

“RELIGION NEBENSACHE”
INTERMARRIAGE BETWEEN BIOLOGICAL
INTEGRATION AND (SELF-)DESTRUCTION

Gaby Zürn

The article deals with the meaning of intermarriage in Czechoslovakia between 1880 and 1938 as one of the most intimate kinds of interaction between people of differing ethnic identity. The author concentrates on the dynamic evolution of state laws governing marriages and the emergence of a racial discourse which especially highlighted intermarriages. In this discourse, religion increasingly became a minor matter, a “Nebensache,” as it was referred to in marriage advertisements of the 1920s. Self-ascription, and perception by “the other” in social spaces defined as frontiers resulted in identity constructions which were situated on a layer between what has been termed “biological integration” on one hand and “(self-)destruction” on the other. The author comes to the conclusion that in the contemporary racist discourse of the late 19th–early 20th centuries intermarriages served as a major instrument to maintain and consolidate ethnic boundaries. They thus became a role model to contrast the earlier, mid-19th-century notion and aspiration of biological integration.