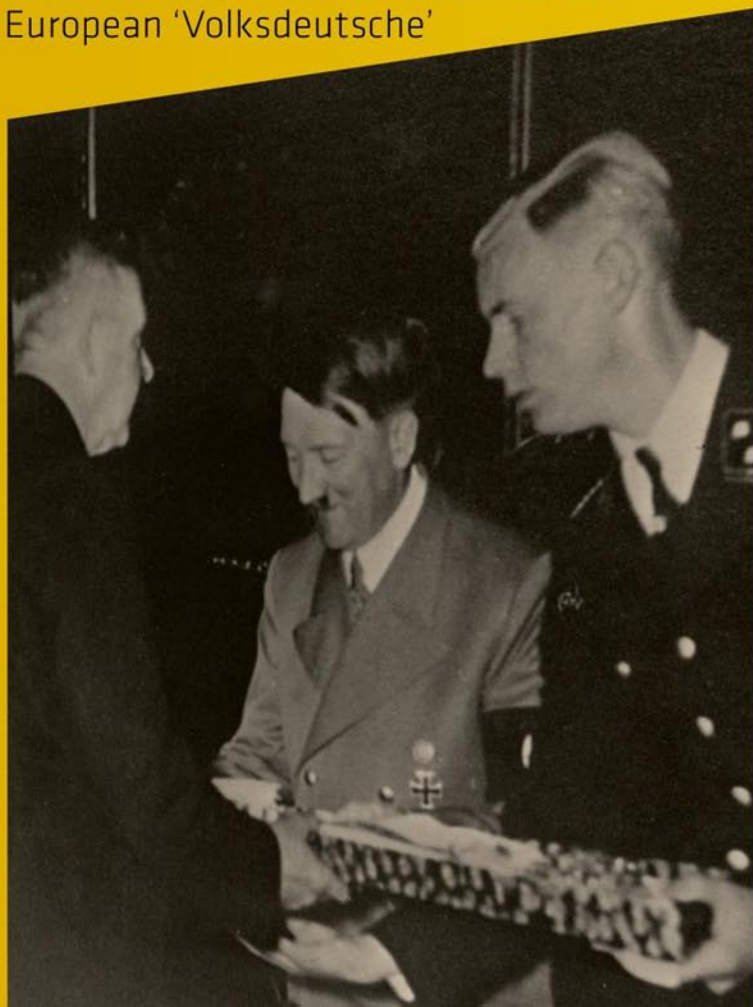


OTTMAR TRAȘCĂ/VIRGILIU ȚĂRĂU
CORNELIU PINTILESCU (EDS.)

Building a Nazi Racial Community in the South-East

Mobility and Transnational Transfers between
Nazi Germany and the South-Eastern
European 'Volksdeutsche'



Building a Nazi Racial Community in the South-East

Veröffentlichungen des Instituts
für deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas
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Florian Kühner-Wielach und Konrad Gündisch

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Introduction

OTTMAR TRAȘCĂ, VIRGILIU ȚĂRĂU, CORNELIU PINTILESCU

This edited volume gathers a selection of papers presented at the conference: *Building a Nazi Racial Community in the South-East: Mobility and Transnational Transfers between Nazi Germany and the South-Eastern European “Volksdeutsche”*, which took place in Cluj-Napoca (Klausenburg in German, Kolozsvár in Hungarian), 7–9 July 2022. Both this conference and the volume are the results of a research project titled „Building a Nazi Racial Community in the South-East: A Transnational Perspective on the German Ethnic Group in Romania“, carried out at the George Barițiu History Institute of the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca from January 2021 to December 2023 and financed by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (Unitatea Executivă pentru Finanțarea Învățământului Superior a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării, UEFISCDI) of the Romanian government. The conference was organised by the George Barițiu History Institute of the Romanian Academy Cluj-Napoca in partnership with the Institute for German Culture and History in South-Eastern Europe at the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich (Institut für deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas e. V. an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, IKGS). This collaboration continued by publishing the conference volume conference in Friedrich Pustet Verlag’s IKGS book series. The editors of this volume would like to express their gratitude to Tobias Weger, Enikő Dác and Florian Kühner-Wielach from IKGS for their useful feedback to different stages of this project and to Dina Climatiano for her language proofreading assistance for the chapters in English. We would also like to thank the Transylvanian Institute (Siebenbürgen-Institut) in Gundelsheim am Neckar (Germany), the “Deutsch-Haus” Archives and Library in Hermannstadt (Sibiu in Romanian, Nagyszében in Hungarian), the National Council for the Study of the Securitate’s Archives in Bucharest, the National Archives of Romania–Sibiu County Branch, and IKGS Munich for providing us access to their archival collections.

This edited volume aims to contribute to a growing body of research dealing with the transnational circulation of National Socialist ideological tropes

and political practices by bringing to the fore the importance of various channels that made these transfers possible not only between Nazi Germany and the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche, but also between the German ethnic groups in the region. The networks of institutional collaborations and personal relations, the milieus of political socialisation and the circulation of publications across borders played a key role in these transfers. Thus, this collection of essays aims: 1. to investigate the circulation of Nazi ideological tropes, cultural products, institutional models and propaganda practices between Germany and South-Eastern Europe, particularly how these transfers contributed to the process of defining or redefining the “national community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) of the Volksdeutsche; 2. to analyse the mobility of the German-speaking youth from South-Eastern Europe to Nazi Germany and how these experiences fuelled the radicalisation of the Volksdeutsche, leading to inner conflicts within the German minorities in South-Eastern Europe; 3. to explore how the mobilisation of the war effort shaped the propaganda narratives targeting the Volksdeutsche and the relations between the Third Reich and the German minorities in the region, but also between the latter and their host states; 4. to investigate the afterlife of the aforementioned transnational networks after the Second World War and how the tainted past of the former Nazi leaders among the Volksdeutsche turned into a tool in the hands of the secret police under communism.

