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Banat Swabians on the Move: Reconsidering the History of a German-speaking Minority from East Central Europe in the Twentieth Century

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This article argues for a reconsideration of the twentieth century history of Banat Swabians – a German-speaking minority from East Central Europe – within the conceptual framework of migration studies. In particular, it examines the case of a Swabian migrant from the Banat village Sackelhausen/Săcălaz and members of her family, identifying and analysing the major patterns of their movements in a global perspective. In doing so, this article intends to show not only that Banat Swabians participated in many of the major European migration flows during the twentieth century, but also that a systematic study of the motives, restrictions, and contingencies in this particular group's migration history has the potential to enhance our understanding of European migrations in the twentieth century in general. The ultimate aim of such an approach is to devise a starting point and structural basis for future research on the topic.

Introduction

Banat Swabians, a German-speaking group from East Central Europe, were a people on the move in the twentieth century.¹ This makes it all the more curious that only a few of the many historical accounts published about the Banat Swabians have systematically and comprehensively tackled the aspect of mobility. Instead, the majority of narratives have tended to focus on origins, culture and identity politics, stressing continuity over change, and place the Banat Swabians within regional or local trajectories rather than more global developments.

¹ As with all ethnic or quasi-ethnic terms, there is no clear definition of Banat Swabians, especially vis-à-vis the broader term Danube Swabians. For the purposes of this paper, the term Banat Swabians refers to German speakers in the historical Banat province of the Austro-Hungarian empire within the borders of today's Romania. It therefore excludes Danube Swabians living in the Serbian and Hungarian parts of Banat.

Indeed, for a long time after settlement in the eighteenth century, most Banat Swabians hardly ever travelled farther than the next village, and while they certainly noticed what was going on in the rest of Europe and the world, they remained notably unaffected by most of the great transitions that took place until the twentieth century.² Even the connection of many villages and towns in Banat to the railway network in the middle of the nineteenth century did not induce much movement. That, however, changed at the onset of the twentieth century, when mobility suddenly became a dominant and essential factor in the lives of many Banat Swabians. Whilst this development has not gone unnoticed in scholarship on this group, these twentieth-century migration patterns have rarely been the analytical focus of any study on Banat Swabians.

In this paper, I shall show that since the late 1890s the migration patterns of Banat Swabians have mirrored almost every significant trend in the history of European migration in this period. Banat Swabians were among the millions of trans-Atlantic migrants who sought their fortunes in the New World; many were displaced as a result of World War II – most of them temporarily, but others never returned; some Banat Swabians became victims of post-war deportations; during the Cold War, large numbers crossed the Iron Curtain to get to the West – with some risking their lives as clandestine migrants; and by the end of the century virtually all of them – except for a small community that has remained until the present day – had left the Banat region for good. Their movements were mostly voluntary, occasionally forced, and sometimes proscribed. The networks in which they moved were transnational in scope, the communities they built diasporic in nature. Studying twentieth-century Banat Swabian history under the central theme of mobility therefore has the potential to enable a more differentiated perspective on migration outside the emigration-immigration dichotomy, on the complex interplay of migration regimes and national and international politics, on family, community and gender dimensions in migration decisions, and much more.

While a comprehensive history of Banat Swabian migration in the twentieth century is beyond the scope of this investigation, I will outline and contextualize the major developments and themes of Banat Swabian migration history on the basis of a specific case study, and will place this microhistorical approach into the conceptual framework of migration studies. In this way, I intend to demonstrate both that Banat Swabians actively took part in and shaped some of the great trends in twentieth-century migration, and that the study of Banat Swabian migration

² Contrary to what the term ‘Swabian’ implies, German settlers were not of homogenous Swabian (i.e. south-central German) descent. Most early migrants came from the Palatinate and Saar regions, but the general composition of settlers was highly heterogeneous. A good introduction to eighteenth century migration to the Banat region is William T. O’Reilly, “Agenten, Werbung, und Reisemodalitäten. Die Auswanderung ins Temescher Banat im 18. Jahrhundert,” in *Migration nach Ost- und Südosteuropa vom 18. bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Mathias Beer and Dittmar Dahlmann (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1999).

history can offer a better, more nuanced understanding of Central and Eastern European migrations in the twentieth century more generally. The ultimate aim of such an approach is to devise a starting point and structural basis for future research on the topic.

