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“Pravda vítězí”

**The Czech Victimisation Narrative and the
Creation of the First Czechoslovak Republic in the
Beginning of the Twentieth Century**

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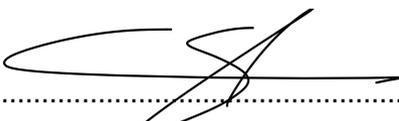
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**MA Programme Euroculture
Declaration**

I, Maeva Chargros hereby declare that this thesis, entitled "*Pravda vítězí: The Czech Victimisation Narrative and the Creation of the First Czechoslovak Republic in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*", submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

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Abstract

Every nation has its myth; every myth has its own discourse and narratives. The Czech nation was first built on the martyrdom of historical figures such as Jan Hus, and then on a duality of heroism and victimisation once it moved towards Czechoslovak nationalism. Indeed, including various nationalities with very different historical experiences required a less exclusive version of the Czech national identity. This evolution of the national discourse occurred shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, which saw many of the “small nations” of Central Europe gain independence. The narrative of victimhood was the most influential part of this newly imagined identity; it even infiltrated Czech historiography up until today. One of the recent traces of this narrative can be found in the works of one of the most prominent Czech historians, Miroslav Hroch.

While the narrative has been identified and its historical accuracy has been challenged and discussed multiple times already, I examined its diffusion patterns and its role, thus sketching its map. Thanks to this discourse-historical research drawing on Ruth Wodak’s methodology for national discourses, the narrative’s crucial role at the core of the Czech national myth is highlighted. The victimisation narrative enabled Czech Nationalism to be inclusive, to be efficiently branded when addressed to a foreign audience, and eventually, to gain considerable influence during one of the most important events of the twentieth century in Europe.

This inclusive character of the narrative is the main finding of the present research, alongside the extent of its diffusion. The narrative travelled from Prague to Paris, London, Geneva; it crossed the Atlantic Ocean and reached the shores of the New World through the Czech-American community; and it inspired Czech Jews to seize this unprecedented momentum and cross the traditionally impenetrable religious borders of Austria-Hungary.

Using both published and unpublished sources, including private correspondence of T. G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, Ernest Denis and other key figures of the Czech nation-building process, this analysis demonstrates through qualitative methods that the victimisation narrative was not just a small detail in Czech nationalism – it was its main driving force.

Keywords: First World War (1914-1918), Czech Nationalism, Czechoslovakia, T. G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, Ernest Denis, Czech-Americans

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This thesis is dedicated to him, obviously, the poor victim of my timeless academic pursuits.

* * *

May Europeans be once again inspired by the great spirit of T. G. Masaryk.

“Pravda vítězí”¹

The Czech Victimisation Narrative and the Creation of the First Czechoslovak Republic in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Introduction

Miroslav Hroch, in his key work on nationalism *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* published in 1985 in its English version, uses the term “oppressed nation” as a synonym of “small nation”. The book was first published in German in 1968; in this version, the term “unterdrückten Völkern” (oppressed nations) is used in a similar way, as a synonym of “kleine Völkern” (small nations).² According to his definition, a “small nation” is one that was “in subjection to a ruling nation for such a long period that the relation of subjection took on a structural character for both parties”³; thus, he includes in this definition most of the Central European nations, from the Polish to the Croat and the Lithuanian, at different levels. The term “oppressed” has a rather strong meaning and this meaning is at the core of the present research. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, to oppress means “to govern people in an unfair and cruel way and prevent them from having opportunities and freedom”. The Collins dictionary gives a slightly different definition: “to oppress people means to treat them cruelly, or to prevent them from having the same opportunities, freedom, and

¹ “Pravda vítězí” means “truth prevails”. It was the official motto of the First Czechoslovak Republic and it is now the motto of the Czech Republic: originally a quote from Jan Hus, one of the founding figures of this nation.

² Miroslav Hroch, *Die Vorkämpfer der Nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1968).

³ M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9.

benefits as others.” In a second definition for the very same verb, it mentions that oppression leads to feeling “depressed, anxious, and uncomfortable” for those subjected to it. As a final example of objective and official definition, the Oxford dictionary explains that to oppress means to “keep (someone) in subjection and hardship, especially by the unjust exercise of authority”. It adds a mention of the verb’s Latin origins, “opprimere”, which means “to press against”. It is worth noting that one, be it an institution or a person, can only oppress individuals – human beings, separately or as a group. Therefore, the definition given by Miroslav Hroch explicitly suggests that the ruling nations were acting with cruelty, unfairly and unjustly, and by doing so they were preventing the “small nations” from being free and being equal to others in terms of opportunities and benefits, causing them anxiety and discomfort. According to him, it was indeed the case for most of the Central and Eastern European nations, but also some Western European ones. It is important to first re-contextualise the concept of “nation” within the accurate period and society. In the case of this study, the concept of nation as introduced by Benedict Anderson⁴ will be used alongside the one of Miroslav Hroch, thus taking into account the constructivist approach with its “imagined community” notion without forgetting the historically and socially rooted origins of patriotic movements and national revivals. Therefore, the Czech nation in this study refers to the people who considered themselves and were registered in censuses as Bohemian, Moravian or Czech, or even those who declared speaking Czech as their main language, in some cases of national minorities relevant to this study. The Czechoslovak nation corresponds to the national identity created in the years leading to the First World War – and the creation of the First Czechoslovak Republic – and including both Czechs and Slovaks within the same national community. Thus, this analysis intends to respect as much as possible the historical definition of these nations and their related nationalities in the context of the given period (1914-1918). Indeed, making sense of the past requires that this past remains within its contemporary context. Otherwise, manipulations and abuses of this past, especially with political aims, can happen⁵ as we will see later. National identities did exist, but their definition and their indisputable character were radically different from the current situation.⁶

The nature of the oppression mentioned by Miroslav Hroch must also be further clarified and once again re-contextualised within the relevant period, namely the national revival spanning throughout the long nineteenth century. During this period, specific populations in

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁵ Jeremy Black, *Using History* (London: Hodder Education, 2005); and Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (2006), 5.

Europe did not have the same rights, and it was also the case within the Habsburg Empire – and later the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Some of the small nations such as the Slovak one, for instance, had a belated revival due to various factors including primarily forced assimilation (Magyarization) after the Compromise of 1867, and then, in a different scope, their inclusion into another nationalist concept, Czechoslovakism, in the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷ As Miroslav Hroch's research shows, the "social characteristics of the bearers of national agitation" were essential to the rise of the small nations.⁸ In the case of the Czech national revival, which started in the second half of the eighteenth century, the main nationalist, or patriotic, activities first originated from the German-speaking nobility, which then received the support of the bourgeoisie which included Czech-speaking individuals. From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the lower social classes increasingly joined the movement.⁹ The national revival was therefore not coming from below, but rather from upper social classes. Designating the Czech nation as a whole during this national revival period as oppressed does not represent accurately the situation within its contemporary context. One should also take into account the national awakening of German-speaking populations, which were present in multiple territories, not only the ones where they were the majority or the elite; the existence of other pan-national ideologies like Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism and Austro-Slavism is also noteworthy. Such a deliberate choice of vocabulary in Hroch's work can perhaps be explained by his own viewpoint and the political context he was living in at the time of writing his book. Impartial objectivity, after all, is hardly within the reach of historians, as professional and experienced as they can be, due to the nature of history itself and the sources historians rely on: "history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as a narrator."¹⁰

Even though the Enlightenment ideals and the French Revolution had a significant impact on both political and social aspects of people's lives throughout the European continent, it did not lead to massive reforms in all kingdoms. The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in this post-revolutionary atmosphere did not encourage the older monarchies to reform their systems, on the contrary. The situation within the Habsburg lands was thus typical of the *Ancien Régime*:

⁷ Elisabeth Bakke, "Doomed to Failure? The Czechoslovak Nation Project and the Slovak Autonomist Reaction 1919-1938" (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 1998), 179-238.

⁸ M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 14-17.

⁹ Rita Krueger, *Czech, German and Noble: Status and National Identity in Habsburg Bohemia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Ivan T. Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 102-105.

¹⁰ K. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (1991), 12. For further readings about the topic of objectivity in historical research, see also: K. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (1991), 5-26; and Peter Claus and John Marriott, *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 404.

social and political oppression was a reality, though not on the basis of nationality, but rather social class (inherited by birth), religion, loyalty to the emperor, and wealth acquired through land possessions and financial investments. As Keith Jenkins phrased it: “what determined a man’s position was what he was by birth, by what he had in him, so that a man just was ‘born to rule’, a man just was ‘born to serve’, a man just did know and have ‘his place’.”¹¹ Nobles, whether Bohemian, Hungarian or Austrian, had access to political power (local and imperial Diets) and sometimes were granted direct contact with the emperor himself depending on their functions and state duties.¹² As highlighted in Hroch’s research, the second phase of national agitation further included the middle-class into political life, at least at the local – as opposed to imperial – level. With this historical context in mind, we can thus hardly speak of an “oppressed nation” in the case of the Czech nation. Bohemian noble families such as the Sternberg, Kinsky, Czernin or the Nostitz were hardly oppressed;¹³ perhaps the imperial government was limiting their activities, especially during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), but they retained their political role and influence during the first two phases of national awakening.¹⁴ Unless, of course, these Bohemian noble families are not included in nowadays’ definition of the Czech nation – this would however be a different topic and imply a projection of recent definitions onto past events, thus undermining the relevance of this study. In a context of monarchies and empires legitimised by the logics of divine right and dynasties, Bohemian nobles were not more oppressed than their Hungarian counterparts, for instance – at least until 1867. Under the Dual Monarchy rule, multiple sources have shown how unequal the situations of Bohemian and Hungarian subjects were, particularly in terms of political representation. Nevertheless, by using the term “oppressed nation” as a synonym of “small nation” and including the Czech case in his analysis, Miroslav Hroch defined the Czech nation – his own – based on a narrative that incorporates his own bias and might not be historically accurate. Though his overall research succeeded in making sense of the specificities of the smaller European nations’ nationalism, the inclusion of this narrative within Czech historiography as was the case in his research is of interest for this paper.

¹¹ K. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (1991), 60-61.

¹² See for example: Charles Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1618-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and R. Krueger, *Czech, German and Noble* (2009).

¹³ Tomasz Kamusella, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 106.

¹⁴ R. Krueger, *Czech, German and Noble*, 56-57; Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 53-55.

Indeed, most of the literature available regarding the topic of the Czech nation and its nation-building process mentions terms such as “struggle”¹⁵, “liberation”¹⁶, or, in other cases such as Miroslav Hroch and Otto Radl¹⁷, “oppression”. Such terms denote a view that would be qualified as sympathetic to the Czech nation in its accession to independence and to the status of a nation-state. This is what triggered an interest in this specific topic: the presence of a common narrative in most of the research related to the Czech nation and its construction as an independent state. This narrative was recently addressed from a historical perspective by Mary Heimann, in her book *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*.¹⁸ However, she focused her research on the twentieth century, and especially the post-1918 developments. Her book, which challenged the view of the Czech nation as one that was the victim of its more powerful neighbours – be it Germany (1938), Russia (1948, 1968), or the Habsburgs and the Holy Roman Empire (from 1620 until 1918 especially) – was received rather negatively especially among Czech scholars. Her repeated attacks on the national myths of the Czech and Czechoslovak nations accompanied with small mistakes in her analysis give a strong impression of personal bias which could be perceived as an attempt to re-write history. Ladislav Holy recently offered a modern and sociological approach to this topic in his book *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*.¹⁹ In 1979, Gary B. Cohen addressed the topic, though it was included in a larger review of Czech nationalism’s historiography.²⁰ In 2009, Andrea Orzoff published a detailed account of Czech and Slovak propaganda activities during the war; the mythical dimension of Masaryk’s and Beneš’ perception of Czech nationalism was at the heart of her inquiry.²¹ Although she included both the heroic and the victimisation narratives and she aimed at explaining the consequences of the two leaders’ approach to Czech nationalism, which gives her monograph a much broader scope. She defined the narrative as follows:

¹⁵ The term, “boj” in Czech, is even present in the name of a national day, “Den boje za svobodu a demracii” (“Day of the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy”, November 17). It was regularly used by T. G. Masaryk in his speeches at the Reichsrat before the war, see for example: George J. Kovtun (ed), “We Want Equal Political Rights”, in *The Spirit of T. G. Masaryk (1850-1937): An Anthology* (New York: Masaryk Publications Trust and Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 53-60. Regarding the use of the term in historiography, see for example: Jaroslav Papoušek, *The Czechoslovak Nation’s Struggle for Independence* (Prague, 1928).

¹⁶ For the use of this term in historiography, see for example: Joseph Jahelka, “The Role of the Chicago Czechs in the Struggle for Czechoslovak Independence” (*Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 31 (1938)), 385, 387-388, 396.

¹⁷ Otto Radl, “Development of Czechoslovak Nationalism” (*The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 232 (1944), 61-70), 66-67.

¹⁸ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Gary B. Cohen, “Recent Research on Czech Nation-Building” (*The Journal of Modern History* 51, (1979), 760 – 772.

²¹ Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

“The story goes like this: under Habsburg rule, the innately democratic, peace-loving, tolerant Czechs were viciously repressed by bellicose, authoritarian, reactionary Austrians, under whose regime the Czech language and national consciousness almost died out. Czech identity was rescued by a heroic, devoted group of intellectuals, dubbed the Awakeners, who brought the dormant nation back to life by recrafting literary Czech, retelling Czech history, and making political claims on behalf of a ‘Czech nation.’”²²

The present study aims at building on her work by simultaneously narrowing down the analysis to only one narrative within the propaganda (the narrative of victimhood) and broadening the types of primary sources used (see the next section, “Research Corpus”). In this paper, we differentiate the narrative of ‘victimhood’ from the one of ‘martyrdom’. Indeed, we believe that latter holds a significantly religious meaning, while the other terms, ‘victimisation’ and ‘victimhood’, respect the secular character of Czech nationalism as thought by the main protagonist of the relevant period, T. G. Masaryk. We will show in the third chapter how crucial this transition to a strictly political narrative was in the Czech context. In the first chapter, we explain the impact Masaryk had on the victimisation narrative and its re-negotiated components, before and during the First World War.

The victimisation narrative has thus been identified previously as an instrumental element of the Czech national myth and identity, though it has rarely been analysed through the perspective considered here. The fact that this “victim thesis”²³ has been used by most – if not all – nations worldwide is noteworthy; this research does not intend to single-out the Czech nation nor to judge its use of this narrative. Such an approach would be counterproductive and would not contribute to the overall field of research in Czech nationalism studies.

Instead, this thesis aims at analysing the role of the victimisation narrative in the nation-building process of the First Czechoslovak Republic throughout the First World War, thus focusing on the timeline of the use of the narrative, but also on its geographical dimension, encompassing both the Czechs who were in Austria-Hungary and those who were abroad – be they in temporary exile or long-term emigres. Hence, such a study contributes to a better understanding of this narrative as part of the Czech national myth – and not only through the perspective of the main figures. The choice of the period is relevant not only due to the fact that the war was the first concrete opportunity for a major change in Central European political landscape since the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), but also because “the years before the First World War saw an upsurge in a nationalism that was strongly grounded in a presentation of

²² A. Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle* (2009), 11.

²³ Ruth Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 188.

history”²⁴, which explains the omnipresence of the victimisation narrative, as we will see in the following chapter. To fulfil its goals, this research will address the following questions:

What were the characteristics of the Czech victimisation narrative during the First World War? How did it interact with the Czech nation-building process? How can we interpret the mapping of the use of this narrative geographically and chronologically?

Research Corpus

For this study, it was necessary to use a variety of sources covering all the different perspectives and the relevant types of discourses. By types of discourses, it is implied the various levels of privacy of analysed documents, the categories of audiences, and the purposes of discursive uses of the narrative, as was clarified in previous studies of nationalism through similar methodological approaches.²⁵ In terms of perspectives, those include the point of view from within the Habsburg monarchy and therefore from Czech (Bohemian and Moravian) politicians, as well as the views of Czech and Slovak expatriates – actively involved in political life – living in Europe and the United States of America, and of foreigners engaged for the Czechoslovak cause. Therefore, the research corpus will include both published and unpublished sources including: personal correspondence of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937)²⁶, Edvard Beneš (1884-1948)²⁷, Karel Kramář (1860-1937), and Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880-1919)²⁸; newspaper articles published in Bohemia, Moravia, Austria, Switzerland, France, and the United States of America; monographs published in French and in English; transcripts in French, English, and Czech of speeches given in English, in Czech, and in French. The inclusion of all these perspectives is imperative since it will show where the victimisation narrative was the strongest and most influential: among Czechs in the Czech Lands and Vienna,

²⁴ J. Black, *Using History* (2005), 66-67.

²⁵ R. Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (2009), 187-188.

²⁶ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937) was a Czech philosopher, sociologist, politician, and founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He spent almost the entire time of the First World War in exile, due to risks of political repression related to his opposition activities. He was the first president of the First Czechoslovak Republic and was re-elected three times (1918-1935). Previously, he had been elected to the Austrian Reichsrat twice, first as member of the Young Czechs Party and then as member and founder of the Realist party.

²⁷ Edvard Beneš (1884-1948) was a Czech politician and diplomat. He spent most of the First World War in exile, helping Masaryk and Štefánik in the process of the creation of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He succeeded to Masaryk in 1935 and carried out two short mandates both marked by major political crises: the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the army of the Third Reich as a consequence of the Munich Agreement (1938) and the Communist coup of 1948.