National Socialist Germany and the radicalisation of the “Volksdeutsche”: contextualising a transnational approach

Fascism manifested across interwar Europe and took various shapes in different national contexts. However, these local adjusted versions of “generic fascism”¹ share, in Roger Griffin’s view, “a core myth that a period of perceived national decline and decadence is giving way to one of rebirth and renewal in a post-liberal new order”.² Drawing on this theoretical tradition, the international academic debates of the last two decades emphasised its transnational character.³ It has been argued that interwar fascism was a “travelling political

1 We write the Italian Fascism movement capitalised, while the so-called “generic fascism” without capitalisation.

2 Roger Griffin: Introduction. In: id. (ed.): *International Fascism. Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*. London 1998, pp. 1–20, here: p. 14.

3 Frederico Finchelstein: *Transatlantic Fascism. Ideology, Violence and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945*. Durham 2010; António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (eds.): *Rethinking fascism and dictatorship in Europe*. New York 2014; Constantin Iordachi: *A Continuum of Dictatorships. Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937–44*.

universe” and that in order to understand the dynamic of such movements one should adopt a perspective that goes beyond the borders of national states.⁴ Inspired by this new research agenda drawing on transnational and entangled history,⁵ several scholars tackled the reverberations of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in Europe and beyond.⁶

Within this historiographic trend of the last two decades, an increasing number of contributions have been published, dealing with the “soft power” tools used by National Socialist Germany to increase their influence across Europe and with the transnational networks used as channels for disseminating this influence. The focus of the historiography of the topic moved from approaches drawing more on the methodological tradition of international relations to those inspired by the “cultural turn.”⁷ Notable among early con-

In: id., pp. 233–271; Arnd Bauerkämper, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (eds.): *Fascism without Borders. Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes from 1918 to 1945*. New York 2017.

4 Finchelstein: *Transatlantic*, p. 6.

5 Among the pioneering contributions on transnational history see for example: Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Jürgen Kocka (eds): *Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*. New York 2009; Akira Iriye: *Global and Transnational History. The Past, Present, and Future*. New York 2013; Pierre-Yves Saunier: *Transnational History*. Basingstoke, New York 2013. Among the historians promoting the entangled history see: Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann: *Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen*. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002) 4, pp. 607–636; Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann (eds.): *De la comparaison à l’histoire croisée*. Paris 2004; Eliga H. Gould: *Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds. The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery*. In: *The American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 3, pp. 764–786.

6 Among the pioneering scholars applying comparative, entangled or transnational history approaches in dealing with Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy see for example: Aristotle Kallis: *Fascist Ideology. Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922–1945*. London 2000; Constantin Iordachi (ed.): *Comparative Fascist Studies. New Perspectives*. London 2010; Arnd Bauerkämper: *Transnational Fascism. Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939*. In: *East Central Europe* 37 (2010), pp. 214–246; Finchelstein: *Transatlantic*; Bauerkämper, Rossoliński-Liebe (eds.): *Fascism*.

7 See for example: Detlev Peukert: *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde. Anpassung, Ausmerze und Aufbegehren unter dem Nationalsozialismus*. Köln 1982; Cornelia Rau-Kühne: *Katholisches Milieu und Kleinstadtgesellschaft. Ettlingen 1918–1939*. Sigma-Ringen 1991; Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (ed.): *Anpassung, Verweigerung und Widerstand. Soziale Milieus, Politische Kultur und der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland im regionalen Vergleich*. Berlin 1997. For an analysis of the impact of the “cultural turn” on the historiography of Nazi Germany see: Martina Steber, Bernhard Gotto: *Volksgemeinschaft. Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime*. In: id. (eds): *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany. Social Engineering and Private Lives*. Oxford 2014, pp. 1–28, here pp. 11–13.

tributions that started this trend are the seminal works authored by Jan-Pieter Barbian⁸ (on the cultural agreements of National Socialist Germany) and Frank-Rutger Hausmann⁹ (on Germany's cultural policies in Europe during 1940s). Their work brought to the fore the process through which cultural influence was turned into a tool for reaching political ends.

This historiographic trend inspired by the “cultural turn” and the emergence of transnational history was continued later by scholars such as Frank Trommler,¹⁰ Benjamin G. Martin,¹¹ W. Ricky,¹² Johannes Dafinger and Dieter Pohl.¹³ Benjamin G. Martin argues convincingly that, after the military success over France in June 1940, the Nazi leadership considered that a political and economic domination over Europe was not enough, and that in order to achieve a “lasting hegemony, Germany would also need to be the ‘leading’ power in the field of culture”.¹⁴ The process of building this cultural hegemony already started in the mid-1930s and entailed a reshaping of “the forums and institutions through which continental cultural elites interacted” by Germans and Italians.¹⁵ The complex entanglements connecting National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy with various far-right cultural actors in order to build “a new order” in Europe represent the focus of the collections of essays edited by Johannes Dafinger and Dieter Pohl.¹⁶ In these multi-layered entanglements “non-state actors” played a significant role and their influence was exerted through “international or transnational actor networks”.¹⁷ According to Johannes Dafinger and Dieter Pohl, the interaction of individuals and social milieus from various countries led to a coagulation of networks

8 Jan-Pieter Barbian: “Kulturwerte im Zweikampf”. Die Kulturabkommen des “Dritten Reiches” als Instrumente nationalsozialistischer Außenpolitik. In: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 74 (1992) 2, pp. 415–460.

9 Frank-Rutger Hausmann: “Dichte, Dichter, tage nicht!” Die Europäische Schriftsteller-Vereinigung in Weimar 1941–1948. Frankfurt am Main 2004.

10 Frank Trommler: *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass. Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert*. Köln 2014.

11 Benjamin G. Martin: *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture*. Cambridge 2016.

12 Ricky W. Law: *Transnational Nazism. Ideology and Culture in German-Japanese Relations, 1919–1936*. Cambridge 2019.

13 Johannes Dafinger, Dieter Pohl (eds.): *A new nationalist Europe under Hitler. Concepts of Europe and transnational networks in the National Socialist sphere of influence, 1933–1945*. Abingdon 2019.