The case study that will help to illustrate my line of arguments centres on the village Sackelhausen, located in present-day Romania, and some of its inhabitants, namely Barbara Ortinau (née Schuller, 1908 – 2006) and members of her family.³ The reconstruction of her life story, as I have attempted it here, is based on a series of interviews with her daughter and son-in-law, conducted in early 2016.⁴ Other sources include four so-called *Ortsmonographien*⁵ about Sackelhausen from 1925, 1979, 1994 and 2006 respectively and material published by the *Heimatsortsgemeinschaft Sackelhausen*.⁶

I have divided the main part of this paper into four different sections, which are both topical and chronological, encompassing the major trends in Banat Swabian migration in the twentieth century. Some of those are temporally confined to a certain period, others represent longer-term, intermittent patterns. In the final part of the paper I will draw a brief conclusion and hint at possible directions for future research on the topic.

Across the Atlantic

Barbara Ortinau's personal migration history begins not in Banat, but in St. Louis, Missouri, where she was born in 1908. Her parents, a recently married couple from Sackelhausen, had left their village for the United States a year earlier in order to earn money to afford a piece of land and build a house back in Banat. For her mother, this was actually the second trans-Atlantic journey as a domestic worker, since she had made her first trip together with her two sisters at the age of 17 in 1905, returned to the village to marry and then came back to St. Louis with her husband. After giving birth to Barbara on that second stay in the United States,

³ Sackelhausen is the German name of the village Săcălaz in today's Romania, located nine kilometres west of Timișoara.

⁴ It should be noted that Barbara Ortinau was my great-grandmother, her daughter and son-in-law are my maternal grandparents. I have conducted and recorded two interviews with them via Skype, on 22 and 29 January 2016. In the following, those interviews are treated as a documentary source. Where possible, I have tried to corroborate their oral accounts with physical evidence from the family archives, such as birth certificates, passports and other official documents.

⁵ *Ortsmonographien*, or village histories, focusing on the history of a certain locality, are a very common genre in the historiography of German-speaking groups in eastern Europe. They are, as in the case of Sackelhausen, mostly written by non-professionals and as such have to be considered with a certain amount of scepticism. However, they often provide valuable statistical and qualitative data that would be almost impossible to find elsewhere.

⁶ *Heimatsortsgemeinschaft Sackelhausen* is a subdivision of the Munich-based *Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben e.V.*, an association of Banat Swabians and their descendants in Germany, committed to the preservation of Banat Swabian community, culture and history.

she quit working in people's homes, and started cooking and doing the housework for a group of compatriot workers from Sackelhausen, who lived with her and her husband. By 1911, the small family had saved enough money and returned to Sackelhausen, this time for good, since a third tour – although envisaged by the husband – was deemed out of the question by Barbara's mother because of her extreme seasickness.⁷

Barbara Ortinau's story is hardly an exception. Labour migration to North America had been very common in Sackelhausen since at least the 1890s, mostly due to the rapid population growth the village experienced in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸ In 1850, a census conducted by the Habsburg authorities counted 2,714 inhabitants, by 1903 the number had risen to 4,112.⁹ At the time, Sackelhausen, like most villages in Banat, was predominantly an agrarian community, and inheritance was patrilineal and impartible.¹⁰ This induced the migration of non-heirs in light of population growth and lack of employment opportunities.¹¹ Single women in particular benefited from the opportunities associated with long-distance migration. Besides the prospect of income, employment in domestic work offered the chance to independently pursue a livelihood.¹²

An especially valuable source in tracking trans-Atlantic migration from Banat are U.S. passenger ship records. According to this data, Banat Swabian migration to the United States exploded at the turn of the century, rising from around thirty people per year between 1891 and 1900 to about 2,770 persons per year between 1901 and 1914.¹³ A closer look at the places of origin and destinations of those migrants suggests the establishment of strong trans-local patterns in those years – reciprocal connections between particular towns and cities on either side

⁷ Cf. "Interview with Barbara Ortinau's daughter and son-in-law," Katharina and Nikolaus Andres, conducted January 22, 2016.