²⁸ Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880-1919) was a Slovak politician, military and astronomer. He assisted Masaryk in the foundation of the First Czechoslovak Republic as Vice-President of the Czechoslovak National Council and became the new state's Minister of War. He was also a pilot in the French army during the First World War.

among Czech and Slovak expatriates abroad, or among foreign observers, for instance. Ernest Denis (1849-1921)²⁹ was one of these foreign observers: as a historian who focused on Bohemian history and as a contemporary of both František Palacký (1798-1876) and Masaryk, he had a significant role in the perception of the Czech nation abroad. Both his monograph *La Bohême Depuis la Montagne Blanche* ('Bohemia since White Mountain', 1903) and his journal *La Nation Tchèque* ('The Czech Nation', 1915-1919) are included in the research corpus. The latter is especially interesting since this journal was the main contact point between Ernest Denis and Edvard Beneš, as we will see later in the second chapter of this paper. The monograph is relevant to this study despite its publication preceding the chosen period by eleven years. Indeed, it clearly shows the influence of the victimisation narrative on how historians could depict the Czech nation in the end of the long nineteenth century, featuring obvious sympathy towards this "small nation" and equally obvious antipathy towards Austrians and Germans – represented mainly by the Habsburg monarchy prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The variety of sources used for this research entails a linguistic and a conceptual challenge, insofar as different versions of the same concepts and the same names were used in different languages and in different geographical and political contexts. All quotes were analysed in their original languages, namely Czech, German, English or French. Nevertheless, translations into English by the author of the study will be provided in this paper for the sake of clarity and to remain adequate regarding the international dimension of this work. In cases where the exact wording in its original language is relevant to the analysis, the translation will be given alongside the original version, in the corresponding footnotes.

The primary sources, printed or manuscripts, used within the scope of this study were mostly consulted at the Masaryk Institute Archives in Prague, Czech Republic; more precisely, they are located within the T. G. Masaryk (TGM) fond and the Edvard Beneš (EB) fond. In the case of the latter fond, some documents might have been overlooked due to the quantity of archives and the ongoing classification process. Nevertheless, given the focus on qualitative methods, this did not interfere with the relevance and accuracy of the findings. Furthermore, Czech (Bohemian) and Czech-American periodicals were consulted on the online platforms of the National Museum Archives (hereafter abbreviated NM), National Library of the Czech Republic (hereafter NL) and the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures

²⁹ Ernest Denis (1849-1921) was a French historian and journalist. He contributed to the Czech nation-building process with his periodicals *La Nation Tchèque* and *Le Monde Slave*. His actions in favour of the Czech, Slovak and Yugoslav nationalist projects granted him a long-term reputation and admiration within Slavic societies during his lifetime but also after his death, during the interwar period.

(hereafter Náprstek Museum). Published archive sources such as the periodicals or additional documents that remain stored in institutions located in the United States of America were mainly consulted in their digitalised form thanks to the Library of Congress' online collections (hereafter abbreviated LoC).

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research gives priority to qualitative approaches to critical discourse analysis (CDA), especially the discourse-historical approach as outlined by Ruth Wodak:

“Power-relations have to do with discourse, and CDA studies both power in discourse and power over discourse. [...] Language use may be ideological. To determine this it is necessary to analyse texts to investigate their interpretation, reception and social effects. Discourses are historical and can only be understood in relation to their context.”³⁰

Indeed, I analyse and interpret historical texts embedded in their specific culture, society and historical context, that shaped or helped shaping a political and nationalist discourse within which I will be looking for specific patterns – namely, the ones of the victimisation narrative. Discourses have always been at the heart of the construction of national identities due to their unifying patterns: “the discursive constructs of national identities emphasise foremost national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity, and largely tend to ignore intra-national difference (the discourses of sameness).”³¹ Therefore, this methodological approach is the most relevant for the present research and the use of the terms “text” and “discourse” are to be understood within this methodology.³² The coding of the collected data was done through a summative approach, using both descriptive and values coding methods to categorise the data corresponding to the victimisation narrative within the geographical, chronological and political dimensions necessary for the analysis.³³ All coding and codifying processes were done manually, though the classification was done thanks to the help of basic office software applications. The different types of sources (newspapers, correspondence, speeches, other documents) were classified by type, date, publishing place, and language. The discourse

³⁰ Ruth Wodak, and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002), 146.

³¹ R. Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (2009), 186.

³² R. Wodak, and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2002), 147-148.

³³ Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd ed., Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd, 2015), 1-42.

analysis was carried out in the aim of identifying phrases, sentences or general comments making reference to the victimisation narrative, not in the form of a linguistic or “word-by-word” analysis of the sources: “A fundamental distinction is made between contents, argumentation strategies, and forms of linguistic implementation as analytical levels. Under linguistic implementation a distinction is drawn between text, sentence and word levels.”³⁴ Only documents in which the narrative was clearly visible were selected in order to avoid interferences of personal interpretation. Personal correspondence was used to identify specific events that were highlighted – or not – in this narrative; the reactions to these events were then analysed based on how Czech and German (Austrian), but also Czech-American newspapers reported on them, also including in this corpus the reactions of Czech in other foreign countries such as France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. References in other articles or personal correspondences to specific articles and newspapers that featured the narrative as their main theme – such as *La Nation Tchèque* (‘The Czech Nation’), for instance – are also studied carefully since the use of these sources can show a conscious selection of ‘biased’ (partisan) sources, for instance. This research has therefore analysed public discourses, as well as private ones; most of the primary sources originated from persons belonging to the political or academic elites in their respective countries.

Given the fact that this paper is primarily based on qualitative research, it is essential to clarify the use of certain terms and names in all the different languages covered by this research. In the case of names of people and places, except in specific cases where the original version of the name might hinder the clarity of the argument and the international version is widely known (Wien – *Vienna*; Praha – *Prague*), the version used in this paper corresponds to the way the name was written in the original language – Czech names will be used for Czech persons, French names for French persons, German names for German and Austrian persons. For instance, the English term “Battle of White Mountain” will be preferred to the Czech name “Bitva na Bílé hoře” or its German version. However, the names, and especially the first names, of historical figures such as Jan (John) Hus, Tomáš (Thomas) Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard (Edward, Eduard) Beneš will remain untranslated – since the original Czech version remains easily comprehensible for an international, non-Czech speaking audience despite the existence of an international version. Eventually, titles included in the research corpus will be referred to with their original title alongside an English translation in parenthesis, as seen previously with Ernest Denis’ monographs and journals.

³⁴ R. Wodak, and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2002), 155-156, 158.

The main difficulty inherent to writing about this research topic lies in the linguistic-historical complexity of geographical adjectives and nouns used with a direct relation to their meaning within nationalism studies. Indeed, the terms “Czech” and “Bohemian”, for instance, could technically refer to the same population since in Czech, “Čech” means both Czech and Bohemian. Furthermore, “Czech Lands” and “Bohemian Crown Lands” on one side and “Bohemia and Moravia” on the other do not refer to the same territory, since the former two also included – depending on historical periods – parts or the entirety of Silesia, Lusatia and the Palatinate. Such a differentiation is taken into account in this paper; therefore, all three terms are used accordingly. Though the difference between both words is non-existent in the Czech language (‘Čech’), since this paper is written in the English language, the term “Bohemian” will refer to Bohemia proper, while the term “Czech” will refer to Bohemia and Moravia and these geographical territories population using Czech language and nationality as their main identity. Thus, a differentiation will systematically be made between Czechs, German-speaking Czechs, Germans, and Austrians, for instance. The term “Czechoslovakia” is used in reference to the territory of the First Czechoslovak Republic, as planned by the Czech and Slovak leaders prior to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.³⁵ The adjective “Czechoslovak” is reserved strictly to the state and nationalist identity designed by these leaders. The official nationality will not be referred to as such in any context preceding 1918, since it did not exist legally yet and is still subject to various interrogations and debates regarding its historical existence as a nationalist concept before the creation of the Czechoslovak state.

³⁵ In this version, the territory of the First Czechoslovak Republic was to include nowadays’ Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as parts of nowadays’ Ukrainian territory and additional borderlands along the current delimitations (including lands now part of Hungary). See the map published in *La Nation Tchèque*, 01.02.1917; and Jan Křen, *Konfliktní Společenství Češi a Němci 1780-1918* (Prague: Academia, 1990), 395.

Chapter 1 – Czech Nationalism & the Victimisation Narrative

National myths are an essential part of our identities. Indeed, “[a]ll societies have myths. They provide a sense of who we are, where we come from and why we are here but they do not necessarily relate to real or even plausible accounts of the past.”³⁶ This approach to the issue of nations, national identities or character, and their social construction throughout history is the one defended mainly by Benedict Anderson, as well as Ernest Gellner and Ernest Renan, though with differences in what this construction entails. Indeed, for Anderson, the constructivist approach does not necessarily imply that nations are a forgery or an invention with no or very limited credible and historical background, but rather a valuable creation.³⁷

Even though this study does not aim at debunking parts or the entirety of the Czech national myth, explaining what shaped the narrative of victimhood as well as its purpose within the nation-building process necessarily involves addressing its propaganda dimension, i.e. the scope of what was realistic, confirmed by facts, and what was part of the myth. Nevertheless, doing so by systematically attacking this victimisation pattern as was done recently adds a layer of bias that could create yet another myth – this time of a nation that failed at building itself in a consistent way because of its own disillusion. It is relevant to mention that “Masaryk searched hard for examples of oppression and barbarism to put Austria on the same propaganda footing as Germany and win for the Czechs the kind of sympathy that was being shown to the Belgians,”³⁸ for instance, though judging the legitimacy of this narrative and assessing whether this behaviour was the right one at the time should not be part of historians’ objectives.³⁹ Hence, the importance of the present study lies in not only having a historically accurate picture of the Czech nation-building process, but also in mapping and recontextualising the use of this specific narrative within Czech propaganda efforts during the First World War. It was indeed part of a political and diplomatic strategy during this period, as we will see, though it was not used in the same fashion and for the same purposes across the Czech and international political landscapes.

³⁶ P. Claus and J. Marriott, *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice* (2017), 374.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (2006), 6.

³⁸ M. Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (2009), 29.

³⁹ P. Claus and J. Marriott, *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice* (2017), 375; Giovanni Levi, “The Distant Past: On the Political Use of History”, and François Hartog and Jacques Revel, “Historians and the Present Conjuncture” (in *Political Uses of the Past*, London: Frank Cass, 2002), 1-12, 61-73.

Historians had a responsibility in the diffusion of the narrative of victimhood within the Czech society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ Indeed, its central position within the Czech national ideology came from political discourses backed by historiography and influenced, among others, by the debate on the meaning of Czech history and the forged manuscripts, and later by Communist propaganda that spanned until the end of the twentieth century. As François Hartog and Jacques Revel explain, “[h]istorians are in the front line of these large-scale manoeuvres because they produce the more or less authorized versions of the past and may sometimes do this for an audience larger than their colleagues.”⁴¹ During the nineteenth century, which saw the main phases of national awakening develop⁴², the general nationalist trend was to emphasise the links between past and present: "past greatness and pretensions were crucial components of national myths, and the continuity of present and past was stressed."⁴³ In the Czech case, just like in most other nations – great or small, to use the same terms as Miroslav Hroch – this trend was accompanied by a surge of medievalism⁴⁴: the seventeenth century marked the end of the Czech golden age according to national awakeners such as Palacký, Jungmann and Dobrovský.⁴⁵

In this chapter, we will therefore focus on explaining the general context of the victimisation narrative and highlight its presence in Masaryk’s political and philosophical thinking. Then, we will present detailed findings from the analysis of the research corpus, aiming at giving a clear and accurate picture of what the concept of a victimisation narrative entails. In the last part of this first chapter, we will address more precisely aspects related to the chronology of the use of the narrative by Czech and Slovak political leaders as well as the press, both in Europe and in the United States of America. The geographical dimension will be covered in the next chapters.

T. G. Masaryk & the Meaning of Czech History

To better understand the context in which the victimisation narrative was used during the First World War, we first need to consider Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk’s political and philosophical thought, as well as his stance on the meaning of Czech history. The main elements composing his approach to politics are the relationship between religion, moral and reason, and

⁴⁰ G. B. Cohen, “Recent Research on Czech Nation-Building” (1979), 760.

⁴¹ F. Hartog and J. Revel, “Historians and the Present Conjuncture” (in *Political Uses of the Past*, 2002), 3.

⁴² M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (1985).

⁴³ J. Black, *Using History* (2005), 57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 66.

⁴⁵ A. Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle* (2009), 26-28, 32; H. L. Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (1993), 249-250.

the dual issue of accountability and individualism.⁴⁶ His main philosophical influence came from the German philosopher Herder, as well as David Hume. Though Masaryk had some positivist traits, he was often going against this current, which drew him to realism⁴⁷ – going as far as founding the Realist political party in 1900. He used his philosophical approach in his writings about history and in his political life, which gave its singular character to his perception of the position of Czechs – or even Slavs – within European nations:

“In *Modern Man and Religion*⁴⁸, Masaryk [...] points to four themes that had drawn him to Herder's thought: [...] (2) his theory of causation and continuity in history and its attempt to combine the idea of humanity's self-determination with the idea of a providential order; (3) his vision of the future of the Slavs as the bearers of a cultural and ethical mission; and (4) his belief in the compatibility of particularism and universalism in the interpretation of nationality.”⁴⁹

His influence on the developments of the Czech nation-building process and the use of the victimisation narrative during the First World War is clearly visible through the propaganda published by the Czechoslovak National Council in the press, both in his homeland and abroad. Indeed, according to him, among all Slavic nations, the Czechs had a significant responsibility, which he branded as a “mission”, due to its past and its national tradition of justice, humanity, and democracy which he linked directly to Jan Hus and the Taborites. It is important to note here that in Masaryk's perspective, democracy was not only a political framework, but also “the belief that every single man should be able to strive for perfection”⁵⁰, thus making any obstacle to such development a case of evident oppression: “[a] national, political centralism is necessarily connected with political oppression.”⁵¹ As Frederick Barnard highlights, the philosophical dimension of the concept of victim was at the heart of Masaryk's political ideals:

“[...] the tension between autonomy and heteronomy, which, in their thinking, largely parallels the tension between human beings' understanding of themselves as self-directing agents and possessors of freedom, on the one hand, and as other-directed servants, instruments or victims, within an order not of their own making, on the other.”⁵²

⁴⁶ Frederick M. Barnard, “Humanism and Titanism: Masaryk and Herder” (in *T. G. Masaryk (1850-1937): Thinker and Politician*, vol. 1, 1990): 23-43.

⁴⁷ E. Bakke, “Doomed to Failure?” (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 1998), 127.

⁴⁸ T. G. Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1938).

⁴⁹ F. Barnard, “Humanism and Titanism” (1990), 24.

⁵⁰ René Wellek, “The Philosophical Basis of Masaryk's Political Ideals” (*Ethics* 55, no 4 (1945)), 300, 303.

⁵¹ G. J. Kovtun (ed), “We Want Equal Political Rights”, in *The Spirit of T. G. Masaryk* (1990), 55.

⁵² F. Barnard, “Humanism and Titanism” (1990), 23.

We can thus see how the position of Czechs as collective victims of the Habsburgs within the established monarchical system was present in Masaryk's political thought; as he phrased it himself in 1893: "We have learned from the past just what to *fear* from an *unjust* centralised government."⁵³ This victimhood was, as he framed it, unintentional, even forced on Czechs: "In the face of a government that proclaims such principles, representatives of the Czech people have no choice but opposition, they have no choice but to defend the rights of the people with all their strength and determination."⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Czech mission was also to oppose German culture and to fight against its domination over Central Europe – as a shield, in a certain way, for all Slavic and Latin nations present in this region: "It was the job of our awakeners to gather all the dormant Czech forces together, to spark them to active life, and to nourish the flame of Czech culture that could successfully compete with its German rival."⁵⁵ Through his speeches and writings, it is also clear that for him, this perception corresponded to a historical, legal and philosophical fact, which he addressed most of the time from a scholarly and detached perspective instead of an emotional or Romantic one – one notable exception being the *Czech Question*⁵⁶, written shortly after he resigned from his parliamentary seat in the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, he did not support mythical approaches to nationalism, including the then-popular ideologies of Pan-Germanism⁵⁷ and Pan-Slavism.⁵⁸ During the First World War, this position towards the latter triggered tensions between himself and Josef Dürich (1847-1927)⁵⁹, as we will see in the following chapter.

Masaryk's political activities prior to the outbreak of the war were the basis for his leadership position throughout the studied period. Indeed, the fact that his reputation was of a trustworthy politician both within the Czech lands and abroad was essential; besides, he was among the few political figures who chose to go into exile instead of moderating his remarks against the regime. On this particular point, he was opposed mainly to Karel Kramář (1860-1937)⁶⁰ – this

⁵³ G. J. Kovtun (ed), "We Want Equal Political Rights", in *The Spirit of T. G. Masaryk* (1990), 58. Emphases added.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

⁵⁵ G. J. Kovtun (ed), "Czechs and their Awakening", in *The Spirit of T. G. Masaryk* (1990), 63.

⁵⁶ T. G. Masaryk, *Česká Otázka* (Prague, 1895).

⁵⁷ Robert J. Kerner, "Two Architects of New Europe: Masaryk and Beneš" (*The Journal of International Relations* 12, No 1 (July 1921)), 31.

⁵⁸ R. Wellek, "The Philosophical Basis of Masaryk's Political Ideals" (1945), 300.

⁵⁹ Josef Dürich (1847-1927) was a Czech politician actively involved in the nation-building process of the Czechoslovak state during the First World War; he was mainly based in Russia, where he contributed, alongside Milan Ratislav Štefánik, to the creation of the Czechoslovak Legion.