14 Martin: *The Nazi-Fascist*, p. 1.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

16 Johannes Dafinger, Dieter Pohl: Introduction. In: *eid.* (eds.), *A New Nationalist*, pp. 1–24, here: p. 3.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

transcending the national borders.¹⁸ Although German state agencies such as Deutsche Akademie or the Deutsches Wissenschaftliches Institut (the German Scientific Institute) played a significant role in exerting German cultural influence over Europe, the importance of non-state actors should not be underestimated.¹⁹ In this respect, Arnd Bauerkämper rightly pointed out that neither German National Socialism or Italian Fascism “can be adequately explained” within the limits of “a national paradigm”.²⁰ Thus, what Kiran Klaus Patel and Sven Reichardt labelled as “the dark side of transnationalism”²¹ took the shape of an “international of the nationalists’ in right-wing and fascist milieus”.²² Constantin Iordachi and Ottmar Trașcă reached similar conclusions when dealing with the relationship between Nazi Germany and its satellite countries and emphasised that the previous research had a tendency “to divorce the study of foreign policy from the complicated web of domestic actors”.²³

Although Nazi Germany tried to expand its political, economic and cultural influence over all of Europe, the territories from the Baltic to the Adriatic were the main scene of the Nazi leadership’s fantasies of reshaping the borders and the population structure. According to Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, Nazism with its view of “the East representing the land of the German future” continued a much older tradition of fantasising about the East, with roots in the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁴ Hitler was not innovative in his plans for Eastern Europe, but he echoed the influence exerted over him by several German geopoliticians, among which the most influential was Karl Haushofer. The latter conceived the future of Germany “in the revised version of the Teutonic ‘Drang nach Osten’”.²⁵

18 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4

20 Arnd Bauerkämper: *Transnational Fascism. Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939*. In: *East Central Europe* 37 (2010), pp. 214–246, here: p. 216.

21 Kiran Klaus Patel, Sven Reichardt: *The Dark Side of Transnationalism. Social Engineering and Nazism, 1930s–40s*. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, issue 1 (special issue), pp. 3–21.

22 Dafinger, Pohl: *Introduction*, p. 4.

23 Constantin Iordachi, Ottmar Trașcă: *Ideological Transfers and Bureaucratic Entanglements. Nazi “Experts” on the “Jewish Question” and the Romanian-German Relations, 1940–1944*. In: *Fascism* 4 (2015), pp. 48–100, here: p. 50.

24 See Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius: *The German Myth of the East. 1800 to the Present*. Oxford 2009, pp. 45–70.

25 George J. Lerski: *Geopolitics Triumphant. The Case of East-Central Europe*. In: *Pakistan Horizon* 16 (1963) 2, pp. 123–132, here: p. 123.

The territories lying between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas were not only the setting of future conquests and colonisation, but also an area where the German states, and later on, the German Empire, built around Prussia, developed intensive economic and cultural exchanges during the Middle Ages, early Modern and Modern periods. The German-speaking population spread over the lands lying between these seas contributed to the development of economic and cultural connections with Germany. Following the First World War, the territories between Germany and revolutionary Russia experienced what could be called a regional version of the “European Civil War”.²⁶ In East-Central Europe, this conflict between the revolutionary left and various forms of far-right or authoritarian conservative movements took the shape of local specificities created by the dismantling of former empires and the emergence of nation states.²⁷ Consequently, most of the countries in East-Central Europe, as Germany itself, experienced the revolution and counter-revolution either on their territory or near their neighbourhood.²⁸ As Paul Hanebrink showed, anti-communism and antisemitism were widely spread among conservative milieus of East-Central Europe, the two components being melted in the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism.²⁹ Thus, the Nazi policies aiming to extend the political, economic and cultural domination over the territories in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe found some pillars on which they could build their influence. Consequently, it is not surprising that Nazi Germany cultivated close relations with the far-right movements in the Baltic states, Hungary, Croatia, and Romania, and tried to instrumentalise these radical movements to reach its hegemonic goals in the region.³⁰

26 For how Ernst Nolte and later on Enzo Traverso coined the concept of “the European civil war” see: Ernst Nolte: *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus*. Frankfurt am Main 1987; Enzo Traverso: *Fire and Blood. The European Civil War, 1914–1945*. London 2017.

27 For the specificities of East Central Europe in the early post-First World War period see: Jochen Böhrer: *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921. The Reconstruction of Poland*. Oxford 2018.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

29 See Paul Hanebrink: *A Specter Haunting Europe. The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*. Cambridge 2018.

30 See the chapter authored by Emily Greble: *Autonomy Compromised. Nazi Occupation and the Ustasha Regime*. In: Emily Greble: *Sarajevo, 1941–1945. Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler’s Europe*. Ithaca 2011, pp. 54–87; Alexander Korb: *Understanding Ustaša violence*. In: *Journal of Genocide Research* 12 (2010) 1–2, pp. 1–18; Stanley G. Payne: *A History of Fascism 1914–1945*. Abingdon 1995, pp. 269–271; Constantin Iordachi: *The Fascist Faith of the Legion “Archangel Michael” in Romania, 1927–1941. Martyrdom and National Purification*. Abingdon 2023, pp. 117, 276; Rebecca Haynes: *Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940*. In: *The Slavonic and East European Review* 77 (1999) 4, pp. 700–725.

However, the Third Reich had different imperial projections about the future of territories lying in the East and South-East. The minds behind the Third Reich's policies on South-Eastern Europe had no plans to turn this region into an empty space for German colonists as Nazi leadership had in mind for Poland and the Western parts of the former Soviet Union.³¹ During the 1930s, those in charge of designing the Third Reich's political and economic policies concerning South-Eastern Europe perceived this area as a perfect space for Germany's "informal empire".³² According to Stephen G. Gross, from the end of the nineteenth century until the Second World War, Germany gradually built an "informal empire" in the region by using economic and cultural collaborations.³³ The networks developed there by German politicians, businessmen and intellectuals played a key role in creating this "informal empire", a process which reached its climax during the Third Reich.³⁴

The differences between the policies of the Third Reich concerning Poland and the western Soviet Union and the ones concerning what Berlin perceived as South-Eastern Europe – namely Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia – also marked the fate of the Volksdeutsche living in those countries.³⁵ While ethnic Germans from Bessarabia, Bukovina and Dobruja were forcibly resettled in the autumn of 1940 in occupied Poland, Czechoslovakia and Slovenia, Nazi Germany had other plans for the ethnic Germans of Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. In occupied Serbian Banat, they became a tool for ruling these territories "in the Third Reich's name" after April 1941.³⁶ In Romania and Hungary their human and material resources had been heavily instrumentalised to fuel the war effort and increase the influence of the Third Reich over these countries. Although the Nazi policies of turning the German minorities in Slovakia, Hungary and Romania into the Third Reich's

31 Rachel O'Sullivan: Integration and Division. Nazi Germany and the "Colonial Other" in Annexed Poland. In: *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2020) 4, pp. 437–458, here: p. 4; Stephen G. Gross: *Export Empire. German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945*. Cambridge 2015, p. 251, p. 283.

