike Italy, however, Spain’s ancient empire had only recently been
lost. In fact, it was this event, in 1898, that gave rise to what would become one of the most
important linguistic ideas to Francoism, hispanismo. The notion of hispanismo proposed that
Spain possessed a unique culture that was embodied in the Castilian language, and moreover that
it still occupied a hegemonic position vis-à-vis its recently emancipated colonies insofar as they
were mere transatlantic transplants of this culture (del Valle and Gabriel-Stheeman 2002, 6). This
then was an argument for the assertion of cultural empire where Spain’s military strength had
failed to uphold its colonial empire.

One of the strengths of the idea of hispanismo was that it could be transposed onto
Spain’s internal diversity as well. It provided a way of imagining Spain, or the so-called Spanish
“race”, as a transcendent cultural entity, existing above the territorial boundaries of Castile and
beyond the sum of the Spanish state’s national parts, indeed arching over the Atlantic itself to
connect the old Spain with its American progeny, and vitally “irrigated by spiritual blood”—the
Castilian language, living legacy of the imperial Spanish greatness achieved under Castilian
leadership (Unamuno in Resina 2002, 114). Yet to the subordinate members of this union, and to
those who were actually subjects of the Franco regime in particular, this concept of Spanishness
must have been experienced as coercion rather than “transcendence”. To note that “race” was not
a biological concept under Francoism and that Franco himself did not pursue territorial
expansion, then, is not to argue that “race” was not a motivation for Francoism or that it was not
imperialist. Rather, I would argue that Francoism was a “racial imperialism”, but one that defined
each of those terms in such a distinctive manner that, superficially, it hardly seemed to resemble
the paradigmatic racial imperialism, Nazism, at all. In practice, however, the Spanish regime’s
ostensibly inclusive definition of “race” as a supranational cultural identity rooted in shared
language was a subtly exclusive one, reducing the entirety of Spain’s non-Castilian-speaking population to the status of colonised subjects, forced to live in and under a “superior” language.

This then was in large part a colonisation of mentalities, such as we might in fact argue characterised Nazism and Fascism as well. More than an attempt to transform its citizens’ subjectivities, however, I would argue that the linguistic practices of Francoism represented an attempt to shore up that regime’s own power, and one that affected Castilian-speakers as well as the speakers of other languages. That is, more important than actually validating the myth of Castilian “transcendence” in the minds of Spanish subjects was compelling their obeisance to its new status, and moreover to the state that asserted that status. Thus when the Franco regime declared Castilian the only official language of Spain and banned other languages from the public sphere, the new order was enforced not through a systematic legislative framework capable of insidiously redirecting behaviours and refashioning subjectivities, but by means of arbitrary military edicts and bald intimidation (Núñez-Seixas n.d., 6, 8). The regime’s engagement with the radio and the press, meanwhile, apparently limited to preventive censorship and not evincing much concern for how widely circulated or deeply absorbed their content was, strikes me as demonstrating a lack of interest in the mass media’s potential as a means of active ideological manipulation (Bonet and Arboledas 2011, 40; Zalbidea Bengoa 1997, 157). This view seems to be corroborated by the messages that were transmitted through the schools under the dictatorship, whose textbooks seem to have placed more emphasis on the single, negative value of obedience to authority than on any substantively new kind of identity (Pinto 2004, 2013).

I leave it to the future to determine whether it is warranted to view this exclusionary definition of Spanishness or a so-called Spanish “race” according to language, implemented through the enforced subjection of all speakers to the directives of state power, as a unique form of “racial imperialism”. Any such exploration of the Spanish case would have to make a more detailed investigation of the historical context from which the regime emerged, especially with regard to the influence of Spain’s distinctive imperial experience and the legacy of ideas about racial and linguistic assimilation and *mestizaje* it produced; the causes and effects of the Civil War; and again the importance of Catholicism in Spain. It would have to ask moreover how that context changed over the duration of the regime, particularly as it persisted after 1945. More research is also needed into the peculiar relationship between the ideology of a co-opted and relatively unsuccessful mass movement, the *Falange*, and a state formed by military coup, that defined Francoism; the question of whether this regime should even be called a fascist one is by no means settled. Nevertheless, it seems clear that ideas about race and empire both had an important part to play in Francoism, if a very different one to their function in the ideologies of Fascism and Nazism. Whether or not my preliminary interpretation of their role and relationship is a constructive contribution is for further enquiries to reveal.
6.3 *Making sense, making senselessness*