⁶⁰ Karel Kramář (1860-1937) was a Czech politician, member and leader of the Young Czechs Party (Národní strana svobodomyšlná, also known as Mladočeši). He chose to stay in the Czech lands during the First World War as a political opposition leader; he was imprisoned and condemned to death penalty for high treason during the war, though granted amnesty following a wave of protests in his defence. His activities were crucial to the developments of the Czechoslovak state.

political rivalry between the two men had started long before the war, though it did not prevent them from cooperating multiple times before, during and after 1918.⁶¹ Indeed, Kramář tried to maintain an activity of political opposition from within the monarchy, which implied a great deal of obstacles such as censorship (and self-censorship) and political repression, as we will see in the third chapter.

Due to his role, but also to his intellectual aura during this crucial period for the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state, Masaryk had a lasting impact on Czech nationalism, as well as on Czech historiography. His stance on the meaning of Czech history contributed to placing the notion of oppression at the centre of the Czech identity, making it an accepted and acceptable historical truth with a scholarly background – a key element in the Czech nation-building process. Indeed, the Czech national awakeners were already coming from the intelligentsia – middle-class and aristocracy alike – in the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. While the narrative of victimhood was already present in Czech patriotic literature before the First World War, the extent and nature of its use in official and diplomatic communications was unprecedented during this period due to the exceptional character of the historical context. Masaryk's reputation as a professor played a significant role in this development, both within the Czech lands, then Czechoslovakia, and among Czechs abroad. The political opposition during the interwar period focused heavily on this narrative as well, attacking Masaryk for what was perceived as a betrayal of this very same 'Czech nation's mission'; one of the leaders of this opposition which perpetuated the victimisation narrative was Jaroslav Durych (1886-1962).⁶² This political choice shows how important the narrative was both during the war and once the First Czechoslovak Republic was established, but also how central Masaryk's role was in establishing it as a political discourse. However, to better understand this phenomenon of the narrative of victimhood, we first need to define the narrative itself in the corpus considered for the present research.

Defining the Victimisation Narrative in the Research Corpus

The research corpus was categorised according to four types of documents, four languages, as well as sorted chronologically and geographically. The main categories used within the analysis were the types of documents and the dates. We will address in detail two chronological highlights of the use of the victimisation narrative in the following part. The

⁶¹ R. J. Kerner, "Two Architects of New Europe" (1921), 33.

⁶² Michal Kopeček, "Jaroslav Durych: The Mission of the Czech State," in *Anti-Modernism: Radical Revisions of Collective Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 2014), 183-184.

following chapters will look into the geographical aspect of the narrative's diffusion. In the present part, we focus on a detailed presentation of the narrative itself, according to the types of documents for each language used in the corpus, in order to have a clear definition of the victimisation narrative within the context of the First World War and the Czech nation-building process. The four types of documents are the following: newspaper articles and transcripts of speeches that were published between 1914 (included) and 1918 (included); letters and telegrams sent between 1914 (included) and 1918 (included); monographs published shortly before, or during the war (1914-1918); other documents such as official documents from Austrian, French, British and American authorities, drafts of articles prior to their publication, drafts of speeches, and personal notes, all dated during the war in the archives. All the documents analysed were written in four main languages: Czech, French, English and German. As mentioned in the methodological statement of the introduction, the analysis was done in the aim of identifying a narrative within texts, therefore the strictly linguistic dimension was not analysed unless it was important for the overall study. Nevertheless, this part of the paper differs from the rest since most of the quoted content will be given in its original language, alongside its English translation in brackets following the quotes. This is for the sake of better clarity in the consecutive parts, since we are now aiming at defining what is intended when referring to the "victimisation narrative" or "narrative of victimhood".

In the Czech-language sources of the corpus, the victimisation narrative was characterised by the prevalence of indirect references related to the thematic of the victim or oppressed nation such as: "osvobození utlačených národů"⁶³ (liberation of oppressed nations) and "osvobodzení"⁶⁴ (liberation); "[o]dvěký boj proti cizímu utlačovateli"⁶⁵ (struggle against foreign oppressor), where the oppressor is the state of Austria-Hungary, sometimes alongside Germany; other references to the terms "boj"⁶⁶ (struggle, fight); "persekuce"⁶⁷ (persecution); "cenzura"⁶⁸ (censorship); references to the word "smrt"⁶⁹ (death), including with terms such as "massakr"⁷⁰ (massacre) and "zastřelit"⁷¹ (shoot). It also included phrases that require to be

⁶³ "Zástupci českého a slovenského národa před kongresním výborem ve Washingtoně" (*V Boji!*, 25.03.1916), 41.

⁶⁴ "Dvě historické lži" (*V Boji!*, 11.05.1916), 68.

⁶⁵ Letter from B. to T. G. Masaryk, on 11.11.1918, in Ladislav Hladký, Jana Škerlová, and Pavel Cibulka (eds), *Korespondence T. G. Masaryk – Slované; Jižní Slované* (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Historický ústav AV ČR, 2015). This source will be abbreviated as Kor. TGM-Slované in the following references.

⁶⁶ For example: "Politický přehled" (*Národní Listy*, 15.03.1916), 2; "Dvojí česká politika" (*Československá Samostatnost*, 10.05.1917), 3-5.

⁶⁷ For example: "Prof. Masaryk" (*Československá Samostatnost*, 08.10.1915), 2.

⁶⁸ For example: "Situace v Rakousku" (*Československá Samostatnost*, 08.10.1915), 2.

⁶⁹ For example: "Česká Srdece" (*V Boji!*, 05.05.1917), 1.

⁷⁰ "Massakr Dělníků ve Štýru" (*Slavie*, 24.11.1916), 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

considered within the context of the full text for the upcoming analysis, either due to their objective meaning without this context or due to the nature of the text itself, such as: “svoboda”⁷² (freedom) used in reference to the Czech (or Czechoslovak) nation’s freedom and independence; “tragické krásy”⁷³ (tragic beauty); “vzpomínka neumírající vši naší slávy i pádu”⁷⁴ (remembering all our glory and our fall); “velezrada”⁷⁵ (high treason). A third approach to this narrative was to make direct references to specific historical events and figures which did not require any further explanations as to their purpose in the texts given the nature of the audience – they had the accurate background to grasp the implied meaning of such references.⁷⁶ The absence of more direct references such as the term “victim” itself, for instance, is worth noting within the Czech-language corpus and the sources’ respective contexts, as we will see in the third chapter of this paper. Slovak was also used in some sources, though given the close relationship between both languages and both nations – as well as their common project at the time – it was not considered separately for this research.

In the French-language sources of the corpus, the victimisation narrative was depicted in a much more direct way as in the Czech-language sources. It is essential at this point to note that both Masaryk and Beneš were fluent in French. Therefore, they used it as much – if not more – as their native Czech in their personal correspondences, depending on the period, and they were aware at ease with such vocabulary despite their numerous grammatical mistakes or approximations. Thus, specific terms and phrases directly or indirectly related to the narrative were used, such as: the verbs “dominer”⁷⁷ (to dominate) and “anéantir”⁷⁸ (to destroy), where the domination and destruction was aimed against the Czechs and with a similar use of the corresponding substantives and adjectives; “lutte”⁷⁹ (struggle); “pendaison”⁸⁰ and “soldats pendus”⁸¹ (hanging, hung soldiers), the soldiers being Czechoslovaks; “[e]lle est une oppression organisée”⁸² (it is an organised oppression), where “it” refers to the state of Austria-Hungary;

⁷² “Masarykova sekta” (*V Boji!*, 11.05.1917), 11-12.

⁷³ “Česká Srdce” (*V Boji!*, 05.05.1917), 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Prof. Masaryk” (*Československá Samostatnost*, 08.10.1915), 2.

⁷⁶ These references are studied in more details in the third chapter. See for example: “Mír a československá otázka” (*Československá Samostatnost*, 10.05.1917), 1-2.

⁷⁷ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, on 26.12.1917, in Dagmar Hájková, and Ivan Šedivý (eds), *Korespondence T. G. Masaryk – Edvard Beneš (1914–1918)* (Prague: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, Ústav T. G. Masaryka, 2004), 248-249. This reference will hereafter be abbreviated Kor. TGM-EB.

⁷⁸ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, on 07.11.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 174.

⁷⁹ For example: “Les Tchecoslovaques : Leur Histoire et Leur Civilisation, Leur Lutte et Leur Travail, Leur Rôle dans le Monde”, 1918, MÚA, EB, IV, R12B/1.

⁸⁰ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, on 26.11.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 182.

⁸¹ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, on 01.12.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 185.

⁸² Letter from T. G. Masaryk (signing with his pseudonym Marsden) to E. Beneš, on 26.12.1917 (Kor. TGM-EB), 248-249.

“libération”⁸³ (liberation), in most cases of Europe or of the Czech (Czechoslovak) nation from the aforementioned oppression originating from Germans, Austrians and Hungarians (Magyars); “cause”⁸⁴ (same meaning as in English); “souffrance”⁸⁵ (suffering); “injustice”⁸⁶. Additionally, phrases featuring the characteristics of the victimisation narrative in spite of containing no exact term displaying this theme were also used. The emphases made in italic in the following quotes are meant to show where the narrative appears in the sentence – though the whole sentence is needed for the final analysis. In case no word has been highlighted, the full sentence should be considered for this part of the analysis. These phrases include among others: “attentat *contre nous*”⁸⁷ (an attack *against us*); “*chez nous la situation est très grave*”⁸⁸ (*at home the situation is very serious*), “chez nous et en Autriche la situation est *excessivement grave*”⁸⁹ (*at home and in Austria the situation is extremely serious*); “*jeter la discorde* parmi les tchèques”⁹⁰ (*sow discord* within the Czech community), where this is framed as a wilful act within the Austrian government’s strategy to further divide Czechs and better oppress them. We can see that in terms of vocabulary, a significantly more direct and emotional approach was used in French-language sources, whether these were written by Masaryk or Beneš themselves, or by other persons.

In the English-language sources of the corpus, the narrative was highlighted thanks to the use of terms and phrases that were directly or indirectly linked to it – most of them similar to the previous terms in the Czech and French sources. These terms were: “liberation”⁹¹; “oppression”⁹²; “subject peoples”⁹³; “exploitation” (or the verb “to exploit”)⁹⁴; “sacrifice”⁹⁵; “persecuted.”⁹⁶ We have again an emotionally charged and explicit vocabulary used in this part of the corpus, in a very similar way as it was done in the French one.

⁸³ Letter from T. G. Masaryk (signing with his pseudonym Marsden) to E. Beneš, on 26.12.1917 (Kor. TGM-EB), 248-249.

⁸⁴ For instance: letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, on 29.09.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB), 28-29.

⁸⁵ Telegram written in French and in English, signed by Beneš, Kramař, Stanek, Klofac, Haberman, Kalina, Svoboda and Preiss, sent by E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik, on 11.11.1918 (MÚA, TGM V-VIII-17/b, 295).

⁸⁶ E. Denis, *La Nation Tchèque*, 01.05.1915.

⁸⁷ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, on 07.11.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 174.

⁸⁸ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, on 08.06.1918 (Kor. TGM-EB), 256-258.

⁸⁹ Letter from E. Beneš to T.G. Masaryk, on 30.09.1918 (Kor. TGM-EB), 283-285.

⁹⁰ Letter from J. E. Pichon to E. Beneš, on 16.03.1916, MÚA, EB IV-R48/1a/2, 73.

⁹¹ Letter from B. P. to T. G. Masaryk, on 03.12.1918 (TGM-Slované).

⁹² “Lighting the Slav Bomb in Austria” (*New York Tribune*, 01.06.1918), 26.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Evžen Štern, *Opinions of T. G. Masaryk* (Prague, 1918), 55-56.

⁹⁵ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to M. R. Štefánik, on 19.11.1918, in Jan Rychlík (ed), *Korespondence T. G. Masaryk – slovenští veřejní činitelé (do r. 1918)* (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2008), 151. This source will hereafter be abbreviated Kor. TGM-MRS.

⁹⁶ Letter to T. G. Masaryk, 23.12.1915, MÚA, TGM, V-VII-32a/2.

The German corpus was mostly used for the sake of comparing the eventual disparities between Czech-language articles and German-language articles reporting on the same events; the purpose was to see whether a similar vocabulary had been used on both sides, otherwise highlighting the use of a victimhood discourse. Hence, we will not give a list of terms here, since Czechs and Slovaks were not using German unless they had to – for instance when certain communications in Czech were prohibited – and these were under an increased control of the Austrian authorities. Most of the documentation in German language used during this research consisted of official documents issued by the Viennese government.

All the aforementioned terms and phrases were used multiple times by various authors of articles, letters, speeches or monographs. They were thus useful to identify the narrative in a consistent way throughout the research. In the following part and chapters, we will see how the use of the narrative interacted with the contemporary context and the different geographical areas relevant to the study. At this point of the analysis, we can say that the victimisation narrative was characterised by the use of both direct and indirect references to the status of victim of the Czech nation during the First World War. It was used widely enough to cover three international languages in addition to the expected Czech language. It is important to note the international character of the vocabulary, since it gives crucial information to better discern the functions of such a narrative as used by the main Czech leaders and their foreign allies. Indeed, the discrepancies of vocabulary in different types of sources using the same language shows that the linguistic aspect was not solely considered when using this narrative: the audience or recipient of the message, be it an article, a letter, a speech or in any other form, was as important. We can also point out the different approaches within the narrative: some terms have a negative connotation, directly depicting Czechs as passive victims, whereas other terms gave a more positive image similar to a resistance movement, actively fighting against the enemy. This was due, as we will see in the third chapter, to the presence of another narrative which also had to remain part of the official propaganda alongside the narrative of victimhood for similar diplomatic reasons – though with a distinct function of its own. After addressing the narrative's idiosyncratic traits, we must address its chronological use, and more specifically the two peaks identified during this research.

1916 & 1918: Highlights of a Political Strategy

As we could see in the previous part, many of the documents identified as containing the narrative of victimhood were either written, sent or published in 1916 and 1918; it was especially the case abroad. Due to this finding, it was necessary to look closer into this phenomenon and understand the reasons behind this chronological distribution of the narrative. A quantitative analysis of the research corpus based on keywords related to “oppression” showed an interesting evolution in the number of occurrences throughout the period studied. Indeed, there was a rise in the use of the narrative in Czech newspapers published in the United States of America in 1916 as well as in 1918. In 1916, there was an increase of 155,5% in occurrences of the narrative, to be considered in comparison with the decrease of 54% in 1915. In 1918, the surge was of 23%, while it was of only 13% from 1916 to 1917.⁹⁷ This phenomenon was confirmed in the rest of the research corpus, especially in private correspondences sent to and by Edvard Beneš. This observation could be explained with multiple hypotheses depending on the angle chosen for the analysis. For instance, at the scale of the continent-wide or later world-wide conflict, the overall military strategy of the allied forces required from the Czechs to renew their allies’ interest in the Czech question during these two years. Indeed, the dismantlement of the monarchical state of Austria-Hungary was not the intended purpose nor the priority of the war at the beginning of and during the conflict. Still in 1917 and 1918, it was shown that such an outcome was not as evident as advocates of the Czech cause hoped.⁹⁸ The frontlines were not located solely in Central Europe; the French government, for example, had to concentrate its military efforts on its own battlefield opposing it directly against Germany – not Austria-Hungary. By crossing secondary sources’ information about the developments of the war with the correspondence between the Czech and Slovak exiled leaders, we can see how changes in the use of the narrative sometimes correspond to a major military event. One noteworthy example that demonstrates this hypothesis’ credibility is the inclusion and later on exclusion from this common narrative of victimhood in the Czechoslovak propaganda of certain Slavic nations that were seeking similar recognition by the Entente powers, depending on the latter’s diplomatic and military interests at the time. This had a direct impact on overall Czech victimisation narrative, since it meant decreasing the amount of references to the thesis that

⁹⁷ Based on the search by keywords and dates carried out on the online databases of the National Museum Archives in March 2019. The results were: 59 documents in 1914; 27 documents in 1915; 69 documents in 1916; 78 documents in 1917; 96 documents in 1918.

⁹⁸ J. Jahelka, “The Role of the Chicago Czechs” (1938), 401, 407.

Austrians and Germans in general, alongside Hungarians (Magyars), were a threat to Slavic and Latin people in general in Central Europe, i.e. the thesis of the oppressed majority against the oppressive minority. The developments in the Balkans, on the frontline with Russia, and in Italy were at the heart of such changes in the main powers' strategies. In a letter sent in September 1916, for example, we can see the following request from Masaryk: "Tell Dr Osuský to write an article about a) the Magyar atrocities against the Romanians – see Cantacuzino, the Romanians in Hungary, b) about the Romanian-Slovak and Serbian alliance – it was in the 1890s. The common programme is interesting now."⁹⁹ We see clearly that the information disseminated in the different press channels available to the Czechs abroad was carefully considered. Thus, we can see various articles responding to this demand from Masaryk in the end of 1916. For instance, in *Československá samostatnost* published on September 21, 1916, we can see the emphasis made on the relations between Pan-Germanism and Hungarian nationalism: "And so the Magyars embraced Germany *to crush the Hungarian Slavs*."¹⁰⁰ In another letter sent in December 1917, Beneš wrote to Masaryk that "at this moment, we must *concentrate all our forces on propaganda* and on reorganising our country".¹⁰¹ As was seen with the quantitative analysis of the corpus from abroad, the number of occurrences of the narrative of victimhood increased significantly in the following months. It is clear from these examples that the narrative of victimisation was deliberately used for political purposes following explicit requests, from the different Czech and Slovak leaders. It is interesting that the topics of the articles were clearly stated, though the presence of the narrative was implied, as a constant norm; it was never mentioned expressly. We will see in the following chapter how this also had an impact in the case of the Paris-based activities with Ernest Denis and Edvard Beneš switching roles concerning *La Nation Tchèque* in 1917, among others.