32 Gross: *Export Empire*, pp. 2–3, pp. 9–10. He was inspired by previous work on the topic: Hans-Jürgen Schröder: Südosteuropa als "Informal Empire" Deutschlands 1933–1939. Das Beispiel Jugoslawien. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 23 (1975), pp. 61–83; David Kaiser: *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War. Germany Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930–39*. Princeton 1980; William S. Grenzbach: *Germany's Informal Empire in East-Central Europe. German Economic Policy toward Yugoslavia and Rumania 1933–1939*. Stuttgart 1988.

33 Gross: *Export*, p. 2.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

35 Mirna Zakić: *Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in World War II*. Cambridge 2017, p. xii.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

tools in the region during the Second World War were similar, the outcomes were different due to the specificities of each national context. While Romania and Slovakia offered better conditions for Nazi Germany to exert control over the leadership of their *Deutsche Volksgruppen*, the Horthy regime was less eager to negotiate a larger autonomy for Hungarian Germans and accept their strict subordination to a foreign government.³⁷

The myth of the “*Volksgemeinschaft*” and the “*Volksdeutsche*”

The effects of the “cultural turn” on the historiography of National Socialist Germany are also deeply connected with another development in the last two decades: the focus on the importance of *Volksgemeinschaft* (“people’s community”) for understanding German society under the Third Reich.³⁸ According to Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto, the scholars’ interest in using the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* to better comprehend National-Socialist German society can be traced back to the late 1970s. At that time, the practitioners of “Marxist-inspired social history”, such as Tim Mason, discussed the issue of class struggle after 1933 and concluded that the Nazi propagandistic discourse promoting a *Volksgemeinschaft* levelling the social classes of German society was a “myth”.³⁹ In the 1980s, the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* lost its central position within the debates on the social history of Nazi Germany.⁴⁰ It came back to the forefront of the historiographic debates during late 1990s and early 2000s. This was a consequence of the influences exerted by the “cultural turn” and the history of everyday life on the historiography of the Third Reich. There is no space here to discuss all the turning moments of the use of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* within the research on National Socialism. However, an overview of the main arguments around

37 For the situation in Slovakia see Michal Schvarc: “Every German in the Specified Year Groups has to appear before the Commissions without Invitation.” *The Recruitment and Service of Germans from Slovakia in the Waffen-SS 1939–1945*. In: *Historický časopis* 68 (2020) 6, pp. 991–1027, and for Romania: Ottmar Trășcă: *Grupul Etnic German din România în “era” Andreas Schmidt. Septembrie 1940–august 1944* [The German Ethnic Group during the Andreas Schmidt “era”. September 1940–August 1940]. In: Ottmar Trășcă, Remus Gabriel Anghel (eds.): *Un veac frământat. Germanii din România după 1918* [A turbulent age. The Romanian Germans after 1918]. Cluj-Napoca 2018, pp. 113–148; for the situation in Hungary see: Norbert Spannenger: *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938–1944 unter Horthy und Hitler*. München 2002.

38 Steber, Gotto: *Volksgemeinschaft*, p. 12.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 10. See Timothy W. Mason: *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich. Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft*. Opladen 1977.

40 Steber, Gotto: *Volksgemeinschaft*, p. 11.

this concept will help us to better grasp how Nazi Germany instrumentalised it within its policies of reshaping the identity of the *Volksdeutsche*.

Among those who supported the importance of the concept of *Volks-gemeinschaft*, scholars such as Norbert Frei and Michael Wildt perceived it not only as a propaganda tool, but also – as Hans Mommsen put it – “a substantial element of Nazi politics”.⁴¹ Norbert Frei argues that the propaganda around the idea of *Volks-gemeinschaft* was successful in reaching a large part of the German society and that many Germans believed that they were living a period of national rebirth.⁴² Michael Wildt focuses on how the performative violence and the exclusion of Jews became a main vehicle for constructing the Nazi *Volks-gemeinschaft*, which forged a sense of community drawing on “practices of exclusion”.⁴³

The use of *Volks-gemeinschaft* as a heuristic tool aroused the criticism of several historians of the Nazi regime. The most complex criticism was voiced by Hans Mommsen, who argued that historians such as Norbert Frei, Michael Wildt or Hans-Ulrich Wehler do not approach the *Volks-gemeinschaft* “as a fiction that in reality was not actively pursued” and that their generalising conclusions draw mainly on “the propagandistic self-depiction of the regime”.⁴⁴

For Ian Kershaw the trend among the historians to focus on the concept of *Volks-gemeinschaft* is related to a turn in the historiography of Nazi Germany that brought an “emphasis on willing consent and active complicity”.⁴⁵ Consequently, the concept of *Volks-gemeinschaft* became a kind of “conceptual vehicle” for explaining “the complicit society”.⁴⁶ When listing the problems of using the concept of *Volks-gemeinschaft* for understanding German society under Nazi rule, he emphasised the question hinting at the paradox behind its use: “how do you turn a propaganda slogan into a tool of analytical

41 See Hans Mommsen: *Changing Historical Perspectives on the Nazi Dictatorship*. In: *European Review* 17 (2009) 1, pp. 73–80, here: p. 76.

42 Norbert Frei: *People’s Community and War. Hitler’s Popular Support*. In: Hans Mommsen (ed.): *The Third Reich between Vision and Reality. New Perspectives on German History 1918–1945*. Oxford, 2001, pp. 59–77, here: p. 64; Norbert Frei: *1945 und Wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen*. München 2005, pp. 113–114.