⁸ Cf. "Geschichte des Ortes Sackelhausen – Beginn der Auswanderung nach Amerika," Heimatsortsgemeinschaft Sackelhausen (HOGS), accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.sackelhausen.eu/index.php?id=8>.

⁹ Cf. Egidius Haupt, *Geschichte der Gemeinde Sackelhausen, 1765-1925* (Temesvar: Schwäbische Verlags AG, 1925), 127, and Josef Pitzer, *Sackelhausen – Anfang und Ende* (Reutlingen: Heimatsortsgemeinschaft Sackelhausen, 1994), 100.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 121.

¹¹ Cf. Jan Kok, "The Family Factor in Migration Decisions," in *Migration History in World History. Multidisciplinary approaches*, ed. Jan Lucassen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 222.

¹² Christiane Harzig, "Domestics of the World (Unite?): Labor Migration Systems and Personal Trajectories of Household Workers in Historical and Global Perspective," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25.2/3 (2006): 54.

¹³ The following numbers are derived from "Ship Extraction Database of the Banat. Number of Passenger Arrivals by Year," ed. David Dreyer, last updated July 27, 2013, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~banatdata/DDB/Dates-Y.htm>. Even though those numbers can be generally regarded as accurate, methodological problems could have led to some Banat immigrants being excluded from Dreyer's statistics. According to the author, Banat Swabians are usually detectable in the records because they travelled with Hungarian passports, but declared their German ethnicity on the immigration documents. However, some might have slipped detection since a number of the lesser used North Sea ports did not require travel documents from passengers. It should also be noted that the above numbers include migrants who made multiple trips.

of the Atlantic.¹⁴ Of 645 recorded entries of migrants from Sackelhausen between 1892 and 1912, an overwhelming majority of 459 went to St. Louis, and for several other villages in Banat similar linkages through chain migration were established.¹⁵ World War I put a temporary stop to trans-Atlantic migration from Banat altogether, and while the numbers recovered slightly during the interbellum, they never reached their pre-war peaks again.¹⁶ The reasons for this certainly include tighter restrictions in the wake of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924, but the cultural ‘boom’ of Banat Swabian consciousness and identity after the largest part of Banat became part of the Kingdom of Romania in the 1920 Treaty of Trianon is also crucial in understanding the decline in migration. Romania’s minorities policy at the time allowed for much greater cultural autonomy than the previous Hungarian administration in the region, which pursued Magyarization, an often coercive policy of acculturation.¹⁷

While many migrants returned after having earned sufficient money, thereby bringing their experiences gained through migration back to their villages, some decided to stay and thus paved the ground for others to follow in intermittent rhythms throughout the following decades and after World War II.¹⁸ Because of these migration patterns, over the course of the twentieth century, the linkages established in the early years of the 1900s would evolve into a transnational migration system in the sense described by Nina G. Schiller et al, that is to say, distinct institutions, circular movements, and strong social and economic interconnections were formed.¹⁹

Wartime Migration

Movements of Banat Swabians during World War I were more or less confined to conscripts in the Austro-Hungarian army being deployed to the Russian and Serbian fronts. Even though the region experienced considerable economic and political turmoil during and after the war, living conditions remained comparatively stable.²⁰ Apart from a slight increase in the numbers of trans-Atlantic migrants after 1920, migration was not an issue for most Banat Swabians during the war or the interwar period. In World War II, however, their situation was mark-

¹⁴ Cf. Dirk Hoerder, “Migration Research in Global Perspective: Recent Developments,” *Sozial. Geschichte Online* 9 (2012): 70.

¹⁵ Cf. David Dreyer and Anton Kraemer, “Pre-World War I Migration Patterns of Banat Germans to North America,” *FEEFHS Journal* 10 (2002): 118.

¹⁶ Cf. “Ship Extraction Database.”