The fluctuations in the use of the victimisation narrative can also be interpreted on the basis of the political strategy organised and thought by Masaryk and Beneš, as well as their respective situations at given moments. Indeed, they both went into exile between the end of 1914 (for Masaryk) and mid-1915 (for Beneš),¹⁰² and it took them a few months to settle in their new environment, meet with the relevant persons, and initiate the first steps of their political strategy abroad. This is especially true in the case of Beneš, who was not known to the general public,

⁹⁹ Letter (in French) from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, 08.09.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 153.

¹⁰⁰ "Slovensko, pangermanismus, a Maďari" (*Československá samostatnost*, 21.09.1916), 3. Originally written in Slovak, emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ Letter (in French) from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, sent in December 1917 (Kor. TGM-EB), 250-251. Emphasis added.

¹⁰² A. Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle* (2009), 23, 40.

whether in Austria-Hungary, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom or the United States of America, before the war and his activities within the framework of the Czechoslovak nation-building process.¹⁰³ Thus, he first had to establish contact with various politicians, journalists, diplomats and academics, so that information would then be published and disseminated outside the relatively limited circles of Ernest Denis and the Czech emigres in Paris. In London, Masaryk started his activities mainly in the end of 1915 and beginning of 1916, giving lectures about the history of the small Czech nation, but also the mission of this nation. We can see in his correspondence that he was regularly invited at various occasions and at various institutions, especially following his nomination at London's King College as lecturer of sociology and Slavonic literature within the newly founded School of Slavonic Studies.¹⁰⁴ The quantity of invitations that he could not fulfil shows that his situation was less complicated than the one of Beneš in France, in terms of outreach capacities, at least. His use of the narrative of victimhood was more academic than in the case of Ernest Denis, despite the latter's opinion on the matter.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, it did include his perception of the meaning of Czech history which, as seen previously, was characterised by an underlying discourse of victimhood. These facts contribute to the explanation of the rise in occurrences of the narrative during the year 1916 in France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. As a direct consequence, it was also increasing the narrative's presence in the United States of America given the strategy adopted by the Czech-American community there. Indeed, one of the functions of the Czech-American periodicals was to act as an intermediary between the developments in Austria-Hungary and the Czech-Americans who were closely watching the situation in their 'old country' – their own sources being Masaryk himself or other Czechs and Slovaks from his network, known as the *Maffie*¹⁰⁶ during the time that preceded Masaryk change of strategy in 1915.

Last but not least and specifically for the year 1918, this increased use of the narrative of victimisation can easily be explained by the overall context of the final stages in negotiations regarding the future map of Europe. In these circumstances, Czechs and Slovaks needed to secure a favourable deal for their future independent Czechoslovak state. The fact that information about potential secret negotiations between France and Austria that could hinder Czechoslovak ambitions had reached Beneš and Masaryk¹⁰⁷ could also explain why they

¹⁰³ B. Michel, "Le rôle d'Ernest Denis" (1993), 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ "Mr. Asquith and Small Nations: Slavonic Studies at London University", *The Times*, 12.10.1915, MÚA, TGM, V-VIII, 283, 35/a/1).

¹⁰⁵ B. Michel, "Le rôle d'Ernest Denis" (1993), 19-20; A. Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle* (2009), 24.

¹⁰⁶ A. Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle* (2009), 39-40; J. Křen, *Konfliktní Společenství Češi a Němci 1780-1918* (1990), 418-419.

¹⁰⁷ R. J. Kerner, "Two Architects of New Europe" (1921), 38.

decided to increase the mediatic pressure abroad by re-establishing the victimisation narrative in their discourse. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous part and discussed in the third chapter of this paper, this narrative was constantly competing with a heroic one, necessary for the appreciation of efforts done by the Czechoslovak Legionaries. It was the case especially with the achievements of the Czech soldiers in Russia in 1917, noticed by the Allied powers. This competition between both discourses could also explain the decrease in occurrences of the victimisation narrative during certain periods throughout the war.

Chapter 2 – Perspectives from Abroad

As this research highlights, the victimisation narrative was mostly disseminated abroad for diplomatic reasons, i.e. to support the cause of an independent Czechoslovak state in Central Europe following the First World War. Geographically, it is relevant to narrow the analysis down to the following three main locations: France, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. Edvard Beneš and the Czechoslovak National Council were based in Paris, making this city the main centre for the diffusion of political and diplomatic communications with the help of mainly two periodicals and a well-prepared network of connections with the French government. Beside the French capital, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was active in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The latter was also home to the largest community of Czech emigres, Chicago being the first city with the highest number of Czechs after Prague at that time: “After Prague, Chicago was the largest Bohemian city in the world [...]”.¹⁰⁸ The case of Switzerland should also be mentioned in this research since the situation there can demonstrate the complexity of the victimisation narrative’s background. Indeed, due to its official diplomatic neutrality during wartime, Switzerland was considered a relatively safe location for establishing one of the Czechoslovak National Committee’s main bases – Lev Sychrava (1887-1958)¹⁰⁹ being the person whose address in Lausanne was often used for various correspondences and who coordinated the periodical *Československa Samostatnost*. Nonetheless, we will see in the next parts how this neutrality did not play solely in the advantage of the Czech and Slovak leaders, as it also benefited the Austrian and German interests. The importance of foreign policy and diplomacy during key historical developments has been shown previously, though it was not the focus of historians until recently:

“At times, diplomatic history has been reduced to scarcely more than a record of what one diplomat or foreign minister said to another, with little awareness of the wider influences that so often shape foreign policy – financial and military factors, the influence of public opinion, and so on. [...] But [Margaret] Macmillan shows [in

¹⁰⁸ J. Jahelka, “The Role of the Chicago Czechs” (1938), 384.

¹⁰⁹ Lev Sychrava (1887-1958) was a Czech politician, editor and author, actively involved in the Czechoslovak nation-building process during the First World War as secretary of the Czechoslovak National Council. He founded the periodical *Československá samostatnost* and took part in the periodical *V Boj!* alongside Edvard Beneš. More information about him can be found on the website of the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic (accessed May 4, 2019): https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/organizacni_struktura/utvary_mzv/specializovany_archiv_mzv/kdo_byl_kdo/sychrava_lev.html

Peacemakers (2001)^{110]} how their decisions were conditioned not only by the disposition of forces at the end of the war, but by the strength of popular feeling in their respective countries.”¹¹¹

In the case of the Czechoslovak state, this influence mentioned by John Tosh did not come solely from Czechs and Slovaks who continued to live under the Habsburg regime until the independence. Due to the unique context of the war, it was not even restricted to Czechs and Slovaks abroad and at home: citizens and diplomats from other foreign countries were also instrumental in the overall political strategy of Masaryk and Beneš.

“Historians of the nation have long taken account of external relations: textbooks habitually feature substantial sections on foreign policy. But there has been less attention to the full range of contacts and influences from abroad which have shaped the development of the nation, if in less obvious ways.”¹¹²

The victimisation narrative was used to influence political and diplomatic decisions mainly in France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It is noteworthy to observe how the strategy of the Czech leaders was carefully adapted to each country’s specificities, thus taking into consideration these nations’ own discourses. In light of this analysis, the role of certain figures that were previously seen as secondary turns out to be more important than initially expected. Indeed, it is thanks to these persons that especially Edvard Beneš was able to skilfully influence certain countries’ position throughout the war. France is especially representative of this phenomenon, with the case of Ernest Denis, whose role was deemed relatively minor by Bernard Michel.¹¹³

In the following chapter, we will detail each one of the aforementioned cases in order to accurately map the use of the victimisation narrative abroad, as well as recontextualise it, starting with France, then moving to the situation in the United States of America, and eventually covering Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

¹¹⁰ Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: J. Murray, 2001).

¹¹¹ John Tosh, “Mapping the Field”, in *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Bernard Michel, “Le rôle d’Ernest Denis et du Journal « La Nation Tchèque » dans la Naissance de la Tchécoslovaquie” (*Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Européens* 169, 1993), 24.

France, Ernest Denis & The Czechoslovak National Council

The role of the French historian Ernest Denis in the nation-building process of the First Czechoslovak Republic has already been discussed and analysed previously.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the present paper aims at building on earlier findings, including research focusing on French diplomatic efforts during the First World War, while at the same time offering a new perspective through the analysis of the victimisation narrative and its dissemination. For this part of the research, the research corpus included published and unpublished – manuscript – sources such as the periodical *La Nation Tchèque*,¹¹⁵ private correspondence between Ernest Denis, Masaryk and Beneš, private correspondence between the leaders of the Czechoslovak National Council, officially based in Paris, but also private correspondence with French politicians and diplomats, as well as any document related to Beneš' and Masaryk's activities in France, such as drafts of articles and speeches.¹¹⁶ As stated in its first issue and according to Denis's own explanations, *La Nation Tchèque* had a clearly defined mission from the beginning: to “educate” the French audience to the issue of the Czech nation's struggle for independence within the Habsburg monarchy.¹¹⁷ The vocabulary used in most articles was heavily influenced by the bias of its authors, including Ernest Denis whose hatred against Germany and Austria was deeply rooted in his own personal experience,¹¹⁸ rather than adopting the approach of academic and historical analyses. Instead of educating French readers about the Czech nation as its official mission stated, the main goal of *La Nation Tchèque* turned out to be the dissemination of propaganda on behalf of the Czechoslovak National Committee. Even though such a role was not disclosed clearly at first, the term “propaganda” (‘propagande’ in French) is used by Ernest Denis himself, as well as Edvard Beneš; from 1917 onwards, this aspect of the newspaper was made public since its direction was taken over by Beneš himself. Even though the term did not have such a negative meaning as it does today, it still consisted in exerting pressure over public opinion in the aim of influencing the latter in favour of a specific theory.¹¹⁹ We can see on the last page of

¹¹⁴ See for example: B. Michel, “Le rôle d’Ernest Denis” (1993): 17 – 25; Bohumila Ferenčuhová, “Ernest Denis, Robert William Seton-Watson a slovenská otázka počas prvej svetovej vojny” (in *Historik a Dejiny: V česko-slovenskom storočí osudových dátumov*, edited by Jaroslava Rogul'ová and Vlasta Jaksicsová, Bratislava: Veda, 2018): 385 – 396; Doubravka Olšáková, “Le Culte d’Ernest Denis dans la Société Tchèque au XIXème et XXème siècles”, (in *Lieux de Mémoire en Europe Centrale*, edited by Antoine Marès, Paris: Institut d’Etudes Slaves, 2009): 163 – 181.

¹¹⁵ *La Nation Tchèque*, under the direction of Ernest Denis from 1915 until 1917, then under the direction of Edvard Beneš until 1919.

¹¹⁶ MÚA, Fond Edvard Beneš (EB) IV and Fond TGM V-VIII.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Ernest Denis to E. Beneš, on 18.10.1917 (MÚA, Kor-15, Denis E., EB IV/2–5/173).

¹¹⁸ B. Michel, “Le rôle d’Ernest Denis” (1993), 17-18.

¹¹⁹ Definition based on the one given by the French dictionary *Larousse*.

the issue published on February 1, 1917 that the headquarters of the periodical is the same as the ones of the Czechoslovak National Council, and that the latter is officially introduced to the newspaper's readers as the organisation behind the publication.¹²⁰ This information is confirmed thanks to the letters sent between Masaryk and Beneš in September 1916, and especially in the letter of Beneš sent on September 27, 1916.¹²¹ The takeover by Beneš happened as a result of mainly two facts: first, the officialization of the Czechoslovak National Committee's strategy and purpose as the organisation representing the independent Czechoslovak nation and the subsequent need for an official communication channel that would already have a significant outreach¹²²; second, the disagreement between Ernest Denis, on one side, and Masaryk and Beneš, on the other side, regarding the official Czechoslovak stance about the negotiations between Yugoslavs and Italians on the fate of Dalmatia. Indeed, the French historian wanted the Czechs and Slovaks to support Dalmatian revendications unequivocally as part of the 'oppressed people's liberation' ideology, whereas Masaryk and Beneš had negotiated their rather neutral position in exchange for a clear and official recognition of the Czechoslovak state as one equal in rights and responsibilities to the Italian state. Furthermore, French diplomats later advised against making such a move vis a vis the Italian or Serbian positions, as we can see in a letter sent by Philippe Berthelot (1866-1934) – who was then working within the Foreign Affairs Ministry's cabinet, before being promoted to Secretary General of the same Ministry – on November 19, 1918 to Edvard Beneš.¹²³ Philippe Berthelot remains to this day well-known for his moderate stance regarding Germany and his opposition to severe punishments that he foresaw as having potentially disastrous consequences. We can see evidence of the aforementioned disagreement and its consequences on the periodical's content and direction in a letter sent by Beneš to Masaryk on September 4, 1916: "In any case he told me that he could never accept the renunciation of Dalmatia, that he could not lead a periodical that accepted it... [...] He believes that it is our duty as Czechs to give an opinion, because it is our strength, he said, even in the case where official Serbia abandons the Croats."¹²⁴ The answer from Masaryk on September 12, 1916,¹²⁵ is similarly

¹²⁰ *La Nation Tchèque*, 01.02.1917, last page.

¹²¹ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 27.09.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 160-161.

¹²² B. Michel, "Le rôle d'Ernest Denis" (1993), 24-25.

¹²³ Letter from P. Berthelot to E. Beneš, 19.11.1918, MÚA, EB, IV, 1–73.

¹²⁴ Letter from E. Beneš to T.G. Masaryk, 04.09.1916, MÚA, TGM, V-VIII, 15/1/54). Original text in French: "Dans tous les cas il m'avait dit qu'il ne pourrait jamais accepter la renonciation à la Dalmatie, qu'il ne pourrait pas diriger un journal où cela serait accepté ... Il croit que notre devoir des Tchèques c'est de se prononcer, car c'est notre force, dit-il, même dans le cas où la Serbie officielle abandonne les Croates." The letter can also be found in the publication Kor. TGM-EB, 150-152.

¹²⁵ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, 12.09.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 155-158.

equivocal regarding the disagreement between the different strategies – including the problem of the French perspective on foreign policy, which was heavily influenced by its colonialist attitude.¹²⁶

Given the number of occurrences of the narrative of victimhood in *La Nation Tchèque*, we will give a few examples to illustrate its peculiar vocabulary and stance on the Central European nations, though it is impossible to give an exhaustive account of each manifestation. Indeed, it was the main vector of diffusion of the narrative in France and abroad, by far. We thus want to draw the attention to the following selection of excerpts, all representative of the overall trend in this periodical:

“[...] all the oppressed nations of Central Europe, in Austria-Hungary and in the Balkans would have kept lamenting under the yoke of Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest.”¹²⁷

“In these articles, Kramář is filled with enthusiasm about the liberation of the small nations through the world war and the victory of the Entente and for the rise of the nation that, escaping darkness and degradation, will thrive with a new life.”¹²⁸

“Alas! Among those who listened the Russian anthem with tears in their eyes and fury in their heart, many and the best of them died before the time of revenge came. Their sleep was heavy and oppressive in this subjugated land. We are working on freeing their sepulchre. They shiver in their graves when we tell them: “Czechs! who went through ruthless times of enslavement, all these joyful footsteps on the ground are those of the liberation army. The dead and the living are rising as the phalanx of Vladimir’s sons approaches, from north to south, from Belgrade till Prague, from Vardar till Brno, a terrific hurrah raising: Hurrah! Hurrah!”¹²⁹

“[...] thanks to [Russia], Czechs will escape from German insolence [...]. Then, as the prophecy of Kollar predicted the three days of mourning, the three anniversaries of Kosovo, Bila Hora, and of Masiejowitse when the independence of Serbia, Bohemia and Poland collapsed, will be erased from the calendars.”¹³⁰

“If I quoted the desperate and tragic call from Bohemia, it is because this Czech nation, currently painfully suffering for us, did not have a representative for this conference of allied forces yet.”¹³¹

Moreover, titles such as “Terror in Austria”¹³² and “Confiscations in Bohemia”¹³³ were also used on a regular basis. It is important to note here that despite its title, *La Nation Tchèque* was not solely focusing on the Czech question. Indeed, it was covering on a bimonthly basis news

¹²⁶ J. Křen, *Konfliktní Společenství Češi a Němci 1780-1918* (1990), 454.

¹²⁷ “La Bohême Indépendante et l’Italie,” *La Nation Tchèque* (01.02.1917), 294.

¹²⁸ “Le Procès Kramář,” *ibid*, 293.

¹²⁹ Ernest Denis, “Salut aux Russes,” *La Nation Tchèque* (01.05.1916), 4.

¹³⁰ Ernest Denis, “La Russie depuis la Guerre,” *La Nation Tchèque* (15.04.1916), 386. The names of the locations were kept in their original form, as seen in the French article.

¹³¹ Speech given by Louis Martin, member of the Senate, on March 30, 1916, as quoted in *La Nation Tchèque* (15.04.1916), 381.

¹³² *La Nation Tchèque* (01.04.1916), 363.