My thesis, that the dominant linguistic ideology of National Socialism contributed to a re-envisioning of German community whose actual enactment was accomplished in part through linguistic practices, is intended to help provide an answer to the broader question of how to make sense of Nazism. Why did National Socialism make sense in historical context? How did it actively make new standards of sense for those who lived under it?

I have argued that German fascism made sense in historical context because it offered a re-vision of German community that was coherent in relation to the recent German past: specifically, it seemed to constitute a reasonable response to the anxieties that the tumultuous decades before 1933 had engendered about German unity, status, and above all integrity in the face of political and economic crisis. National Socialism promised to bring about the racial purification of the nation, to be accommodated in a socially unified (if economically inequitable) “people’s community” or *Volksgemeinschaft*, the metropole of its European and eventually global racial empire. This vision of community can be seen as the ideal resolution of the fears expressed in the dominant linguistic ideology of Nazism, that of *Muttersprache*. That ideology perceived a gradual dislocation of the treasured German language, vessel of that people’s unique worldview and symbol of their enduring identity, from the racial German nation, increasingly infiltrated by racial foreigners who used the German language to insinuate their way into the German community and degrade it by mixing with its members. The drift could only be reversed by enclosing those of the German people who were still racially uncorrupted within new borders drawn by a new kind of state, with new powers to control and end its subjects’ life-courses at will.

This new, National Socialist state actively made new sense, meanwhile, by exploiting the affordances of the mutually constitutive relationship between discursive and material structures. As a socially-structured system, German discourse registered the material changes in political and economic conditions that affected German society under National Socialism; as a socially-structuring system, it influenced in turn the way that German subjects interpreted and acted in that society, ultimately reinforcing its altered material conditions. The National Socialists exploited this reciprocal relationship, using language in a variety of educative fields in order to make their specifically racial-national vision of society real, both as a discursive figuration in the minds of their subjects and as a community materially purged of elements they deemed undesirable.

The new vision of community began to be enacted with the enactment of laws that dismembered the existing society into “Germans” and “Jews”, forcing actors on each side of the divide to practise a new form of racial identification—by bearing an “ancestral passport” or a star, and by partaking of all the privileges and enduring all the responsibilities to which one or the
other entitled or obliged its bearer. These new subjectivities were reinforced in the mass media, whose implicit or explicit discursive exclusion of the “Jew” was deepened by its interpellation of “Germans” as members of the “people’s community”: in calling upon the latter to perform their belonging to that community through particular discursive and material contributions of their own, the media was equally co-opting them to reproduce the exclusion of those who did not belong. The Volksgemeinschaft also began to take form through the formation of its first native generation in the schools. There, young people acquired a conceptual framework that cast the community as an organism and Jews as “parasites” in its body; yet they also learned to actively fill in the background of racial awareness on which that community could emerge by learning literally to fill in their own racial background, that is, to participate in the practices of racial identification on which the boundaries of the new community depended.