¹⁷ Cf. Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948. Ihre Rolle im rumänischen und serbischen Banat* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), 25f. and 94ff.

¹⁸ Cf. Dreyer and Kraemer, “Migration Patterns of Banat Germans,” 119, and “Auswanderung nach Amerika.”

¹⁹ Nina Glick Schiller et al., “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68.1 (1995): 48.

²⁰ Cf. Haupt, *Geschichte Sackelhausen*, 162.

edly different. This time conscripts fought in the Romanian army, the German Wehrmacht, and the Waffen-SS, reflecting both the territorial shifts during the interbellum era as well as the growing influence of the German Reich on German-speaking minorities in eastern Europe since the seizure of power by the Nazis in Germany 1933.²¹ In 1944 the situation escalated: in August, the Kingdom of Romania, which had initially been a member of the Axis powers, joined the Allies when faced with the advance of Soviet troops into its territory. The result was a rather chaotic large-scale evacuation of Banat Swabians to Thuringia, Bavaria, Czechoslovakia and Austria starting in September 1944, orchestrated by the retreating Wehrmacht.²²

In the midst of the turbulences, Barbara Ortinau and her family – now enlarged by a son and a daughter – managed to board a train in the nearby town of Hatzfeld that took them to Austria.²³ Others were not so lucky, and had to attempt the journey by wagon and horse, or had to stay behind. About a quarter of the total population of Sackelhausen remained, including Barbara's parents.²⁴ Those who had migrated to Austria also encountered numerous difficulties. The Ortinau family moved around Lower Austria multiple times, staying on different farms and in a refugee camp, until they were eventually taken in by a family in Waidhofen.²⁵ As the war drew to an end, the family had to make the decision that many people displaced by the war were facing, namely whether they should return, or whether they should start a new life elsewhere. In the case of the military administrations of Germany and Austria, these issues were debated under the terms of repatriation and resettlement, and as scholars have pointed out, the particular zone of occupation the refugees found themselves in could potentially limit their scope of action. Indeed, according to Peter Gatrell, repatriation was the preferred policy of the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and was supported by both Soviet and Western military administrations until late 1946. However, with the founding of the International Refugee Organization – without participation of the USSR – Western military administrations abandoned the primacy of repatriation, leaving the final decision up to the refugees in most instances.²⁶

Yet, as the example of the Ortinau family shows, the opportunities for movement might not have been so tightly circumscribed by Allied policies as Gatrell suggests. Even though Lower Austria was initially liberated by American troops, it had become part of the Soviet zone of occupation by May 1945. The question of return was nonetheless heavily debated by the family members, indicating that at

²¹ Cf. Hausleitner, *Donauschwaben*, 200.

²² Cf. *ibid.*, 286.

²³ Cf. "Interview," January 22, 2016. Hatzfeld is the German name of Jimbolia, located 50 kilometres west of Timisoara.

²⁴ Cf. Pitzer, *Sackelhausen*, 128 and 135.

²⁵ Cf. "Interview," January 22, 2016.

²⁶ Cf. Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94ff.

the time pressure to return was low even in the Soviet Zone and different options were on the table. Barbara's desire to return to Sackelhausen eventually prevailed over her husband's intention to move on to either Germany or the United States. By mid-June, several Banat Swabian families in the area had joined up and petitioned the Soviet administration to provide a train back to Banat, which they granted days later.²⁷ Upon arrival in their home village, Sackelhauseners found their houses occupied by Aromanians and Romanians, who had been promised land and property in the areas deserted by the Swabians.²⁸ A long and conflictual process of conciliation ensued, further complicated by communist expropriations and arbitrary acts of violence against the German-speaking minority, who were now considered perpetrators of the war by the Romanian state.²⁹

By December 1945, of an estimated 3,000 war refugees from Sackelhausen, about four fifths had returned.³⁰ Those who did not return were either granted status as expelled persons in Germany ('Vertriebene'), made use of family ties to start a new life in the Americas or migrated elsewhere.³¹ While those patterns certainly reflect different developments in refugee policies of the Allied military administrations as Peter Gatrell has shown, they also demonstrate that those policies were implemented rather arbitrarily in the first few months after the war. As the case of the Ortinau family reveals, the personal desires, fears and actions of the refugees were of at least equal significance. In this respect, the immediate post-war history of Banat Swabians fits neither into the master narrative of German expulsion, nor into the often assumed dichotomy between repatriation and resettlement of the post-war refugee regime.