¹³³ *Ibid*, as well as other issues of the periodical in 1916 and 1917 since it was a recurrent editorial element.

from all nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Its use of the narrative of victimhood is very similar to the one found in the Czech-American periodical *V Boj!* as well as in the newspaper *Československa Samostatnost*, as we will see in the next sections of this chapter. Nevertheless, it was also systematically reviewing all news from Europe, but also from the United States of America, resembling *Slavie* in this regard. Even though it was created primarily for propaganda purposes, the informative aspect cannot be omitted in the framework of the present analysis. *Le Monde Slave* had a very similar purpose as *La Nation Tchèque* when it was created by Ernest Denis and Robert de Caix in 1917. The idea of creating this second periodical came at the time Denis offered to Masaryk and Beneš to let the Czechoslovak National Council officially take over *La Nation Tchèque* as their main communication channel. He wanted to maintain a scholarly and scientific dimension in his publications that the propaganda for the Czech cause would otherwise overshadow, as well as remain independent in his editorial choices (see the disagreement on the topic of Dalmatia).¹³⁴ Therefore, one could expect *Le Monde Slave* not to be similar to *La Nation Tchèque* in its tone and approach to the war developments – to have a more objective, analysis-oriented focus. In reality, the issues included articles from Masaryk and Beneš, and the opinion of Denis was clearly visible throughout its first year of existence. Its publication was interrupted after one year due to financial difficulties, but it should be noted that unlike *La Nation Tchèque*, this periodical was not focusing primarily on the Czech (and Slovak) perspective – Yugoslavia and the Russian revolution were both key topics.¹³⁵ Thus, though both were different in their published programme, the influence of Ernest Denis and of the Czech leaders, Masaryk and Beneš, was a significant point in common that raises the question of whether these persons were the primary advocates of the narrative of victimisation. To investigate further into the aforementioned point of inquiry, we will now focus our attention on other publications written by Ernest Denis, namely the three following monographs: *La Bohême depuis la Montagne Blanche* (1902),¹³⁶ *La Guerre : Causes Immédiates et Lointaines, l'Intoxication d'un Peuple, le Traité* (1915),¹³⁷ and *Who wanted War? The Origins of the War according to Diplomatic Documents* (1917, co-authored with Emile Durkheim).¹³⁸ If Ernest Denis was indeed one of the main conveyers of the narrative, then we should find it dominating

¹³⁴ Antonia Bernard, “Le Monde Slave, Première Revue Française consacrée aux Pays Slaves,” *Revue des Etudes Slaves* 74, No 2-3 (2002), 397-399.

¹³⁵ A. Bernard, “Le Monde Slave,” (2002), 399-400.

¹³⁶ Ernest Denis, *La Bohême depuis la Montagne Blanche* (Paris, 1902).

¹³⁷ Ernest Denis, *La Guerre : Causes Immédiates et Lointaines, l'Intoxication d'un Peuple, le Traité* (Paris: Delagrave, 1915).

¹³⁸ Ernest Denis, and Emile Durkheim, *Who wanted War? The Origins of the War according to Diplomatic Documents* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1917).

his works. It would be interesting to see whether he was making use of this narrative only for the Czech and Slovak cause, or for other nations (Slavic, but also Latin such as the Romanian one) as well. The first monograph was published before the war was even a possibility; it is relevant to look into it despite the chronological difference with the present research's topic, including in the subject of the monograph itself, since it focused exclusively on the Czech nation. Thanks to this source, we can confirm that the narrative of victimhood was already present before the First World War, and that the perspective of the French historian was infused with the historical tradition typical of the nineteenth century in Czech historiography, which featured the narrative as a historically grounded fact. This partiality is even defended by Denis himself on the second page of the monograph, in his "Letter to Ladislav Pinkas":

"As for this serene indifference that a certain school requests from historians, I do not believe in its existence and I have never encountered it. Between persecutors and martyrs, between tyrants and victims, it is not possible for me to remain neutral; I hate oppression in every shape and form, I believe in the triumph of justice, and that is why the cause of Bohemia is so dear to me."¹³⁹

We can also see the vocabulary characteristic of the victimisation narrative in the previous quote. It is also dispersed throughout the monograph with exact terms or implied meanings. Overall, his account of Czech history since the battle of White Mountain portrays the Czech nation as a heroic martyr of Slavic nations, which struggled against an oppressive Germanic and Catholic minority. This published source shows the transition from a discourse of martyrdom, which included religious themes, to one of victimhood, which, as explained in the introduction, was more secular and did not feature the religious question in a predominant position anymore. While reading the following quote that illustrates this martyrdom narrative, it is advisable not to forget that Denis was himself of protestant faith:

"The Catholics had free rein, and their plans had long been decided: they searched till the very bottom of the entrails [depths] of the people to rip it off from its faith; the patient nearly died. [...] bled dry, abandoned to the most relentless religious and political despotism during two centuries, [Bohemia] ceased to be part of independent nations and seemed to forget about its own history and its own language."¹⁴⁰

We recognised the style found in *La Nation Tchèque* previously, though the religious aspect had disappeared from Denis' articles by 1915, in favour of a more political discourse. We can find this religious theme again in the second monograph analysed for this paper, though with a

¹³⁹ E. Denis, *La Bohême depuis la Montagne Blanche* (1902), 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

much less present martyrdom dimension.¹⁴¹ The victimhood narrative was used by the French scholar in this book as well, though encompassing all Slavic nations – even including the Romanian nation – as we can see in the second chapter entitled “How Germany’s policies were to inexorably result in universal war”: “It is true that the Slavs, thrown at the extremities of Europe and forced to defend it against Asian invasions, had a long and painful childhood.”¹⁴² For Denis, all Slavic nations could be considered as victims; we can also see the paternalizing approach typical of French colonialism in this excerpt. It was the latter that caused tensions among Czech and Slovak leaders, some preferring to turn to Russia seen as the Slavic older (and protective) brother. In this second monograph, it is relevant for the present study to note how Denis focuses on demonstrating all the wrongdoings of Germany and of Austria-Hungary, depicting both as victims of their own mistakes – while maintaining that both acted in a cruel, brutal and oppressive way for Slavic nations. In *Who wanted War?*, Denis and his colleague are demonstrating through the use of official sources such as diplomatic documents that Germany and Austria are guilty of triggering a war that could have been avoided. It emphasises the essential role played by Germany,¹⁴³ and it condemns the policy of ultimatum both states adopted – ultimatum against Serbia from Austria, ultimatum against Russia from Germany.¹⁴⁴ This monograph also highlights the role of the Allied powers and their attempts to prevent the conflict from breaking out.¹⁴⁵ This is important to understand how Ernest Denis used the narrative of victimhood: from his perspective, Germany was the main responsible party while Austria-Hungary was simply applying policies that worked in the interest of the former.¹⁴⁶ Thus, as a French who had experienced the war of 1870 against Germany, it was a duty to defend Slavic nations against this common enemy. This was his strategy also with *Le Monde Slave* and *La Nation Tchèque*: he saw his editorial activities as a national duty to defend French interests.¹⁴⁷ Hence, he was indeed one of the main sources of diffusion of the discourse of victimhood in France during the First World War – but also before and after. At times, he was even pushing for a more daring approach to the situation in Bohemia, complaining about the lack of reactions of the French government, but also of the fact that he felt the Czechs who stayed in Prague were out of touch with the reality of the war and what it implied.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ E. Denis, *La Guerre : Causes Immédiates et Lointaines* (1915), 112.

¹⁴² E. Denis, *La Guerre : Causes Immédiates et Lointaines* (1915), 114.

¹⁴³ E. Denis and E. Durkheim, *Who wanted War?* (1917), 56-57.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 34-35.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 13-15, 22-25, 52-54.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁴⁷ A. Bernard, “Le Monde Slave,” (2002), 397-400.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from E. Denis to T. G. Masaryk, 20.03.1915, MÚA, TGM, VIII, 295, 16a/7).

Beside the activities in the press and the various publications of Ernest Denis, this part of our analysis included all activities related to the Czechoslovak National Council – including during the period preceding its official recognition as such, with this specific denomination – given the fact that this organisation was based in Paris. Furthermore, we must note here that Masaryk requested from Beneš that all the letters he addressed to him would have to be written in French from August 29, 1916.¹⁴⁹ Thus, it was logical to place this part of the study in the French section, even though some communications were made in other languages (Czech and English, predominantly). The narrative of victimisation was indeed present also in private correspondence. For instance, in a telegram sent on October 11, 1916, where Beneš mentions the situation in Austria-Hungary regarding the Czech political life: “Berlin puts pressure on Sturgkh [...]. New pressure on Czechs by the nobility and the Emperor is threatening with new persecutions.”¹⁵⁰ Earlier in 1916, following the publication of an article condemning the activities of Czechs and Slovaks abroad, and more specifically of Masaryk, in most – if not all – German-language and Czech-language newspapers of the empire, Beneš comments: “Apparently, the Czech newspapers were forced to publish it by the Austrian government. At least the terms are so violent that it is not possible otherwise.”¹⁵¹ Indeed, the terms used included “high treason”, directly aimed at Masaryk himself. This example is particularly interesting, since it shows how one event could trigger a strong emotional reaction from Beneš – especially when Masaryk (or their respective families) was personally targeted. The activities that the Austrian government referred to, in what would nowadays be called a press release,¹⁵² consisted in Masaryk’s *At the Eleventh Hour*,¹⁵³ published in 1916. This essay was first published anonymously by Masaryk and the printing was carried out by Seton-Watson.¹⁵⁴ This document contained crucial military information regarding the German, Austrian and Hungarian forces; information that, in a context such as the First World War, were considered highly sensitive and state secrets. The Austrian response was to initiate a wave of reprisals against Masaryk and his connections in Austria-Hungary. The reaction of Beneš shows how his personal opinion sometimes influenced his judgment on certain events. Indeed, Masaryk knew what he was doing was illegal and he was aware of the risks he was taking, since he initially attempted to conceal

¹⁴⁹ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, 29.08.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 148.

¹⁵⁰ Telegram from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 11.10.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 165.

¹⁵¹ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 02.04.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 81.

¹⁵² See for example: “V Cizích Službách,” *Národní Listy* 55 (25.03.1916), 1; “V Cizích Službách,” *Venkov* (25.03.1916), 1. The text was the same in all Czech newspapers. These two newspapers were in favour of the independence (see chapter 3), and still published the full text on their respective front pages.

¹⁵³ T. G. Masaryk [published anonymously originally], *At the Eleventh Hour: A Memorandum on the Military Situation* (London, 1916).

¹⁵⁴ Invoice issued by the printing company, MÚA, TGM, VII, 32a/17.

his identity and limited the release of the document to trustworthy contacts within his network – before circulating it more widely.¹⁵⁵ In the meantime, events that were expected to trigger the use of the victimisation narrative were reported in a very factual manner, even when it involved the outcome of Kramář's trial, which saw multiple Czech political leaders condemned to death or to heavy imprisonment sentences.¹⁵⁶ This absence of the narrative in such examples is crucial to better understand its diplomatic purpose. Indeed, such facts needed no emphasis, since they were self-evident as to the level of political repression exerted on Czechs.

The victimisation narrative was more often noticed in Beneš correspondence than in Masaryk's. This is due to the differing approaches to its meaning and purpose by both men. As highlighted in the first chapter of this paper, Masaryk had a rather scholarly perception of this discourse. He discussed it during academic conferences as often as in political situations. Nevertheless, Beneš had a more direct experience of the narrative within the political context – his task was mainly to obtain the official support and recognition from the governments waging war against Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1918, this task included to convey the information that Czech soldiers were about to be “crushed” in Russia unless the Allies sent immediately a significant number of their soldiers to assist them.¹⁵⁷ Obviously, using a narrative depicting Czech soldiers as heroic was important in the context of the war, but emphasising their unfavourable situation was aimed at ensuring the support of other armies and saving Czech lives. In a letter sent on November 3, 1915, we can see how Beneš felt distraught by the lack of reactions on the side of the Allied powers.¹⁵⁸ He expressed how difficult it was to reach out to anyone; as seen in the first chapter of this paper, 1916 was one of the highlights regarding the use of the narrative of victimhood abroad. Even though it is impossible to make direct causal links, it is a noteworthy observation to underline this development. Another element of this letter is the difficulty for the Czech leaders to rally to their cause Slovaks abroad and in their homeland. Indeed, apart from Štefánik, it was difficult for them to find a Slovak to sign with them the manifest they planned to publish later in November 1915.¹⁵⁹ On November 7, 1916, Beneš sent the following telegram to Masaryk:

“Attack against Polish and against Russia attack against us. In Vienna 115 members of parliament Galicia being excluded from Reichsrat attempt to divide us to reign and

¹⁵⁵ We can see the concerns raised by the possibility of publishing this memorandum mentioned in multiple letters sent to him, as well as the interest they had in reading it. MÚA, TGM, VII, 32-37, 283).

¹⁵⁶ See for example how Beneš reported on this event in his telegram to Masaryk on 09.06.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 124.

¹⁵⁷ Telegram from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 24.08.1918 and 27.08.1918 (Kor. TGM-EB), 271-273.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 03.11.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB), 42.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 42-43.

destroy. Remedy fight till end to destroy Austria and reduce Germany. It would be content of declaration if you agree to draft the final text and I will publicise it through the newspapers after submission to the French and Russian authorities.”¹⁶⁰

This shows how the narrative of victimhood was used as a unifying discourse, gathering all Slavic nations defending their rights to self-determination during the First World War. Again, when personal relations were targeted by the Austrian authorities, Beneš reacted strongly:

“Imprisoned are horribly brutalised especially by hunger, there are multiple cases of suicide in jail. Writer Vymazal Brno after long imprisonment died suddenly in the street out of exhaustion and because of lack of food; councillor at the tribunal in Brno doctor Slama fell seriously ill after long instruction and after condemnation to five years of jail.”¹⁶¹

His wife had just been arrested, therefore he worried about her well-being, alerting Masaryk by listing distressful cases of Czech opponents. This shows the difference when reporting on other similar events such as the trial of Kramář and other Czech members of the opposition.

We can therefore say that the victimisation narrative was used for various purposes in France, namely: diplomacy with the French government as well as the main Allied powers, public information towards French citizens who were ‘guilty’ of ‘Austrophilia’, and diplomacy from the Yugoslavian leaders towards the Czech leaders. Ernest Denis was one of the main advocates of the narrative, pushing it in all his editorial activities and publications, as well as in his private correspondence with French and Czech politicians, including with Masaryk.¹⁶² We can state this as a fact thanks to the example of the disagreement on Dalmatia, for it shows how the narrative was absolutely a key element for Denis, while the two Czech leaders easily disposed of it when it was a potential obstacle to their final goal, being recognised as a sovereign, independent state. The use of the narrative within the French context was in a certain way successful, since France was the first state to recognise de facto Czechoslovakia, followed by the United Kingdom and the United States – as well as all the other Allied nations.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Telegram from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 07.11.1916 (Kor. TGM-EB), 174.

¹⁶¹ Telegram from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 04.04.1917 (Kor. TGM-EB), 225.

¹⁶² Letter from E. Denis to T. G. Masaryk, 27.01.1915, MÚA, TGM, V-VIII, 16a, 7-9.

¹⁶³ J. Křen, *Konfliktní Společenství Češi a Němci 1780-1918* (1990), 453.

The Czech-American Perspective

It is crucial to note that for this section, the sources used were primarily newspaper articles, due to the challenging availability of other types of documents online. Thus, only archives available online or at the Masaryk Institute Archives in Prague were analysed; given the Czech-American activities during the relevant period, we believe this did not hinder the relevance nor the significance of this study. Indeed, the victimisation narrative was very present, if not omnipresent, in many of the Czech newspapers published in the United States of America during the First World War. It was especially visible in publications owned or founded by Czech intellectuals who had left their homeland in the end of the nineteenth century. Most of them were anxious to maintain strong connections with the “old country”, while also making use of their newly gained freedom of expression away from the traditional censorship of the Habsburg monarchy. Therefore, the development of the Czech-American press was thriving before and during the period studied for the present paper, and their articles were filled with patriotic aspirations – whether from a Catholic, Protestant, Freethinker, or secularist point of view, Czech-speaking or German-speaking, Bohemian or Moravian.¹⁶⁴ Some of these newspapers featuring the narrative of victimhood even included it in their title, or through the publication of certain poems or quotes on their frontpages, as well as through the inclusion of certain visual symbols within the title head design. This was the case of the periodical *V Boji!*, for example. Some of these can even remind the Romantic literature that dominated the first half of the nineteenth century during the Czech National Revival. The main reason for this omnipresence of the narrative of victimhood within the Czech-American press was the situation of the authors and editors themselves. As Czech emigres, their patriotic feelings were heightened by the distance and the fact that these people had in some cases been forced to leave their homeland against their will, fleeing political persecution themselves.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this was not the case of the majority of emigres coming to the United States of America from the Czech lands. Research has shown that the main drive for this move across the Atlantic was primarily an economic one, i.e. the hope of an improvement of their social situation and wealth of their

¹⁶⁴ For more information regarding the Czech-American press landscape in the relevant period, see: David Zdenek Chroust, “Bohemian Voice: Contention, Brotherhood and Journalism among Czech People in America, 1860-1910” (PhD diss., Texas A&M University, 2009); Alena Jaklová, *Čečoamerická periodika 19. století* (Brno: Nadace Universitas, Akademické nakladatelství a vydavatelství, 2006); and A. Jaklová, “Národnostní a sociálně-ekonomická sebereflexe českých přistěhovalců v čechoamerických periodikách 19. a 20. Století” (*Studie Národohospodářského Ústavu Josefa Hlávky* 8 (2006)).

¹⁶⁵ J. Jahelka, “The Role of Chicago Czechs” (1938), 381-382.

relatives.¹⁶⁶ The narrative was especially encountered in the periodicals *V Boj!* and *Slavie* during this part of the research, though other publications were also noticeably prone to use a similar discourse.