43 Michael Wildt: *Hitler’s Volks-gemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion. Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939*. Translated by Bernard Heise. New York 2012, pp. 278, 281.

44 Mommsen: *Changing*, pp. 76–77.

45 See Ian Kershaw: *Volks-gemeinschaft. Potential and Limitations of the Concept*. In: Martina Steber, Bernhard Gotto (eds): *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany. Social Engineering and Private Lives*. Oxford 2014, pp. 29–42.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

explanation?”⁴⁷ He brought to the fore the fact that the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* “as a mobilizing promise of a better future” worked as “a set of subjective feelings”. Consequently, the utility of this analytical tool is undermined by the fact that we don’t have the possibility to measure the emotions created among the masses by the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* and assess its efficiency in fuelling the support for the Nazi regime.⁴⁸ However, Kershaw also identified several aspects which promise to bring some insights for explaining the social support for the Nazi regime. According to the British historian, the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* worked as a “strong integrative force” by instrumentalising the “profound sense” of social and ideological divisions within Germany under the Weimar Republic.⁴⁹

The heuristic potential of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* have been explored in extenso by several edited volumes published during the last two decades such as: *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*,⁵⁰ edited by Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt or *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany. Social Engineering and Private Lives*, edited by Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto.⁵¹ Other authors, such as Armin Nolzen, did not focus on the question of “whether or not its different purposes were realized”, but paid more attention to the “functions” of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* within the Nazi regime.⁵² Thus, Nolzen dealt with how the bureaucratic structures and policies of the NSDAP concerning the *Volksdeutsche* from the occupied territories “shaped” the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁵³

In the same category of contributions dealing with how the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* was interpreted and instrumentalised on the *Volksdeutsche* are the works authored by Winson Chu. The latter focuses on how the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* was operated concerning Nazi policies on the German minority in Poland and how hierarchies were defined inside the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁵⁴ Sacha S. Davis tackles the endeavours of *völkisch* and

47 Ibid., p. 36.

48 Ibid., p. 37.

49 Ibid., p. 32.

50 Frank Bajohr, Michael Wildt (eds.): *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*. Frankfurt am Main 2009.

51 See Steber, Gotto (eds): *Visions*.

52 Armin Nolzen: Organizing the „people’s community“. The NSDAP and the ‘ethnic Germans’ in Nazi-occupied territories. In: *Journal of Genocide Research* 19 (2017) 2, pp. 170–190.

53 Ibid.

54 Winson Chu: ‘*Volksgemeinschaften unter sich*’. German Minorities and Regionalism in Poland, 1918–39. In: Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer, Mark Roseman (eds.): *German History from the Margins*. Bloomington 2007, pp. 104–126.

Nazi nationalists among Transylvanian Saxons to build a racial *Volksgemeinschaft* and inquiries how this undertaking was undermined by their “particularist” approach to this issue.⁵⁵

Our view on how the myth of *Volksgemeinschaft* was instrumentalised within National Socialist propaganda is inspired by the work of David Welch. According to the latter, the German society before Hitler seized power suffered from a “deep sense of national humiliation” and was ravaged by economic difficulties and mass unemployment. These problems partially explain why large parts of the population were attracted by the Nazi narratives of a “revival”, which promised to bring conflicting groups inside the German society “under the banner of national rebirth”.⁵⁶ Consequently, as Christopher R. Browning and Lewis H. Siegelbaum rightly pointed out, the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* worked as “a myth of transcendent unity”.⁵⁷

A part of the debate around the myth of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* was focused on the question: What was the extent to which the official propaganda really managed to reshape society in Nazi Germany? In this respect, David Welch argued that although “the appeal of ‘national community’ propaganda was a potent mobilizing agent”, this does not mean that between 1933 and 1945 there was “a revolutionary transformation of society”.⁵⁸ In a similar way, Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt also emphasised that the scholars using this concept should avoid making equivalences between the propaganda around the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* and the social reality.⁵⁹

When reading the official press of the *Deutsche Volksgruppe* in Rumänien, one might be surprised by the predominance of the top-down imposed identity of *Südostdeutsche* (South-East Germans), which replaced each group’s identity label, such as *Zipsers* or *Banat Swabians*. Nazi Germany’s policies of reshaping the identities of the Transylvanian Saxons or *Zipsers* through aggressive propaganda were unsuccessful. Ironically, even a *Volks-*

55 Sacha E. Davis: *Constructing the Volksgemeinschaft. Saxon Particularism and the Myth of the German East, 1919–1933*. In: *German Studies Review* 39 (2016), pp. 41–64, here: p. 56.

56 David Welch: *Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft. Constructing a People’s Community*. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (2004) 2, pp. 213–238, here: p. 217.

57 Christopher R. Browning, Lewis H. Siegelbaum: *Frameworks for Social Engineering. Stalinist Schema of the Identification and the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft*. In: Michael Geyer, Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds.): *Beyond. Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared*. New York 2009, pp. 231–265, here: p. 236.

58 Welch: *Nazi*, p. 213.

59 Frank Bajohr, Michael Wildt: *Einleitung*. In: eid. (eds.): *Volksgemeinschaft*, pp. 7–23, here: pp. 8–9.

deutsche scholar involved in implementing the Nazi policies in the field of academic research – Misch Orend, a researcher of the Transylvanian Saxon folklore, who was the head of the Research Institute of the Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien in Hermannstadt – had a title of a book manuscript he authored criticised by the head of the SS-Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft “Das Ahnenerbe” Wolfram Sievers because he had used the identity label of Transylvanian Saxons (“Siebenbürger Sachsen”) and not Transylvanian Germans (“Siebenbürger Deutsche”).⁶⁰ Another good example: when establishing the émigrés’ associations in West Germany, the Volksdeutsche chose to name themselves according to their previous group/regional identities. This is why we have now, for instance, the Association of Banat Swabians (Landmannschaft der Banater Schwaben) and not the Association of Südostdeutsche.