Post-War Deportations

As a result of World War II, Banat Swabians were twice subjected to deportations. The first took place in January 1945 and thus affected those who had either stayed behind in the evacuations of 1944 or had served in the German or Romanian militaries and had since returned to their villages. These extraditions were part of a larger Soviet-led punitive campaign aimed at German-speaking minorities in Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia, who were collectively considered Nazi-collaborators.³² In Romania, nearly 70,000 German-speakers were deported,

²⁷ Cf. "Interview," January 22, 2016.

²⁸ Called "Mazedonier" by Banat Swabians, the Aromanians are a traditionally pastoralist group originating from the southern Balkans. Cf. Thede Kahl, *Ethnizität und räumliche Verteilung der Aromunen in Südosteuropa* (Münster: Institut für Geographie der Westfälischen Wilhelms Universität Münster, 1999).

²⁹ Cf. Hausleitner, *Donauschwaben*, 317ff.

³⁰ Cf. Pitzer, *Sackelhausen*, 138.

³¹ Cf. Reinhold Fett, *Sackelhausen – Heimatbuch einer Banater Gemeinde* (Limburg: Limburger Vereinsdruckerei 1979), 94ff.

³² Cf. Hausleitner, *Donauschwaben*, 319. For an overview of the role of National Socialism in Banat, see Mariana Hausleitner, "Der Einfluss des Nationalsozialismus bei den Donaus-

of which 32,000 were drafted from Banat. They were mostly put to work in coal mines and factories in different parts of the Soviet Union, including areas beyond the Urals.³³ For every village, quotas of able-bodied men and women of working age were put in place, and while the Romanian and Soviet forces carrying out the recruitments preferred to pick former members of the Wehrmacht, the Waffen-SS and other political organizations closely associated with the Nazis, fulfilment of the quotas did not stop there.³⁴ In Sackelhausen, 72 men and 53 women were affected, of which 23 died due to the harsh conditions in the camps.³⁵ Most had returned by the end of the 1940s, with some making their way directly to Germany, where their families had stayed as refugees after the war.³⁶

The second deportation took place in June 1951, when the Romanian Communist regime forcibly relocated about 40,000 ‘enemies of the people’ – 9,000 of which were German-speaking – from the Banat to the Bărăgan Plain in eastern Romania, where they were left to their own devices.³⁷ Among those deported were wealthy landowners, Aromanians, alleged anti-communists, smugglers, refugees, criminals, and foreign citizens.³⁸ In Sackelhausen, 224 persons were affected, including Margarethe Ortinau, at the time engaged to Barbara Ortinau’s son Johann.³⁹ Her family was most probably singled out due to the relatively large size of their landholdings. Over the ensuing years, Johann made multiple trips to visit his fiancée, as a result of which Barbara’s first grandchild was born in Bărăgan.⁴⁰ In early 1956, the deported were allowed to return, mostly due to changes in Romanian foreign and domestic policy which came as a result of the incipient process of de-Stalinization across the Soviet sphere of influence.⁴¹

The immediate reasons for the 1951 deportations are to be found in a complex interplay of Romanian nationality politics, the shift towards a planned economy and rising tensions with Tito’s Yugoslavia, neighbouring directly to the multi-eth-

chwaben im rumänischen und serbischen Banat,“ *Spiegelungen. Zeitschrift für deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas* 9 (2014).

³³ Cf. Hausleitner, *Donauschwaben*, 323ff.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 319.

³⁵ Cf. Mathias Reitz, *Sackelhausen. Beiträge zur Geschichte einer deutschen Gemeinde im Banat* (Reutlingen: Self Published, 2006), 22.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 20f.