In an article published in *V Boj!* dedicated to the Austrian monarch Franz-Joseph (1830-1916) and entitled “Císař”, Karel Horký (1879-1965) – a correspondent for many Czech periodicals abroad, in exile in Madrid during the war – brought attention to the disparities in coverage of the issues encountered by the population and those faced by the monarch. He did so by comparing Franz-Joseph with a murderer, and by mentioning the “millions of mothers who cannot feed their babies”¹⁶⁷, highlighting how the former was at the heart of all concerns, while the latter were barely considered – at least by the Austrian government and the press supporting the war. Further in his article, he used multiple times the term “corpse”, which he opposed to “ghost” in order to emphasise the reality of all those who had died during the war already, and alternatively to make references to the dying monarch.¹⁶⁸ His article was mainly focusing on the Czech situation, though his commentary was in line with the developments in the whole state of Austria-Hungary – and Europe, after more than two years of war. He skilfully managed to use the victimisation narrative by underlining the difficult situation of Czechs – both civilians and soldiers – while depicting the monarchy as an agonising – if not dead already – corpse. This is an example of how the two narratives, namely the heroic and the victimisation ones, were used depending on the objectives of the authors, especially in periodicals published abroad where the censorship allowed for more creativity and more outward criticism against both the monarchy and the war itself. The victimisation narrative was also used in the fundraising call published in the same issue of *V Boj!*: the money would go to the Czech legionaries in Russia, for instance, who “gladly give their lives for our nation”.¹⁶⁹ We can again see the writer merging the heroic and the victimisation narratives into one common message appealing to both the pride and the solidarity of Czech emigres. This call, published in different versions for each issue of the newspaper, was accompanied with paragraphs directly shaming those who did not contribute financially to the “national political *struggle*”, going as far as excluding them from the community, from the “Czech nation”.¹⁷⁰ Among the most self-evident appearances of the

¹⁶⁶ About this topic, see: Karel D. Bicha, “The Czechs in Wisconsin History,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 53, No 3 (1970), 194; Josef Opatrný, “Problems in the History of Czech Immigration to America in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Nebraska History* 74 (1993), 120-121; and Lukáš Perutka, “General Problems of the emigration from Rožnov to Texas”, in *Family Stories: Rožnov to Texas* (Rožnov pod Radhoštěm: Nová Forma, 2018), 10-11.

¹⁶⁷ Karel Horký, “Císař” (*V Boj!*, 13.10.1916), 162.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 164.

¹⁶⁹ *V Boj!*, 13.10.1916, 168.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*; *V Boj!*, 25.03.1916, 40. Emphasis added.

narrative of victimhood in this newspaper can be seen in the issue published on March 25, 1916: “The Czech National Council sent representatives, upon invitation of congressman Meyer in London, who introduced a proposal to discuss the issue of the peace, and above all, the main issues related to it, such as the *liberation of the oppressed nations*.”¹⁷¹ Another noteworthy occasion can be found in the issue published on January 26, 1917, which includes an “English Section” mainly written by Masaryk and featuring a very straightforward pattern of victimisation, with the title “My Sentence to Death: Bohemia’s Struggle for Freedom”, under which we can read: “The *poor victim* will be kept some months or a year in prison and then released, because no proofs of the pretended connection will be found.”¹⁷² The “poor victim”, in this sentence, refers to anyone in Austria-Hungary who was to be arrested based on their suspected connection with Masaryk, who had just been found guilty of high treason. We can see the aforementioned characteristics in how Masaryk made use of the narrative: he was simply stating a fact – that was to occur and had occurred already in similar circumstances – while using terms depicting victimhood in a direct way instead of using more objective legal terms such as “innocent”, for instance. In spite of its presence, the narrative is not exaggerated in this example. Again, a few lines later in the same article, he wrote “war was declared *without the consent of the Bohemian nation*”¹⁷³, showcasing his typical approach to the narrative. Besides, the fact that *V Boj!* included a section written in English from the end of 1916 is interesting, with a first appearance of a full text in English in its issue published on November 17 of that year.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, it corresponds to the moment when the Czech and Slovak leaders decided to increase their mediatic pressure on the Allied forces and to mobilise as much as possible the Czech-American community for financial support in order to fund their projects of an organised military corps of Czech soldiers in Russia. In the “English Section” of the December 8, 1916 issue, one could read:

“The history of [Francis Joseph’s] reign from beginning to end is written in blood of innocent victims. [...] On the Slavs of Austria-Hungary the sceptre of Francis Joseph pressed more and more heavily, as he grew older. [...] during the latter part of this long reign Slovaks were a race without any rights. [...] to Bohemians (Czechs) the death of Francis Joseph simply means the passing of another oppressor, of another member of a

¹⁷¹ “Zástupci českého a slovenského národa před kongresním výborem ve Washingtoně,” *V Boj!* (25.03.1916), 41. Emphasis added.

¹⁷² T. G. Masaryk, “My Sentence to Death: Bohemia’s Struggle for Freedom,” *V Boj!* (26.01.1917), 270. Emphasis added.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 271. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁴ “English Section,” *V Boj!*, (17.11.1916).

dynasty which has brought to the Bohemian nation nothing but misfortune and tragedy. [...] Austria, this vast jail of nations.”¹⁷⁵

This article was written by the President of the Bohemian National Alliance in the United States of America, Dr. L. J. Fisher. We can see with this example the difference with Masaryk’s more subtle, or less hostile at least, formulations of the narrative. The Bohemian National Alliance was the main organisation behind fundraising efforts as well as unifying Czechs and Slovaks to support the diplomatic and political work of Masaryk. We should also mention the poem “Česká Srdce”¹⁷⁶ published on May 25, 1917, featuring indisputably the same emotional discourse, though written by the editor of the periodical, Mr Klement. As closing example for the case of *V Boj!*, Czech-Americans could read on the first page of their newspaper the following words, part of a long ode to Czech and Slovak “brotherhood” presenting 1917 as the “year of freedom for the Czech and Slovak nation”: “Through tears and hope, through sweat and struggle, through pain and suffering, we longed for this moment.”¹⁷⁷ This hopeful message was to become reality more than a year after its publication, eventually.

The second most interesting case of the use of the victimisation narrative in the Czech-American context was, as mentioned in the introduction of this section, the periodical *Slavie*. Created in 1861 in Racine, Wisconsin, it was an already well-established source of information for the Czech community – unlike *V Boj!* which was created for the purpose of propaganda during the war. In their accounts of the war developments in Europe, we can see how the periodicals’ journalists were identifying Bohemia as a victim of the conflict, under attack by the Germans, alongside Serbia, Belgium, or Poland.¹⁷⁸ This was at odds with the reality, since Bohemians (Czechs) were enrolled within the Austrian army, officially. Nevertheless, mass desertions of Czech soldiers on the frontlines had already occurred, highlighting the disagreements between the Austrian authorities and the Czech population.¹⁷⁹ The press ensured the message was communicated widely and integrated in their reports, which contributed to fostering the perception of the Czech nation as one on the side of the Allies – but also as victims of the Austrians, once again. In the issue published on July 20, 1915, the narrative was omnipresent, also as a response to Vienna: “It was certain that persecution would happen, but if this persecution was successful and stop the Czech efforts, then we would only accommodate

¹⁷⁵ Dr. J. L. Fisher, “In Memoriam of Francis Joseph,” *V Boj!*, (08.12.1916), 223.

¹⁷⁶ V. Klement, “Česká Srdce,” *V Boj!*, (25.05.1917), 19.

¹⁷⁷ “Ve Chvíli Dějinné!” *V Boj!* (12.01.1917), 241.

¹⁷⁸ *Slavie* (20.07.1915), 2.

¹⁷⁹ A. Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle* (2009), 38.

Austria that wants to intimidate us.”¹⁸⁰ The articles added references to past “persecutions”, quoting the examples of 1868-1873¹⁸¹ and Jan Hus, among others. This strategy followed on from Masaryk’s vision of Czech history, demonstrating the continuous character of Austrian attacks against the monarchy’s Bohemian subjects. We can notice the presence of the narrative in the appeals to Czech-Americans to support – mostly financially – the cause of the nation, for instance in the issue published on December 7, 1915: “In these days, when the persecution is worsening, also among Czech politicians and journalists, it is time for Czech-Americans to remember their duty.”¹⁸² This was common tactics as we could see in *V Boj!* previously, though it implied to skilfully balance the heroic and victimisation narratives so that readers would donate out of solidarity and pride, but also with the hope that their contribution would have an impact – a crucial aspect of any communication strategy for fundraising. In the issue of *Slavie* dated November 23, 1915, the narrative can be found in the “From the Old Country” section:

“What if! What if the Germans won! [...] What will become of Czechs then? [...] Czechs in Austria are lynched like traitors. Czech soldiers are insulted of “damned Russians”. [...] Speaking Czech is prohibited at school. The guilty ones are thrown into solitary confinement for two weeks. [...] The intelligentsia is also targeted. [...] From the Czech regions, up to 22 marshal battalions were deployed, while barely 18 from the German regions!”¹⁸³

The article continues, describing at length all the persecutions faced by Czechs in their old country. It is an example of how the narrative was used to trigger strong emotions: the same facts could have been stated in a simple report detailing legal measures taken by the authorities and their consequences on Czechs. Nevertheless, it was framed within a dramatic tone from the beginning with this “What if!” exclamations, inviting the readers to imagine the worse – something worse than what was then described in the lines covering almost two columns of the page. The examples selected were appealing to what was already extremely painful for Czechs, for historical reasons: language, education, Pan-Slavism, loyalty to their ‘Slavic brothers’ and their homeland, and the strength of a revived patriotic and Czech-speaking elite.¹⁸⁴ These elements of Czech culture were at the core of their identity, and even more so in the United States of America, where the community had been building Czech schools and aiming at

¹⁸⁰ *Slavie* (20.07.1915), 4.

¹⁸¹ This period of the Habsburg monarchy’s history was marked by a series of actions from the authorities against nationalist oppositions and autonomist leaders. See: Jakub Arbes, *Pláč koruny české, neboli, Persekuce lidu českého v letech 1868-1873* (Prague, 1894).

¹⁸² *Slavie* (07.12.1915), 2.

¹⁸³ “Ze Staré Vlasti,” *Slavie* (23.11.1915), 3.

¹⁸⁴ H. L. Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (1993), 200-248, 255.

maintaining as many popular traditions as possible while also integrating in their new country. Another article, reporting on the political move against “small nations” made by the German Socialists, featured a similar alarming tone, this time using the narrative to include the nations from the Balkan region, often described as “brothers” by Czechs and Slovaks throughout the war.¹⁸⁵ The coverage of events such as the trials of political opponents was following the same patterns.¹⁸⁶ The periodical was also regularly publishing translations (in Czech) of articles originally written in English or in French in other newspapers, such as *New Europe*, for instance.¹⁸⁷ These articles included the narrative and were originally aimed at an international audience. The competition between the heroic and victimhood discourses was also present in various articles, including “Austrian Hell” published on November 24, 1916¹⁸⁸ and describing the conditions of Czech soldiers being “punished” on the frontline – as a retaliation for their regular desertions and revolts. Indeed, it was important to show the bravery of Czech soldiers, not only in this specific context but also when it came to their actions in Russia. The deserters were prisoners of war, though thanks to the diplomatic efforts of the exiled Czechoslovak National Council, they could take part in the war on the side of the allied forces in Russia, France and Italy especially. Therefore, we can say that a similar use of the narrative of victimisation was made in *V Boj!* and in *Slavie*, though it was truly omnipresent in the former due to its very purpose from its creation. Other noteworthy occurrences of the narrative were found in the periodical *Hlas*, which even included it in a call to vote for the re-election of President Wilson, portrayed as the defender of oppressed nations.¹⁸⁹

English-language publications were also an essential part of the Czech propaganda on the American continent, as we can see with *The Voice of an Oppressed People*,¹⁹⁰ written by Masaryk and Jaroslav F. Smetanka and published in 1917 by the Bohemian National Alliance. The typical approach taken by Masaryk can be noted in this example, with a discourse of victimhood neighbouring a very academic vocabulary and scholarly method of demonstration. Let us quote a selection of excerpts from this publication:

“But there is another heroic state whose martyrdom, as cruel as these, has passed almost unnoticed – Bohemia. [...] since the war broke, Bohemian sufferings have been incalculable. [...] The Bohemians have resisted this tyranny in every way they could.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ “Německý Socialista proti Malým Narodům,” *Slavie* (29.06.1917), 3.

¹⁸⁶ See for example: “Čeští Velezrádci”, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ See for example: “Čechy a Evropska Krise,” *Slavie* (16.02.1917).

¹⁸⁸ “Rakouské Peklo,” *Slavie* (24.11.1916), 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Hlas* (03.11.1916), 5.

¹⁹⁰ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and Jaroslav F. Smetanka, *The Voice of an Oppressed People* (LoC, Chicago: Bohemian National Alliance, 1917).

¹⁹¹ “The Unconsidered Martyr,” from *Chicago Daily Journal*, in *The Voice of an Oppressed People* (1917), 6.

“Germany’s aim is and was Berlin-Bagdad – the employment of the nations of Austria-Hungary as *helpless instruments*, and the *subjection of the smaller nations* which form that peculiar zone between the East and the West of Europe. [...] to *liberate* and strengthen these smaller nations is the only real check against Prussia.”¹⁹²

“[Francis Joseph] pacified the Magyars and sacrificed all the rest. [...] The German population treats the Slavs [...] as ‘minderwertig’, inferior people.”¹⁹³

The American press also covered the war and the situation in Bohemia, using this very same narrative for complementary purposes. Indeed, if the Czech-American press was rallying Czech and Slovak emigres to raise funds for the activities of the Czechoslovak National Council in Europe, American newspapers were rallying the American public opinion to put pressure on politicians and public figures, so they would support the cause of the Czechoslovak nation. Journalists writing these articles were often in direct contact with either an official representative of the Czechoslovak National Council (such as Masaryk, Beneš or Štefánik), an influential member of the Czech-American community (such as Emanuel Viktor Voska (1875-1960), for example), or Czech readers influenced by the propaganda published in Czech periodicals in the United States of America. Among the most notorious cases where the victimisation narrative was successfully used in such articles to lobby in favour of Czechs, we can find the coverage of Masaryk’s daughter arrest and imprisonment shortly after Masaryk’s condemnation for high treason, which triggered a wave of protests in the United States of America and vast reactions in the press.¹⁹⁴

After carefully examining specific articles addressing topics related to the Czech nation and its struggle for independence within the context of the war, we can say that Czech emigres in the United States of America not only had an active role in disseminating the idea of a Czech nation victim of its Habsburg oppressor, but also contributed to the acceptance of this narrative within English-language sources. Thanks to this significant activity, they raised the interest of various American scholars and politicians, including President Wilson himself, whose Fourteen Points were the main basis for the Czechs and Slovaks to justify their right to independence.¹⁹⁵ The role of the Czech-Americans was thus not only financial; they fostered the idea that victimhood – or martyrdom – was part of the Czechoslovak national identity, and by using it themselves, reinforced their position within the nation, beyond their old country’s borders. Masaryk was not the only Czech person lobbying in the North American state. He actually had to use the

¹⁹² T. G. Masaryk, “Introductory Remarks,” *The Voice of an Oppressed People* (1917), 22-23. Emphases added.

¹⁹³ J. F. Smetanka, “Dismemberment of Austria,” *ibid*, 27.

¹⁹⁴ Betty M. Unterberger, “The Arrest of Alice Masaryk,” *Slavic Review* 33, No 1 (1974), 91-106.

¹⁹⁵ J. Křen, *Konfliktní Společenství Češi a Němci 1780-1918* (1990), 426.

mediatic and political platforms of Czech emigres already present in the ‘New World’ such as *Slavie* and Voska’s network of public figures among others, to gain influence there in the early stage of his strategy abroad.¹⁹⁶

Switzerland & the United Kingdom

The case of Switzerland is relevant in this study due to this state’s neutrality during the war, as well as the fact that Lev Sychrava, as explained in the introduction, chose this country as his main location for his exile during the First World War. He created the periodical *Československá Samostatnost*, which was registered in Paris and published in Annemasse, a city on the Swiss-French border. In spite of being located in France, Annemasse was included in the Swiss part of this research due to the fact that its main editor was closely linked to the Czech and Slovak (Czechoslovak) activities in Switzerland – while being present in Paris whenever Masaryk or Beneš needed him there. Indeed, the diplomatic neutrality of its government made this state a safe haven for all sides, leading sometimes to a very complex – if not odd – situation for Czechs and Slovaks in exile. Spies of all belligerent forces, including of the Austrian government, were present on its territory, which made it a potentially dangerous place to be even for Beneš or Masaryk at times. This complicated situation was brought up in a few letters exchanged between the Czech politicians. For instance, in a correspondence sent by Beneš to Masaryk on September 25, 1915, we can find the following:

“This man attempted many times to extort confidences from our Czech volunteers [soldiers], especially [...] what they have in mind, who are the Czech politicians behind their actions, who are those who, from abroad, work for the Czech cause, and when the name Masaryk was mentioned, he declared he did not know him (another time he said he knew him well), that the Legionaries must be in contact with politicians in Bohemia and what are their names. He attempted to get information by questioning our volunteers’ sincerity saying that they are actually still Austrian and thus inciting them to make bolder statements. [...] The matter is in the hands [...] of a former Czech teacher who will act carefully. [...] the suspicion regarding both of them ((both Dittrich)) grows every day.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ J. Jahelka, “The Role of Chicago Czechs” (1938), 383.