The failure of the top-down imposed Südostdeutsche identity umbrella does not mean that the identity narratives promoted by völkisch nationalists or the Nazis drawing on an imagined shared past did not resonate with the political and cultural elites of the Volksdeutsche. On the contrary, after Nazi Germany launched a well-financed propaganda campaign targeting the ethnic Germans from abroad in the mid-1930s, the idea of a Nazi Volksgemeinschaft uniting Germans in and outside of the Reich had the potential to appeal to many among the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche. Dissatisfied with the “nationalising policies” of their host states, ethnic Germans in the region looked with hope to Nazi Germany as a powerful protector, which could support them in their quest for national minority rights and autonomy.⁶¹ Even in states that were tolerant towards the German minority, such as Czechoslovakia and Romania up to the establishment of King Carol II’s dictatorship, the German minorities were frustrated with their economic and political situation. The German minorities in the national states created after the fall of the former Austro-Hungary had difficulties accepting the loss of the privileged status they had previously enjoyed in the Dual Monarchy.⁶²

Before the propagandists of the Third Reich disseminated the idea of the Nazi racial Volksgemeinschaft, the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche already

60 Letter from Misch Orend to Geschäftsführer der SS-Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft “Das Ahnenerbe” Wolfram Sievers (April 10, 1941). Klaus Popa (ed.): *Akten um die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien 1937–1945*. Frankfurt am Main 2005, p. 226.

61 For the conceptualization of this triade see: Rogers Brubaker: *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge 1996, pp. 4–5; See also Balázs A. Szelényi: *From Minority to Übermensch. The Social Roots of Ethnic Conflict in the German Diaspora of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia*. In: *Past and Present* 196 (2007), pp. 215–251.

62 Szelényi: *From Minority*, p. 216.

experienced the *völkisch* version of this concept. By the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century the *völkisch* ideology spread in the region through German publications and *Volksdeutsche* youth studying in German universities. In this respect, the activity of cultural and political figures promoting a revival of German identity in the context of intensifying Magyarization policies was important. Key figures such as Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn and Rudolf Brandsch opposed these policies, promoted the preservation of the German language and stronger ties with Germany. However, up to the end of First World War, the spread of pan-German ideology in the region was limited by the policies of the government in Budapest, whose goal was to integrate these groups in the Hungarian nation. Following the dismantling of the Dual Monarchy and the emergence of the national states, the pan-German policies of Weimar Germany found a more favourable context.⁶³ These policies disseminated among the South-Eastern *Volksdeutsche* were what can be labelled as the *völkisch* version of the myth of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Völkisch ideology was one of the main ideological backgrounds of the National Programme (“*Volksprogramm*”) of the Romanian Germans adopted in October 1935, which changed the name of their representative structure from *Verband* (Union) to *Volksgemeinschaft der Deutschen in Rumänien* (Community of the Germans in Romania, henceforth VDR). This new political programme was a merger of Nazi ideological influences with *völkisch* and conservative elements. This mixture reflected the compromise between a part of the Nazi leaders labelled as “moderate” and the conservative leadership of the Romanian Germans, which led to the election of Fritz Fabritius as leader of the VDR.⁶⁴ The *völkisch* organicist vision of the concept is illustrated by the way Wilhelm Schunn – at that time “Commissioner for the Nation’s Organic Constitution” (*Beauftragter für den volksorganischen Aufbau*) – defined the new *Volksgemeinschaft* in an article published in the one-year anniversary volume of the establishment of the VDR.⁶⁵ He described the

63 *Ibid.*, p. 232–233.

64 Wolfgang Miede: *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien 1933–1938. Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Volkstumspolitik*. Bern, Frankfurt am Main 1972, pp. 182–184.

65 Wilhelm Schunn: “Der Start zu einem Hohen Ziel. Bericht des Beauftragten für den volksorganischen Aufbau”. In: *Ein Jahr Volksgemeinschaft der Deutschen in Rumänien unter Fritz Fabritius*, edited by Helmut Wolff, Hermannstadt/Sibiu 1936, pp. 47–67, here: p. 47, quoted in: Tudor Georgescu: *Pursuing the Fascist Promise. The Transylvanian Saxon „Self-Help“ from Genesis to Empowerment, 1922–1935*. In: Robert Pyrah, Marius Turda (eds.): *Re-Contextualising East Central European History. Nation, Culture and Minority Groups*. London 2010, pp. 55–73, here: p. 67.

Volksgemeinschaft as “an organism, a living corpus in which every cell has its tasks”.⁶⁶ According to Tudor Georgescu, one way of reinforcing the organic links within the community was the “reinvention” of an old system of sociability and solidarity of Transylvanian Saxons reshaped by Schunn under the label “völkische Nachbarschaften” (neighbourhoods),⁶⁷ which were perceived by the latter as relics of “old-Germanic communal life”.⁶⁸

The main components of the “old-German communal life” coined by Schunn were the idealisation of peasant culture as the authentic source of Volksdeutsche identity and the myth of the German colonists’ mission to civilise the East. These two key elements were preserved within the Nazi narratives around the concept of Volksgemeinschaft but taking new shapes. Aside from these features inherited from the völkisch stage of the concept, the Nazi propagandists among the Romanian and Yugoslav Volksdeutsche added a racial logic of exclusion. In the case of the peasantry, they emphasised not only its role in preserving language and traditions, but reshaped this trope in the form of “blood and soil” (Blut und Boden) discourse.

The völkisch version of the myth of the Volksgemeinschaft, which was circulated in the region during 1920s, is also well exemplified by articles authored by Rudolf Brandsch, who studied Theology and German language and culture at the universities of Marburg, Klausenburg, Berlin and Jena, where he had direct contact with völkisch nationalists. After 1918, his political activity had two main directions: 1. unifying the diverse German-speaking groups in Romania and establishing a political organisation to represent their interests – he launched in 1919 the so-called Union of Germans in Great Romania (Verband der Deutschen in Groß-Rumänien); 2. bringing together the German minorities in East-Central Europe – he was among the founders and Chair of the Association of German Ethnic Groups in Europe (Verband der Deutschen Volksgruppen in Europa) from 1922 to 1931.⁶⁹ Through his articles, he disseminated a völkisch version of the myth of the Volksgemeinschaft as an ideological background to his aforementioned political projects. One of

66 Ibid., p. 67.

67 According to James Koranyi, Nachbarschaften (neighbourhoods) were “local community support networks” in Transylvanian Saxon villages, which “emphasised the importance of local loyalties and traditions”. James Koranyi: *Migrating Memories. Romanian Germans in Modern Europe*. Cambridge 2021, p. 68.