³⁷ Cf. Wilhelm Weber, “Das Schicksal der Deutschen im Banat nach dem Umsturz vom 23. August 1944 bis zur Deportation in die Bărăgan-Steppe,“ in *Deportiert in den Bărăgan 1951-1956*, ed. Walther Konschitzky et al. (München: Haus des Deutschen Ostens, 2001), 96f.

³⁸ Cf. Josef Wolf, “Die Zwangsumsiedlung in die Bărăgan-Steppe 1951/56. Deportationen und Deportationsformen im Banat des 20. Jahrhunderts,“ in *Deportiert in den Bărăgan 1951-1956*, ed. Walther Konschitzky et al. (München: Haus des Deutschen Ostens, 2001), 50.

³⁹ Cf. Reitz, *Sackelhausen*, 53.

⁴⁰ Cf. “Interview with Barbara Ortinau’s daughter and son-in-law,” Katharina and Nikolaus Andres, conducted January 29, 2016. Anecdotal accounts from this interview suggest that denunciators among the villagers and bribing Romanian officials played a considerable role in the drafting (and redrafting) of deportation lists.

⁴¹ Cf. Wolf, “Zwangsumsiedlung,” 59.

nic Banat.⁴² However, aside from their local context, they should also be analysed in the larger framework of Soviet-style forced settlements throughout the Eastern bloc. As Josef Wolf has shown, a comparative approach can reveal significant commonalities with similar processes at the time, notably the forced resettlements in Hungary and along the inner-German border in the German Democratic Republic in 1952.⁴³ Despite their particularities, in all three cases the respective socialist governments aimed at creating, reaffirming or stabilizing spatial orders by means of forced relocation of ‘undesired’ populations.⁴⁴ In the Romanian case, overlapping socioeconomic, cultural and geostrategic motives make the deportations an especially interesting case study for investigating attempts at managing territoriality in the context of socialist forms of governance. Similarly, the Bărăgan deportations offer fascinating insights into the complexities of post-war nation-building in eastern Europe. ‘The Deportation Regime’, as Nicholas de Genova has called it, was about sovereignty as much as territoriality in that the governments of the newly-formed nation-states attempted to consolidate their power both internally and externally by physically relocating populations across their territories.⁴⁵ The Romanian example shows that the preference for deportations as a political instrument in that regard cannot be explained solely by the cultural politics of citizenship and alienation.

In the long run, the deportations also became a central theme of identity-building and memory culture among Banat Swabians, apparent, for example, in the commemorative events on the occasions of the respective 50th anniversaries of the deportations which took place in Munich in 1994 and 2001. The traumatic experiences have strongly contributed to collective self-images as an oppressed and suffering people, expressing itself in book titles such as “Der Leidensweg der Banater Schwaben im 20. Jahrhundert” [The Way of Grief of Banat Swabians in the Twentieth Century], published by the association of Banat Swabians in Germany. As such self-perceptions are often regarded as constitutive for the formation of diasporic communities,⁴⁶ a systematic study of the ways in which they have been created and reproduced by the many local, national and supranational associations of Banat Swabians in Germany and elsewhere could shed light on practices of collective remembrance and the construction of a Banat Swabian diaspora.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, 36ff.

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, 76-79.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁵ Nicholas de Genova, “The Deportation Regime. Sovereignty, Space and the Freedom of Movement,” in *The Deportation Regime. Sovereignty, Space and the Freedom of Movement*, ed. Nicholas de Genova and Nathalie Peutz (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2010), 33.

⁴⁶ Cf. Heinrich Freihoffer, ed., *Der Leidensweg der Banater Schwaben im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (München: Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben aus Rumänien in Deutschland e.V., 1983), and Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An introduction*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 2ff.