¹⁹⁷ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 25.09.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB, 25-26). Original text in French: “Ce monsieur tâchait plusieurs fois d’extorquer de nos volontaires tchèques les confidences, surtout [...] ce qui est en leur tête, quels sont les politiciens tchèques qui sont derrière l’action des volontaires, quels sont ceux qui, en étranger, travaillent pour la cause tchèque, et lorsqu’on lui a nommé Mr. Masaryk, il déclara qu’il ne le connaît pas (une autre fois il a dit qu’il le connaît bien), que les légionnaires doivent être en relation avec les politiciens en Bohême et quels sont leurs noms. Ils tâcha le savoir en mettant en doute la sincérité de nos volontaires en disant, qu’en vérité ils sont toujours Autrichiens et les stimulait ainsi aux déclarations plus décisives. [...] La chose est dans les mains [...] d’ancien instituteur tchèque qui va agir prudemment. [...] la suspicion contre tous les deux ((both Dittrich)) grandit ainsi d’un jour à l’autre.”

Further suspicions were raised by the fact that the private correspondence of Lev Sychrava, who was established in Annemasse officially, was regularly subject to unscrupulous opening prior to its delivery, as we can see from a letter sent by Masaryk to Beneš on October 1, 1915, where he writes the following – worrying – comment:

“6. I have some disagreeable news. The case of dr. Sychrava's letter to Bulgaria has been repeated in Copenhagen. A copy of the news, Mr. Kepl has got, was sent to Mr. Brain from Copenhagen; the letter came over - Germany of course and perhaps was read: we found only on the envelop the german stamp 'Freigelassen' but do not see, whether the letter was opened. If so you can imagine, what it means. Besides Mr. Kvapil is in danger too.”¹⁹⁸

It is clear from these two quotes that despite being diplomatically neutral, Switzerland was not safe enough for Masaryk and Beneš to permanently live there. The victimisation narrative was thus not only a diplomatic tool: it also depicted a reality that Czechs, even abroad, had to face. Furthermore, being in Switzerland sometimes meant being kept away from the main developments, as Josef Dürich complained about when meeting with Beneš in 1915.¹⁹⁹

When major events occurred in Prague, the reports were emphasising the reactions of the Austrian authorities as well as the echoes in the German-language press, as we can see in the following telegram sent by Štefan Osuský (1899-1973), who spent most of his time during the war in Geneva and Paris:

“Announced from Switzerland allies note to Wilson caused great emotion among Czecho Slovaks before note given out for publication military measures taken in Prague to prevent expected disorders article composed in official Prager Zeitung sent to Czech papers with order to publish with allies note typographers refused of type and expedition of papers several arrests made until morning settling of type and expedition of papers several arrests. Frankfurter Zeitung published article from German source from Bohemia showing that expression of Czech loyalty as announced by [...] not authentic Czech political and popular education of half century was for independence and did not change during war.”²⁰⁰

The emphasis on the arrests is of relevance for the present study, since it shows how the events were ‘filtered’ before they reached Masaryk and Beneš. It was difficult for the press in Austria-Hungary to report on even small issues, as we can see in this telegram, therefore it was crucial for the Czechs that what could not be covered ‘at home’ would be covered abroad. Similar reports came from Sychrava on a regular basis.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, 01.10.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB), 31-34.

¹⁹⁹ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 03.11.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB), 41.

²⁰⁰ Telegram from Osuský to T. G. Masaryk, 19.01.1917, MÚA, TGM, V-VIII, 295, 16a.

²⁰¹ For example, letter from L. Sychrava to T. G. Masaryk, 17.01.[1918], MÚA, TGM, VIII, 295, 18a, 58.

From Switzerland, we can also note here the essay “Lettre d’Autriche” written in Zürich by Beneš under the pseudonym Edouard Bielsky, in which the narrative of victimisation can be seen with, and this is rare enough to stress this point, the religious thematic as well – though not in the framework of a martyrdom discourse.²⁰² He was also often quoted in articles of *Gazette de Lausanne* and *Journal de Genève*, as we can see in his telegram dated June 20, 1917,²⁰³ and in both newspapers’ archives.²⁰⁴ In some of these articles, we can see the presence of the narrative as well.²⁰⁵ Last but certainly not least, the periodical *Československá Samostatnost* should be analysed closely, since it was considered one of the official press channels of the Czechoslovak National Council (and the Czech National Alliance before that) based in Paris. In its issue published on October 8, 1915, we can see the narrative was present in no less than three articles, be it as a main theme or only as traces and implied meanings, as well as historically significant references.²⁰⁶ On September, 1916, we see another clear example in the article “Po roce práce” published on the front page: “we managed to clearly explain how the Czech nation challenged the whole plan, how our soldiers surrendered and rebelled, and were executed in mass, how an incredible terror rages against us, how all of our main leaders are in jail or had to escape [...]”²⁰⁷ In the “Feuilleton” section of *Československá Samostatnost* published on May 10, 1917, we can see how the discourse of victimhood could also be spread through a very different type of articles – with a very creative and almost lyrical approach.²⁰⁸ Another noteworthy example can be found on the seventh page of the same issue, under the subtitle “Persekuce.”²⁰⁹ Given how regularly the narrative was identified in this periodical, we selected a few examples featuring the characteristics of the use of the narrative of victimhood in *Československá Samostatnost* to illustrate the phenomenon. This periodical reminds us of the use of the narrative in other publications such as *La Nation Tchèque* in France and *V Boj!* in the United States of America.

We can thus say that Switzerland and its border area with France – including the small city of Annemasse – was a key location in the diffusion strategy of the narrative, and therefore, it is crucial to analyse the activities of Czechs and Slovaks in this country to understand the use of

²⁰² Edouard Bielsky [Beneš], “Lettre d’Autriche,” December 1915, MÚA, EB, IV, 1-73, R3/2.

²⁰³ Telegram from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 20.06.1917 (Kor. TGM-EB), 238.

²⁰⁴ For example, in *Journal de Genève*: 27.07.1916, 23.05.1918, 13.06.1918, 22.10.1918. For example, in *Gazette de Lausanne*: 23.05.1918, 12.06.1918.

²⁰⁵ For instance, in the article “Vers l’Indépendance,” *Journal de Genève* (22.10.1918).

²⁰⁶ “Dopis z Prahy,” “Prof. Masaryk,” and “Degenerace Habsburku a Rakouska,” *Československá Samostatnost* (08.10.1915), 1, 2, 6.

²⁰⁷ “Po Roce Práce,” *Československá Samostatnost* (21.09.1916), 1.

²⁰⁸ “Feuilleton,” *Československá Samostatnost* (10.05.1917), 2-4.

²⁰⁹ “Persekuce,” *ibid.*, 7.

the narrative of victimhood. It should be highlighted as a diffusion centre, since the news from Austria were mainly collected and received through the Swiss-Austrian border. The difficulties related to this border being regularly closed by the authorities in Vienna was even mentioned by Beneš.²¹⁰

The last section of this chapter dedicated to the situation abroad, for both foreign and Czech (and Slovak) politicians, diplomats and scholars, and their use of the narrative of victimisation, is directed to the case of the United Kingdom, and more precisely London. Indeed, Masaryk spent most of his time abroad between Paris and London, and he assumed a significant position within the King's College there, as part of the newly founded School of Slavonic Studies. British politicians and scholars were highly interested in the story of the small Czech nation being oppressed by the Austrian monarchy: Masaryk was invited multiple times to give lectures at academic and political conferences, as well as by labour unions so he could deliver speeches to workers. If we dare comparing two very different persons solely based on their role in defending the Czech cause, we can say that the equivalent of Ernest Denis was Robert William Seton-Watson (1879-1951), in the United Kingdom. The British historian was indeed instrumental in increasing Masaryk's popularity and outreach in London. The strategy in this British context had to be radically different from the one used in France, due to the fact that the French and British nations were not built on the same national ideals and therefore, appealing to the British public opinion necessarily included references to these ideals – Christianity and the greatness of the British empire,²¹¹ among others. Czechs and Slovaks were just one of the many small nations the United Kingdom felt it was its duty to defend – the first one being Belgium, which was one of their primary reasons to engage in the war.²¹² This background is crucial to better understand the use of the victimisation narrative in the British context. Indeed, the narrative was present in much of the correspondence received by Masaryk, as well as in newspaper articles. However, unless he had a direct influence on or link with the text, it was not focusing on the Czech case and the narrative was much less visible – encompassing all Slavic nations of Central Europe, as well as Romania. Thanks to the numerous letters sent by

²¹⁰ Letter from E. Beneš to T. G. Masaryk, 23.10.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB), 38.

²¹¹ We can see both of these elements of British nationalism featured in the following works: Robert William Seton-Watson et al., "Preface," "Introductory," in *War and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1915); and R. W. Seton-Watson, "Basis of Publication," *What is at Stake in the War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 2.

²¹² Following the *Treaty of London* (1839), the United Kingdom was to protect Belgium's territorial integrity. For more on this topic, see: C.P. Sanger and H.T.J. Norton, *England's Guarantee to Belgium and Luxembourg* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1915).

journalists to Masaryk, thanking him for the interviews he gave them,²¹³ we can easily confirm the phenomenon observed in the first chapter of this paper, namely the peak of occurrences in 1916. It corresponds to the period when Masaryk was most active in reaching out to British newspapers – as well as in other locations, as seen previously in this chapter. Letters sent and received by Beneš clearly show that the British diplomatic corps was the last one to be fully convinced of the urgent need to recognise the Czechoslovak state as an independent, allied and equal state. Nevertheless, Masaryk’s attitude to the narrative of victimhood remained fairly academic, as seen in the first chapter of this paper. He relied on Beneš and other advocates of the Czech cause regarding the difficult task of convincing the masses: his role was to be the interlocutor for officials, including presidents and prime ministers. The Czechoslovak National Council was already functioning as an independent government, thus Beneš was in charge of representing their nation abroad, just like a Foreign Minister – which he then became officially – would do.

²¹³ Letters came from, among others: The Thomson Publications (29.11.1916), *The Christian Science Monitor* – European Office (24.11.1916), *Handelsblad* – London Editor (09.11.1916), *The Observer* (28.12.1916), and Newark Evening News – Europe Office. MÚA, TGM, V-VII, 36a, 12.

Chapter 3 – Perspectives from Within

Even though freedom of the press was not achieved anywhere in the Habsburg monarchy before the First World War started and before the empire definitively collapsed, Czechs benefited from an increasingly diverse political and media landscape since the second half of the nineteenth century: “By 1875, Bohemia boasted 195 periodicals, 99 in Czech: fifteen years later, the region produced 418 periodicals, 253 of them in Czech.”²¹⁴ Most of the political parties, traditional or recently founded such as the Young Czechs (Mladočeský), were subsidising at least one newspaper which returned the favour by offering a mediatic platform to the parties’ ideas and programmes.²¹⁵ New coalitions, also known as “clubs”, were created and had a significant role in the opposition at the Reichsrat.²¹⁶ Therefore, saying that Czechs were unable to critically discuss political topics before the war due to systematic persecution from the central power in Vienna – precisely what Czech politicians claimed at the time – would be historically inaccurate. Yet, we can find such an idea suggested in many of the political parties’ articles and campaigns at the turn of the century, as well as in Czech historiography throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as seen in the introduction of this paper. It is important though not to state the opposite: the Habsburg political system was far from being an example of liberal democracy. During the war, due to martial law and the state of war’s legal and practical consequences on political and civil life among others, the situation dramatically changed, and censorship became increasingly restrictive for Czechs who had ideas and narratives going against the interests of the Central Powers. This rival discourse included requests for full autonomy (Bohemian and Moravian Diets) within a federation instead of a centralised state, refusal of waging war on behalf of Austria-Hungary (mass desertions of Czech soldiers on the frontline with Russia), demonstrated interest in the social and political revolutionary developments in Russia which threatened the legitimacy and prosperity of the monarchy (Bolshevism, Communism),²¹⁷ and appeals for a more proportionate representation of all nationalities in the political and electoral system eventually leading to the decrease of the German minority’s influence, especially in Bohemia.²¹⁸ As we can see, the situation was very

²¹⁴ A. Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle* (2009), 35.

²¹⁵ Stanley B. Winters, “The Young Czechs Party (1874-1914): An Appraisal” (*Slavic Review* 28 (1969), no 3): 433, 438-439.

²¹⁶ Otto Urban, *Česká Společnost 1848-1918* (Prague: Svoboda, 1982), 328-335.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 518-521.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 554.

tense in the years preceding the war due to these demands from Czech politicians such as Kramář and Masaryk; the centralised system of the Habsburg monarchy ensuring the prevalence of German and Austrian subjects' interests would have been permanently weakened with such reforms. If these discourses were tolerated before the outbreak of the war in Bohemia, they were strictly scrutinised afterwards until 1918 and the end of the German-Austrian hegemony in Central Europe.²¹⁹ Additionally, the narrative of victimhood was closely examined by the Austrian authorities, partly due to the problematic topics it included: Jan Hus and the Taborite and Hussite heritage, the Battle of White Mountain, the Compromise of 1867 and its impact on the hopes Czechs sustained for further autonomy, or at least further recognition of their rights as Czech subjects within the monarchy, among others.²²⁰ Indeed, these were systematically portraying the Austrian state as an oppressor, sometimes going as far as considering Austrians as foreigners – a hardly acceptable statement from the Austrian dynasty. The basis of such statements was that the Emperor Franz-Joseph had never been crowned King of Bohemia, despite its pledge to do so when taking over the throne of Austria-Hungary in 1848. While the narrative of victimhood had included the ideals of Austroslavism during the nineteenth century due to various influences including the one of Palacký, it was increasingly radical in its opposition to the Austrian power in the beginning of the twentieth century, and this evolution was confirmed during the war. It is on this historical background and political context that this part of the present study is based. Therefore, it should not be surprising to the reader that the research was more difficult than for the previous chapters. Indeed, finding traces of the victimisation narrative in published sources originating from the Czech lands during the studied period was not as evident as finding the same traces in sources published abroad. Yet, this narrative was still present in the Czech-language political landscape in the Czech lands, and the following chapter will aim at showing the nature and extent of its use, as well as highlighting the role of its main protagonists. But first, we need to re-contextualise the theme of victimhood appropriately. Indeed, without an accurate picture of the situation in Bohemia during the First World War, it would be difficult to fully seize the importance of the narrative of victimisation.

²¹⁹ J. Papoušek, *The Czechoslovak Nation's Struggle for Independence* (1928), 13.

²²⁰ Some or all of these revendications were included in the Young Czechs, the Agrarian, the Realist, and the Social Democratic Parties from the late nineteenth (or early twentieth) century already.

The First World War, Martial Law & Surveillance

It is an indisputable historical fact that the Habsburg monarchy had a political and judicial system that significantly restricted certain freedoms depending on the social class, employment situation and family situation of each individual, as noted by Tomasz Kamusella: “Full legal equality of the three [Austria-Hungary, Ottomans, and Russia] empires’ inhabitants and the doing away with divine-right legitimization of power were not effected prior to their disappearance after World War I.”²²¹ This was the case during times of peace, when political opposition could still voice their concerns through a form of democratic parliamentary system that was modified – aiming at improvements in terms of its efficiency – on a regular basis during the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth century.²²² It is however crucial not to omit the context of the period chosen for the present research. Indeed, it was common for sovereign states to adapt their judicial and political systems in times of war. Therefore, the perspective of Czechs living in Austria-Hungary during the period of 1914-1918 was closely linked to events that occurred due to the specificities of martial law. For instance, the use of mass executions of soldiers as a punishment for equally massive desertions, as well as the regularity of trials for “high treason” with the death penalty as most likely outcome despite the lack of convincing evidence for the alleged crime, were serious breaches of human rights from our twenty-first century perspective, but it was similarly used by all powers during war time before 1945. We can see in a telegram sent by Masaryk that criticism and worrying remarks regarding barbaric behaviour of Czech soldiers (“our boys”) in Russia was also voiced by the Allies.²²³ Nonetheless, other aspects, such as censorship and the termination of multiple Czech-language periodicals, as we will see in the next section of this chapter, were most typical of Austria-Hungary, while the press benefited from a wider freedom in other countries such as France, the United Kingdom or the United States of America – at relative levels depending on the type of articles, location, topics and languages. Nevertheless, in the British and American cases, these countries were not directly confronted to the realities of the frontlines and the permeability of borders that stemmed from it; and none of these countries experienced an upheaval as the one challenging the very existence of the Austrian-Hungarian state. Such a context entails that newspapers were mostly covering the developments of the war: these reports were crucial information and were often, though not systematically, exempt from

²²¹ T. Kamusella, *The Politics of Language* (2012), 9.

²²² O. Urban, *Česká Společnost 1848-1918* (1982), 100-134, 142-183, 518-564.

²²³ Telegram from T. G. Masaryk to M. R. Štefánek, [1918], MÚA, TGM, VIII, 17a, 20.

politically oriented discourses. The narrative of victimisation was thus less visible and especially less public inside the Czech lands as it was the case abroad; it was common for periodicals to dedicate two to four pages to reports pertaining to the war itself, with detailed accounts of each frontline or main location. A notable exception is the periodical *Rozvoj*, which is analysed in the last section of this chapter; this newspaper covered the war developments only in a limited version. In this research, we deliberately excluded from the occurrences of the narrative the articles showing emotional and patriotic sympathy towards Czech soldiers: every single nation was supporting their respective armies, it would thus hinder the relevance of the overall analysis to include such examples.