68 Georgescu: *Pursuing*, pp. 67–68.

69 See Sabine Bamberger-Stemmann: *Volksgemeinschaft als Siedlungsgemeinschaft. Das Volksgruppenkonzept von Rudolf Brandsch und seine Wirkung in den 1930er Jahren*. In: Cornelia Eisler, Silke Göttsch-Elten (eds.): *Minderheiten im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit* Wissenschaftliche Konzeptionen, mediale Vermittlung, politische Funktion. Münster 2017, pp. 191–218, here: p. 197.

the vehicles of disseminating his ideas was the magazine *Nation und Staat* (Nation and State) launched in Vienna in 1927 with the financial support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁰ As Sabine Bamberger-Stemmann argues, Brandsch coined its concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* inspired by *völkisch* ideology and focused on the importance of the peasant culture and their agricultural economy as the main sources of authentic national values.⁷¹ Although both *völkisch* and Nazi visions of *Volksgemeinschaft* had their origins in *völkisch* ideology, Brandsch's emphasis on the ties of the people with the soil was different from the one promoted by Nazis because the former did not entail a racial component. According to Brandsch, this relation was defined mainly through the specific system of land ownership and agricultural economy.⁷² The case of Rudolf Brandsch's activity illustrates that both the *völkisch* version of the myth of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the concept of *Volksgruppe* were shaped during the 1920s in the ideological framework of the pan-German policies of the Weimar Republic.

The Nazi propaganda around the myth of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was built on these *völkisch* layers by adding new components. The Nazis valorised and reshaped the *völkisch* emphasis on peasantry as the container of the authentic German values and the myth of the German civilising mission in the East. Due to its composite character, it is difficult to assert to which extent the audience of Nazi propaganda among the South-Eastern *Volksdeutsche* made a clear distinction between the *völkisch* and Nazi versions of concept of *Volksgemeinschaft*. Moreover, the fluid meanings assigned to the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* by various German speaking intellectuals in the region led also to inner contradictions. According to Sacha E. Davis, during the interwar period, the nationalist voices among the Transylvanian Saxon elite "successfully drew on the civilizing mission in order to integrate into a broader German *Volksgemeinschaft* encompassing Germans from Germany to the Baltic".⁷³ However, the Transylvanian Saxon "particularist" view on Germanness marked their relationship with other German-speaking groups in interwar Romania and undermined the creation of a united community of Romanian Germans.⁷⁴

Besides the afore mentioned frustrations with the nostalgia of an idealised past perceived through the lens of their former privileges, which were very

70 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

73 Davis: *Constructing*, p. 56.

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

influential particularly among Transylvanian Saxons and Zipsers⁷⁵ the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche also faced economic problems and inner class tensions following the First World War. The German minorities in Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia, mostly made up of peasants, were affected by the loss of the Austro-Hungarian market after the dismantling of the Dual Monarchy.⁷⁶ While German peasants in Hungary and Romania had to compete after 1918 with the rest of the peasantry in these countries for a much smaller national market where agricultural products were abundant, in Czechoslovakia, the Zipsers, who used to be a significant part of the bourgeoisie in the northern part of the Transleithania, now had to compete with the more economically powerful middle class of Bohemia and Moravia.⁷⁷ In this regional context marked by border changes and crisis, the concept of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft had the potential to attract those among the German minorities of South-Eastern Europe who were experiencing severe economic and social instability. Consequently, as in interwar Germany, the concept of the Volksgemeinschaft was perceived by many as a tool for bridging the class, religious or regional divisions and providing “a myth of transcendent unity” in a time of multi-layered crisis.⁷⁸

David Welch identified four key themes that structured the Nazi propaganda: 1. the “appeal to national unity”, which instrumentalised the principle that the Volksgemeinschaft should always have prominence over the individual; 2. the quest “for racial purity”; 3. “a hatred of enemies” focusing particularly on Bolsheviks and Jews; and 4. “charismatic leadership” embodied in the Führerprinzip.⁷⁹ Within this system of four pillars, the myth of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft worked as a vault key. The latter united the four elements in one coherent ensemble. As Welch pointed out, Nazi propaganda’s main goal was to radically reshape German society “so that the prevailing class, religious and sectional loyalties would be replaced by a new heightened national awareness” built around the myth of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft.⁸⁰ As in the case of *völkisch* ideology, within National Socialism the drive for unity drew on “an idealized past” rather than on the present.⁸¹

75 Szelényi: *From Minority*, p. 226.

76 Vasile Ciobanu: *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni: 1918–1944* [Contributions to the knowledge of the history of Transylvanian Saxons]. Sibiu 2002, p. 99.

77 Szelényi: *From Minority*, p. 240.

78 Browning, Siegelbaum: *Frameworks*, p. 236.

79 Welch: *Nazi*, p. 217.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Although the level of resonance that the Nazi version of Volksgemeinschaft found among German-speaking groups in South-Eastern Europe differed from one community to another, some features of the cultural background created by the pan-German policies of Weimar Germany during the 1920s played an important role in the receptivity to the Nazi concept of Volksgemeinschaft among different groups of ethnic Germans in the region. This role is visible in the articles published by the cultural magazine *Ostland*, launched in Hermannstadt (Sibiu in Romanian, Nagyszeben in Hungarian) in 1919 by Richard Csaki. Afterwards, Csaki moved to the Reich and led the Deutsches Ausland-Institut (henceforth DAI) in Stuttgart from 1933 to 1941.⁸² In the pages of *Ostland* magazine, he intensively disseminated the myth of the civilising mission of the Volksdeutsche in the East as a key identity component unifying these groups.⁸³ Thus, according to the programmatic article authored by Richard Csaki:

The pages [of our cultural magazine] aim to express this old German spirit of the territories in the East, to revitalise the will of the [first German] colonists from the moment of the birth of our people, which still flows inexhaustibly.⁸⁴

During the 1930s, the völkisch myth of the civilising mission of the German colonists in the East took a new form within the “blood and soil” narratives, which were intensively instrumentalised within the Nazi propaganda among the Volksdeutsche. The ideas developed by Richard Walther Darré could potentially resonate with the Volksdeutsche, considering Darré’s discourse of idealising the peasantry. The latter was combined with a fixation on Eastern Europe, contrasting it with the decadent West, illustrated by one of his texts:

82 Richard Csaki enjoyed the support from Hans Steinacher, who was at that time head of the Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland (VDA). See Andreas Strippel: Die politisch-wissenschaftliche Kooperation der Einwandererzentralstelle und des Deutschen Ausland-Instituts in Stuttgart. In: Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar (eds.): *Völkische Wissenschaften und Politikberatung im 20. Jahrhundert*. Paderborn 2010, pp. 137–152, here: p. 143.