Creeping Exodus

World War II and its aftermath had left many Banat Swabian families divided on either side of the Iron Curtain. For those affected, family reunion was the highest priority, and emigration – fuelled by the expropriations and deportations of the post-war years – just a matter of time and circumstance.⁴⁷ Since the end of the war, the movements of Banat Swabians were largely proscribed, and only a desperate few attempted to cross the Romanian border illegally.⁴⁸ According to numbers from Sackelhausen, between 1946 and 1955 only 44 persons succeeded in leaving the village.⁴⁹ After Romania joined the UN in 1956, family reunion became a legitimate means of migration, and the annual numbers of emigrants increased again, to about 20 per year between 1956 and 1969 in Sackelhausen.⁵⁰ The accession to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1965, however, put an end to this, but simultaneously made the well-being of the German-speaking minority in Romania an issue for the government of West Germany. In 1967, diplomatic relations between West Germany and Romania were re-instituted, slightly easing the situation for prospective emigrants. Between 1970 and 1976, emigration from Sackelhausen increased to an average of 40 persons per year. Another important development were the first two meetings of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki 1975 and Belgrade 1977 that put international relations across the Iron Curtain on a new legal basis. It was, however, only after the West German government negotiated an agreement with Romania to ‘buy out’ German ‘*Volkszugehörige*’ – a legal term for those living outside Germany who self-identify as Germans – in annual quotas at a set price per head in 1978 that emigration was significantly propelled.⁵¹ This deal, one of the most comprehensive in a series of West German efforts to ‘bring back’ remaining German ‘*Volkszugehörige*’ from eastern Europe starting in the 1960s, marked the beginning of what would later be called a “predominantly self-induced process” of “mass exodus” of the German-speaking groups from Romania.⁵² However, even with the quotas in place, the application process for prospective migrants could take years and could become quite costly, since in many instances officers and agents of the notorious Romanian secret police agency *Securitate* had to be bribed.⁵³

⁴⁷ Cf. Reitz, *Sackelhausen*, 62.

⁴⁸ Cf. for example Martin J. Fricko, “Flucht über die Grenze 1947,” in *Der Leidensweg der Banater Schwaben im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Heinrich Freihoffer (München: Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben aus Rumänien in Deutschland e.V., 1983), 663ff.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pitzer, *Sackelhausen*, 211.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.* and Reitz, *Sackelhausen*, 63.

⁵¹ Cf. Rainer Ohliger and Cătălin Turliuc, “Minorities into Migrants: Emigration and Ethnic Unmixing in Twentieth-Century Romania,” in *European Encounters. Migrants, migration and European societies since 1945*, ed. Rainer Ohliger et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 63.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵³ Cf. Reitz, *Sackelhausen*, 77. *Securitate* is short for *Departamentul Securității Statului*,

Some managed to circumvent the system and again, Barbara Ortinau and her family provide a good example of this. Thanks to her birth on United States territory, she was able to claim U.S. citizenship for her and her daughter, which enabled the family to emigrate within a matter of months after they had made the decision to leave in 1977. However, instead of travelling to the United States as they had explained to the Romanian authorities, they joined the growing community of *Aussiedler* – a common term for ethnic German immigrants to Germany – from Sackelhausen in the West German district of Reutlingen, Baden-Württemberg. To be sure, trying to emigrate by claiming U.S. citizenship had not become possible only recently. For those with family members born in the U.S. the opportunity had existed for nearly three decades and it might retrospectively seem bewildering that the family did not make use of this earlier. Still, more than anything, this particular example shows the importance of individual and collective agency in making decisions about migration in environments with high restrictions on mobility. Most members of the Ortinau family left only very reluctantly. They had succeeded in regaining a certain level of wealth and especially Barbara, having lived through the hardships of migrating multiple times in her life, did not want to leave the village behind again. Yet, as neighbours, friends and relatives started leaving Sackelhausen in ever increasing numbers beginning in 1970, the family became convinced that the community was in irreversible decline. Eventually, in August 1977, they left the country, giving in to one of Barbara's granddaughter's wish to be with her boyfriend, a fellow Sackelhausener, who had already left the village in 1972.⁵⁴ It should also be mentioned that Barbara's son, Johann, was not able to claim U.S. citizenship and, together with his family, had to find an alternative means to leave the country. He had been born before the transmission of citizenship through U.S. citizen mothers was permitted in the so-called *Act of May 24, 1934*, which was not applied retroactively – an example that shows how contingent circumstances could be extremely significant on the individual level.⁵⁵ Between 1977 and 1990, the number of Sackelhauseners leaving the village rose to an average of 140 per year and by the end of the century, only a few dozen Banat Swabians still lived in the village.⁵⁶ On the whole Banat, a 2002 census counted 19,000 self-identified Germans, compared to 138,000 in 1977.⁵⁷

The movements and the proscription of movements of Banat Swabians in the Cold War period can only partly be captured within the meta-narrative of “ethnic unmixing and ethnic cleansing in Central and Eastern Europe”, as many authors have concluded.⁵⁸ This narrative implies a teleology by which nation-building

⁵⁴ Cf. “Interview,” January 29, 2016.