One element stood out during the analysis of archived documents: letters sent from and to Prague were coded, so that no one else but the addressee would be able to read them (see *Picture 1* for an illustrated example of decoded letter). The risks connected to increased and continuous surveillance from the Austrian and German authorities were a regular topic in their communications, as we can see for instance in a letter sent by Louis Eisenmann to Edvard Beneš on August 21, 1918.²²⁴ In this letter, he mentioned that he was worried some more of their letters had been intercepted and read, since there were traces of the envelope potentially being opened ahead of its delivery. The two men discussed how to avoid this from happening again. Similar situations occurred with letters transiting through Denmark²²⁵ and Germany (see Chapter 2 “Perspectives from Abroad”). This observation is noteworthy for the analysis of the situation inside the Habsburg monarchy’s borders, since it is understood that the Austrian authorities were ensuring all communications involving Czech political opposition’s leaders were carefully screened whenever they could get hold of a telegram or a letter. It justifies the use of coded letters and it gives an idea of the censorship and surveillance enforced within the state’s borders. It also explains further why it was so difficult to find the narrative in published sources: even private correspondence had to be carefully protected.

²²⁴ Letter from Louis Eisenmann to E. Beneš, on 21.08.1918, MÚA, EB, IV, 2-5.

²²⁵ Letter from T. G. Masaryk to E. Beneš, on 01.10.1915 (Kor. TGM-EB), 31-34.

of victimhood, demonstrates that the reality of the war challenged the diffusion of the narrative inside the borders of the Austrian territory.

Victimhood as Inclusive or Exclusive National Myth?

The aspirations of the political opposition in the Czech lands entailed conflicts with the Austrian government, but also within the Czech community itself. Indeed, not all sides agreed on the goals pursued by Masaryk and Beneš abroad nor on their strategy and methods. Such a bold position was very dangerous for anyone still living in Austria-Hungary and left open the door to a number of persecutions on the politicians themselves, but also on their families.²²⁶ Nevertheless, the advantage of a narrative involving victimhood – and not martyrdom, as explained in the introduction – was that it was less divisive. Indeed, despite the prevalence of non-Catholic figures as well as an omnipresent pattern of blaming the Austrian or German Other for all the evils of Central Europe, the characteristics of the narrative were flexible enough to fit in the political propaganda of many political parties. The main obstacle to the spread of this discourse was censorship. As a matter of fact, if considered as a persecution, as it was the case in the narrative spread abroad by the Czechoslovak National Council and the Bohemian National Alliance, then all sides of the political and press landscape in Austria-Hungary were concerned, at least when it comes to the press published in Czech language. Indeed, in terms of publications, we can see already from October 1914 the considerable impact the censorship had on newspapers. The periodical of the Young Czechs Party *Národní Listy*, for instance, saw many of its articles, including those on the front page usually dedicated to war-related reports, repeatedly prohibited and erased from its final print.²²⁷ The censored articles were not always addressing sensitive or political issues. Beyond emphasising the fact that the narrative of victimhood was based on real facts in many cases, this observation also shows the difficulty and limits of this research in the case of the Czech lands.

Nevertheless, it was possible to identify the narrative in some articles of the Czech press. It was detected in the issue of *Národní Listy* published on January 1st, 1915, for instance, which had also been subject to censorship from the Austrian authorities.²²⁸ Indeed, this article emphasises

²²⁶ J. Papoušek, *The Czechoslovak Nation's Struggle for Independence* (1928), 12-13, 15.

²²⁷ See for example the issues of *Národní Listy* published on the following dates: 23.10.1914 (front page and page 2), 23.11.1914 (front page), 25.11.1914 (page 3), 26.11.1914 (front page), 05.03.1915 (page 2), 03.05.1915 (page 4), 26.08.1915 (front page), 07.01.1916 (page 2), 02.04.1916 (page 3), 07.09.1916 (front page, pages 2, 4), 30.10.1916 (page 2), 21.03.1917 (pages 3, 4). There were many more issues censored in the exact same way between 1914 and 1918; these examples are meant to illustrate the continuity of the censorship measures.

²²⁸ “V Nový Rok,” *Národní Listy* (01.01.1915), 1.

the negative and destructive consequences of the war, while implying that for Czechs, 1915 should be a year leading to “peace of mind”; if we dare reading between the lines, the author, who is no one else but the leader of the Young Czechs Party, Karel Kramář, was suggesting that the war was a burden for all nations – but not so much for the Czech nation. The narrative was present again in *Národní Listy* published a few months later only, on April 6, 1915. Once again, Kramář defied the censorship authorities with his article “Vzkříšení” (Resurrection):

“Belief in the right to free life and free self-determination of peoples will be the basic chord of intellectual life of anyone who, with a pure heart and a holy enthusiasm, will die. [...] What about us, may we hope for resurrection? The small nations now have stepped up in the war – there are talks about the freedom of all nations in a gigantic struggle...”²²⁹

This article was written within the context of his trial – he was sentenced to death at first, then to fifteen years of imprisonment, for high treason. We can see that parts of the article were erased by the censorship authorities. Meanwhile in the newspaper *Hlas Lidu*, published on December 21, 1914, we can notice the presence of the narrative’s characteristics in the poem “Výkřik”.²³⁰ This example is especially interesting for its use of a narrative close to martyrdom, which is probably linked to the nature of this source: *Hlas Lidu* was indeed the newspaper of the Czech Christian-Socialist party. Therefore, the theme of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice is used in this specific case; poems were a very useful mean of passing on political messages through non-political channels. The emphasis made on the Czech people and their homeland – without mentioning Austria nor the empire – shows that the narrative was used to define Czechs specifically; yet, *Hlas Lidu* was not part of the main opposition forces, on the contrary. The party it represented was mostly supportive of the Austrian Emperor throughout the war. The narrative is once again used as a uniting discourse in the issue published on February 15, 1917, with an article calling for Czechs to remain strong in facing political challenges.²³¹ We can thus see how this narrative was used beyond political affiliation in the Czech lands, highlighting once again its inclusive character. Let us note here that despite not being one of the periodicals known as the opposition’s propaganda tools, *Hlas Lidu* was also regularly censored and articles were also removed from its publications.²³² Therefore, the censorship was not aimed strictly against the opposition; it was a wider policy, typical of the monarchy – even before the war.

²²⁹ Karel Kramář, “Vzkříšení,” *Národní Listy* (06.04.1915), 1.

²³⁰ “Výkřik,” *Hlas Lidu* (21.12.1914), 2.

²³¹ “Zlatá Slova,” *Hlas Lidu* (15.02.1917), 2.

²³² See for example *Hlas Lidu* published on: 10.12.1914 (page 3); 04.05.1916 (page 4); 08.05.1916 (page 3); 31.08.1916 (page 2).

The Quest for Freedom and Independence: Czech Jews

Among the inhabitants of the Czech lands who took part in this last phase of the Czech (or Czechoslovak) nation-building process were the Czech (and Czech-speaking) Jews. Indeed, the rise of German nationalism and the Pan-Germanist ideology antagonised this community who shared the historical experience of being left out of the main political developments due to their linguistic and religious identities.²³³ Hence, their support for an independent Czech (or Czechoslovak) state during the First World War was of significant importance to the present study's topic. They voiced their concerns and inclinations through various channels, including newspapers such as *Rozvoj*, for instance – another newspaper that had been significantly impacted by the authorities' censorship measures.²³⁴ Even though this sole source would not be enough to depict the entire Czech-Jewish community during this period, it is relevant to look into how certain persons within this community were integrating the narrative of victimhood in their discourse through articles published in *Rozvoj*. Indeed, they shared many apprehensions and hopes with the rest of the Czech (and Slovak) population during this period that was a defining moment for their national identity as well, both inside the Austrian-Hungarian state and outside of it in Europe more generally. Many occurrences of the narrative were found in this periodical; we carefully selected the examples showcasing the narrative of victimhood as defined in the first chapter of this paper, in order to avoid a confusion with the discourse of martyrdom that was also a key element of the Jewish national identity. For Czech Jews who were contributing to *Rozvoj*, using the narrative of victimhood was a way to claim their right to being part of this nation as it strived for independence, defending their *Czech-ness* and standing by all other nationalities – Jews being considered a nationality at the time, including in official census – oppressed by Vienna and the German elite's minority in Prague. We can see this phenomenon in a particularly evident occasion in the issue published on December 11, 1914:

“We Czech Jews feel now more than ever *body and soul together with the rest of the Czech people*, with whom we share *as brothers a common fate, in good and evil*, and we declare that publicly and unequivocally that *we condemn all denunciations* wherever and from whoever they come from.”²³⁵

²³³ Kateřina Čapková, *Czech, German, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 46, 118-119.

²³⁴ See for example the *Rozvoj* issues published on the following dates: 04.09.1915 (front page and pages 2-5); 20.02.1915 (pages 1, 3, 5).

²³⁵ “České veřejnosti,” *Rozvoj* (11.12.1914), 1. Emphases added.

Jews were often accused of all evils in an era of increasing antisemitic feelings, as well as national and nationalist tensions.²³⁶ In the aforementioned article, the authors clearly stated that Czech Jews – at least, those who signed the article and those they represented – would not betray Czechs and the Czech nation in any way. Later in the same issue but in another, longer article discussing the “Jewish Question”, we can read: “It is only the nationality itself that is decisive and not, ultimately, the national affiliation of the regiment in which Jewish soldiers are fighting. [...] Since 1876, Czech Jews have been raising national awareness within the Jewish community.”²³⁷ By rooting the Jewish national and patriotic engagement in political milestones from the nineteenth century, the author of this article was proving his community aligned itself with the Czech national movement that had made multiple attempts to gain more cultural and political representation and autonomy. Thus, they were positioning themselves not only as Czechs, but as Czechs loyal to the tradition of Dobrovský, Palacký and Jungmann. We can see additional references to Czech historical figures, such as Jan Hus and Palacký, for instance, in the issue published on July 10, 1915, dedicated to the anniversary of the death of the medieval priest. In one article, the author explained that Czech history was also Czech Jews’ history, both the good and the bad episodes. He concluded with this: “Because by taking over the co-ownership of the national role, they [Czech Jews] accepted with it all the obligations from the past that are tied to it.”²³⁸ Given the direct reference to Jan Hus and its implied meaning in the context of Czech nationalism, as explained in the first chapter, this is considered as an occurrence of the narrative of victimhood. Indeed, Jan Hus was depicted as the first Czech martyr who sacrificed himself so that Czechs could ‘live in truth’. In this article, it was made clear to all readers that Czech Jews considered this part of Czech history as their own and therefore, considered themselves as belonging to the Czech nation victim of relentless Habsburg oppression. In another article published in the same issue, we can read: “Czech Reformation, like Reformation in general, is a struggle for the freedom of the people’s spirit, a fight against the world controlling the living forces of humanity, the crippling authority of the papacy, the medieval church.”²³⁹ The author then goes on with the same tone, comparing the fight of Jan Hus against the Roman Catholic Church to the fight for reforms in the modern state – implied reference to Austria-Hungary – that blocked all political freedom. Following these observations, we can thus say that the Czech Jews who actively took part in the edition of *Rozvoj*

²³⁶ Hillel J. Kieval, “Death and the Nation: Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech lands,” *Jewish History* 10, No 1 (1996), 80, 83.

²³⁷ “Židovská otázka,” *Rozvoj* (11.12.1914), 3.

²³⁸ Alfred Fuchs, “Český žid a Hus,” *Rozvoj* (10.07.1915), 1.

²³⁹ Kamil z Nagy, “Osvoboditel,” *ibid*, 1.

during the First World War were embracing key elements of Czech nationalism, including the victimisation narrative.

Jews had a similar purpose during the First World War as Czechs and Slovaks: their fight for recognition as a nation on the international stage, which was rewarded with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, granting them the right to establish a Jewish national state in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the choice of some Czech Jews at the beginning of the war was to defend their status as Czechs, instead of joining forces with other European Jews, as we can see in the aforementioned articles of *Rozvoj*. Indeed, the “Jewish Question” article’s conclusion states that the ideas of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) and of a Zionist state corresponded to what the enemies of the Jews wanted, namely that Jews would be set apart and not included in their respective nations, i.e. the Czech nation, in this specific case.²⁴⁰ Their own experience of Habsburg persecutions and discriminations led Czech Jews to turn towards those who were waging war against the same enemy and seemed determined to achieve their goals – beyond religious differences. The quest for independence and freedom was the most common justification for and purpose of the use of the narrative of victimhood during the First World War, creating long-term or temporary alliances between nationalities previously opposing each other. We can see a surprising twist in the use of the narrative of victimhood in the issue mentioned previously and published on December 11, 1914: “Waves of antisemitism, brought to us by the Christian-Socialist from Vienna – and Germany after the Hilsner affair occurred, and Jews certainly had no reason to complain about any hostility against our community nor the Czech press against itself.”²⁴¹ It is indeed meaningful to see how a typical pattern of the Czech narrative of victimhood, i.e. blaming the Germans and the Austrians for all the wrongdoings, is used in this specific case to justify Czechs’ growing antisemitism and to praise the rest of the Czech press that did not succumb to this toxic foreign influence. Furthermore, we can note that, as made clear with his defence of a Jew during a controversial trial in 1899,²⁴² Masaryk was not as antipathic towards the Czech Jewish community as many of his compatriots, choosing justice and humanity (*humanita*) over hateful prejudices. When establishing the founding principles of the future Czechoslovak state, he also highlighted that all minorities would be respected and would have appropriate proportional representation within the political and electoral system. Such a project could only inspire Czech Jews who felt they could finally belong to the nation they had lived with for centuries.

²⁴⁰ “Židovská otázka,” *Rozvoj* (11.12.1914), 3.

²⁴¹ “Židovská otázka v národě českém,” *Rozvoj* (11.12.1914), 4.

²⁴² A. Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle* (2009), 28.

Conclusive Remarks

This study of a specific aspect of the Czech nation-building process during the First World War contributes to defining the narrative of victimhood in a more precise manner, showing its complexity and its various roles, both in Austria-Hungary and abroad. It has shown that the narrative was used by all parties involved: Czechs and Slovaks, both abroad and at home; foreign allies of the Czech and Slovak nation; diplomats, politicians, scholars and journalists from Austria-Hungary and from foreign countries. The range as well as the continuity of its use demonstrate that it was a key element in defining the Czech (and later Czechoslovak) national identity. Indeed, the narrative was not a new element, though it evolved alongside the different nationalist ideologies of the multinational state, moving from a heavily religious discourse involving all the characteristics of martyrdom, to a secular one, featuring political victimhood instead. Furthermore, the consistency in which the most influential, or at least popular, periodicals in each of the studied locations made use of the narrative during the war is indicative of its impact on the perception of Czech nationalism during and after the war. The victimisation narrative was an element of Czech nationalism with an inclusive character, which is a striking difference when compared with martyrdom narratives, noticeably exclusive due to their divisive character. It was used as a ‘marketing’ tool by T. G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, as well as the other advocates of the Czech (and Slovak) cause, in order to brand the Czech (and Slovak) nation in a favourable way in the eyes of the Allied powers. This is made evident thanks to the prevalence of its use in diplomatic and political contexts. Through Masaryk’s influence, the narrative also gained in legitimacy; indeed, he consistently demonstrated its historical and philosophical background during his lectures at the King’s College in London, as well as during his many conferences. In a sense, we can say that Masaryk normalised the narrative of victimhood, in such a way that it then remained an integral part of Czech historiography until the end of the twentieth century; it also maintained the image of the Czech nation as a powerless one despite its heroic dimension, a thematic used later as well. The most noteworthy finding consists of the inclusive dimension of the use of the narrative with Czech nationalism during the First World War. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the narrative was not used by one side of the Czech political spectrum in Austria-Hungary; instead, it transcended political polarisation. Besides, Czech Jews were included in this study of Czech nationalism, though they are often left aside – they were, after all, considered a separate nationality at the time. Nonetheless, we believe that through the perspective of the narrative of

victimhood, it is important to include them in the definition of Czech nationalism: they used the narrative in a similar way as other Czechs, and even defended their kinship and loyalty by integrating it in their own discourse.

It is also important to note here that the narrative of victimhood was used by other nations during the First World War, especially those in a similar situation as the Czechs and the Slovaks. Indeed, Yugoslavs and Bulgarians were using a similar discourse in their letters to Masaryk, given the fact that they had no choice but to be enrolled on the side of Austria-Hungary in the war. The narrative of victimisation was extremely important for all the nations within the Habsburg monarchy to differentiate themselves from the government's official stance and actions. It would be interesting to look into the dialogue of these narratives between the Czechs and the Slovaks on one side, and the Yugoslavs and Bulgarians on the other; adding the Russian and Polish cases would be relevant as well. Unfortunately, due to linguistic limitations, it was not possible to cover these aspects in the present study.

Understanding Czech nationalism during the First World War might seem like a very limited study in terms of scope and European dimension. Nonetheless, we are convinced that given the importance of the narrative of martyrdom, and then of victimhood, in Czech patriotism and nationalism through centuries and until today, this study bears relevance at a European level. Indeed, what was then the Habsburgs in this discourse was replaced by the threat represented by the Third Reich, then by the threat of Soviet Russia, simultaneously replaced by the threat symbolised by capitalism and the United States of America, and more recently, by the symbol of Brussels and the European Union. A nation necessarily defines itself through discourses against "the Other", Benedict Anderson explains, alongside many experts in nationalism studies. This "Other" is often depicted as threatening, but the nation itself decides whether it wants to be portrayed as a heroic champion that prevailed against the peril of "otherness", or if it prefers being seen as a martyr, a victim of relentless – and usually unsuccessful – oppression. Furthermore, this study has shown how nationalism, a concept deeply rooted in territorial perceptions, knows no border: the victimisation narrative was essential to strengthen the bond between Czechs at home and abroad. It would be interesting to investigate further the latter characteristic during a wider period of time, so that its unusual inclusive attribute could be more clearly interpreted – thus improving the overall understanding of Czech nationalism through a historical perspective.

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