I attempted to assess how effective National Socialist intervention in each of these fields was in each of their respective chapters. The Nazis’ engagements in the fields of law, the radio, and the press were each more or less successful according to how well they were able to balance the requirement of maintaining formal continuity with the traditional character of each medium on the one hand, and the aim of reorienting those media toward radically new ends on the other. That is, their success depended on their ability on the one hand to achieve discursive saturation of each field’s channels of communication without disappointing popular expectations, as they did in the case of the press, and on the other to achieve discursive shift of the messages conveyed through those channels in such a way as to transfigure people’s expectations, and indeed their very subjectivities. Through my investigation of the field of education, finally, I concluded that the Nazi regime, despite the remarkable transformation of the German state it achieved while in power, had no effective means of sustaining those new state structures over time. If the regime did not succeed in securing the structural preconditions for the social reproduction of the Volksgemeinschaft, however, nevertheless its production of racially-conscious young Volksgenossen and Volksgenossinnen through the schools was perhaps among the most effective functions of the National Socialist apparatus.

Certainly, then, the effects of the National Socialists’ understanding of language in relation to the national community and use of it in the creation of “national comrades” were striking. Yet they were not mysterious. The ideas about “making sense”, about language as a socially-structured and socially-structuring system, and about discursive saturation and discursive shift that I have used are by no means peculiar to the National Socialist context: they are ways of thinking about how language in general works (and as such could themselves be considered elements of a particular linguistic ideology of my own). But what I would argue does make the case of National Socialism remarkable, and also an especially constructive example for this way of thinking about language, is that its ambitions—to recreate an entire society and ultimately the
entire world in a way that was not just integrally but obsessively racist—seem so unfamiliar. Seem so, because I would not however argue that they really should strike us that way.

What I mean by that has to do with the ideas of sense and senselessness with which I introduced this work. The collapse of National Socialism was indeed, in Hitler’s (1942) words, “the end of the bourgeois world” (450), in that it marked a change of sensibilities: things would never again look exactly the same to anyone who had borne witness to the Nazi regime’s crimes from near or far as they had before the “age of extremes” (Hobsbawm 1996). Something hitherto unimagined had happened. It was not slavery or genocide, for those were integral parts of the history of imperialism. Rather, it was the emergence of a state power for which the destruction of human life was not only a justifiable means to politically- and economically-determined ends, but a basic motive, and a power which moreover was capable of carrying out this destruction in a systematic, indeed industrial way. Yet in the same way that we must take care not to obscure the continuities between the National Socialists’ racial imperialism and classical European imperialism—between the world before and the world after 1933—we must also reject any attempt to deny the continuities that also join the world before and the world after 1945.

Now that National Socialism has happened, we can no longer describe it as “unimagined”. It may still appear “senseless”, of course, a word that expresses the difficulty of re-inhabiting the old sensibilities that allowed ordinary people to collaborate in terrible actions. But we must recognise that the appearance of senselessness is itself a facade. It is the product of the construction of yet another new sensibility, this time one that attempts to absolve other ordinary people in other times and places of complicity in terrible actions, and to deny that such terrible actions could ever happen again. Yet as Bauman (2000) observes, the basic parameters of modern state power that made the Holocaust possible have not changed, nor are there any safeguards in place that could reliably prevent a similar atrocity from reoccurring (11). We may choose to deny that there was any sense to National Socialism, but the refusal to acknowledge and consider why and how it did in fact make sense to millions of people less than one century ago precludes the possibility of considering how we can ensure that it never happens again.

The attempt to access a particular vantage point on history, in this case on the question of how to make sense of fascism, is one aspect of the contribution I have sought to make with this work. Yet it is also an attempt to create a sample, using a pattern of study inspired by Heller and McElhinny (forthcoming), on which the present, too, may be figured. This is not to make a sweeping and facile comparison between contemporary systems of inequality and fascism. It is rather to ask what kind of communities, sharing what kind of sensibilities, are being produced by the dominant linguistic ideologies and linguistic practices of the era of global capitalism. It is also to ask how this production, like those of fascism and various other constellations of nation, state, and society, might fit into the broader category of imperialism. The present day is
burgeoning with potential for consideration in joint political economic and linguistic perspective. I have tried to show in this work how that perspective might help us to make sense of the past. The next step is to consider how it might help us to make sense of this present.
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