⁵⁵ Cf. “U.S. Citizenship Acquired by Birth Abroad,” Chang and Boos’ Canada – U.S. Immigration Law Center, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.americanlaw.com/citabrd.html>.

⁵⁶ Cf. Pitzer, *Sackelhausen*, 212, and Reitz, *Sackelhausen*, 81.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hannelore Baier et al., *Geschichte und Traditionen der deutschen Minderheit in Rumänien*, 3rd ed. (Hermannstadt: Central, 2007), 29.

⁵⁸ Ohliger and Turliuc, *Minorities into Migrants*, 53.

processes intentionally and inevitably led to the disentanglement of the multicultural and multilingual societies in Central and Eastern Europe. By considering individual agency in terms of decision-making and the organization of mobility as well as the complex underlying dynamics of various enabling and disabling factors such as state-imposed migration restrictions and incentives, favourable and unfavourable constellations in the international system, and contingent individual circumstances, it becomes apparent that the process of German emigration from Romania was much messier and more complex than any such simplistic explanation might suggest. Paradoxically, however, it was the very paradigm of ethnic unmixing that spurred and legitimized West German interest in Romania's German-speaking minorities and which gave them opportunities for movement that other Romanian citizens did not have at that time. Above all, this paradox is indicative of the ways in which grand and enduring narratives in migration history should be regarded and studied, namely as powerful vehicles for political projects, benefiting certain actors and groups over others.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to outline a migration history of Banat Swabians in the twentieth century on the basis of the trajectories of the village of Sackelhausen and some of its inhabitants. In the given format and scope, this, of course, can only be a point of reference from which further and more comprehensive studies need to be conducted. I have shown that the migration patterns of Banat Swabians emerged within the complicated intersections of individual agency and external circumstance, where they were shaped by and shaped economic conjunctures, social relations, state controls and incentives, and international orders. Those patterns, I have argued, call for a more nuanced understanding of issues of migration, territorialization, sovereignty and identity in Central and Eastern European history, which should be decoupled from master narratives centred on the expulsion of ethnic Germans and the 'unmixing' of peoples in Central and Eastern Europe. Over the course of the twentieth century, Banat Swabians were described variously as labour migrants, refugees, displaced persons, expellees, returnees, deportees, illegals, and *Aussiedler*; they were citizens of the Austro-Hungarian empire, of Romania, Serbia, Hungary, the United States, Germany and many other countries. All those ascriptions in turn shaped their very own perceptions of their cultural identities, individually and collectively. However, the point of a systematic and comprehensive study of Banat Swabian migration history hardly lies in establishing the validity of a distinctive Banat Swabian identity and what it might entail.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For a recent sociological study on Banat Swabian identity, conducted in 2010/11 among Banat Swabians still living in Romania, see Gwénola Sebaux, "Die Banater Deutschen im frühen 21. Jahrhundert – Zwischen Mythos und Wirklichkeit," *Spiegelungen. Zeitschrift für deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas* 9 (2014).

Rather, such a project should aim to examine mobility in a conceptual framework that embraces the complexities and contingencies of individual agency, the political struggle for legitimacy, and geopolitics in a global context and goes beyond questions of identity, encompassing notions of sovereignty, transnationality and territorialization alike.

The history of Banat Swabian migration challenges the conception – especially prevalent in the current ‘refugee crisis’ – that migration is something that affects Europe ‘from the outside’ and serves as an exemplification of the eclectic spectrum of ways in which Europeans have and were moved in the twentieth century.

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