83 He published in Hermannstadt from 1919 to 1921 and from 1926 to 1943 the cultural magazine: *Ostland. Monatsschrift für die Kultur der Ostdeutschen* (after 1926, entitled *Ostland. Vom geistigen Leben der Auslanddeutschen*).

84 The original German version is: “Diesen deutschen Geist des Ostlandes wollen unsere Blätter zum Ausdruck bringen, den alten Kolonistenwillen neu beleben aus dem Born des deutschen Volkstums, der unerschöpflich noch immer quillt.” Richard Csaki: Zur Einführung. In: *Ostland. Vom geistigen der Auslanddeutschen* 1 (1926) 1, pp. 1–4, here: p. 2. All translations from German into English by authors, unless otherwise noted.

The fate of Germany is rooted in the East [...]. National Socialism has once more turned the face of the whole people clearly and with conviction to the East, leaving behind us the pernicious influence of the dissolving and decomposing mental sphere of the West.⁸⁵

As the chapter of this edited volume authored by Filip Krčmar shows, “blood and soil” narratives worked as a key component of the Nazi propaganda aiming to build a *Volksgemeinschaft* uniting ethnic Germans from South-East Europe with their peers in the Reich. Nevertheless, according to Mirna Zakić, the Nazi narratives on the *Volksdeutsche* surface an “ambivalence” and a tension between “the emphasis” on a unified community on the one hand, and “the mania for classification on the other”.⁸⁶ In her view, the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* had three layers: 1. National – “equated with German citizenship and Germany’s political borders”; 2. “Supranational” – “corresponding to the idea of a cross-border German Volk”; and 3. “Subnational” – comprising the German minorities outside the Reich. Despite the “compatibility” between the Nazi narratives envisioning a “supranational Volk” and the “subnational communities” perceiving themselves as German, it was not easy for “ethnic Germans to slot themselves” into this racial hierarchy.⁸⁷ The contributions authored by Doris L. Bergen and Mirna Zakić suggest that although Nazi propaganda tried to portray the *Volksdeutsche* as a part of the Nazi racial *Volksgemeinschaft*, there was a deep gap between the place assigned to them by the official discourse within the latter and the existing hierarchies of the new order built by the Third Reich. Doris L. Bergen shed light on the *Volksdeutsche*’s perception as not German enough in the eyes of the Third Reich’s racial policy makers.⁸⁸ Similar conclusions reached by Mirna Zakić brought to the fore that the advertised German Volk was in practice “divided into groups with different degrees of Germanness, as suggested by the very existence of the term ‘*Volksdeutsche*’”.⁸⁹ This paradox is illustrated very well by the status of Banat Germans in Yugoslavia, who were treated by Nazi Germany as “junior partners” and “second-class Germans” despite their collaboration. Although they did not enjoy a “full membership in the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*”, this did not prevent their full “association with

85 Deborah Dwork, Robert Jan Van Pelt: *Auschwitz, 1270 to the Present*. New York 1996, p. 81, quoted in Liulevicius: *The German*, p. 177.

86 Zakić: *Ethnic*, p. 17.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

88 Doris L. Bergen: *The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–1945*. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994) 4, pp. 569–582.

Nazi crimes”.⁹⁰ Similar contradictions were documented by Michal Schvarc in his chapter within this edited volume concerning the Slovakian Germans recruited for work in the Third Reich. Many of the latter complained that their Reichsdeutsche colleagues viewed them as “German-speaking Slovaks” or “Slovaks of German descent” and not as full-fledged members of the “National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft”.

The propaganda disseminating the myth of a Nazi Volksgemeinschaft among the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche also entailed a radical logic of exclusion. The antisemitic discourse and policies of the Nazi organisations among the Volksdeutsche are the darkest side of defining the Volksgemeinschaft as an “exclusive (racial) community”.⁹¹ According to Balázs A. Szelényi, although the antisemitic discourse was a common element within the drive towards National Socialism of the Zipsers in Slovakia, the Danube Swabians in Hungary and the Transylvanian Saxons in Romania, the acerbity of antisemitism differed from one group to another.⁹² The antisemitic personalities among the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche were also a channel of communication between Nazi Germany and the far-right movements in the host countries. Fritz Fabritius, the founder of Selbsthilfe/Erneuerungsbewegung (Renewalist Movement) among Romanian Germans signed in March 1932 an agreement of collaboration with A. C. Cuza, the leader of the League for National Christian Defense (LANC) and one of the most virulent antisemitic personalities of Romanian public life.⁹³ As the file created by the interwar Romanian secret police on his activity shows, Fabritius worked during the 1930s as a key network node and active disseminator of the antisemitic propaganda organisation Welt-Dienst.⁹⁴ He was also a useful tool for other Nazi controlled organisations, such as the League for Germans Abroad (Volksbund für das Deutschtum in Ausland, henceforth VDA) and DAI in Stuttgart. In May 1934, the NSDAP leadership in Germany instructed him to launch a campaign against the Austrian government’s coercive policies on Nazis following the June 1933

89 Zakić: Ethnic, p. 18.

90 Ibid., p. 3.

91 Welch: Nazi, p. 230.

92 Szelényi: From Minority, p. 217.

93 Florian Kühner-Wielach: Drumul spre “aliniererea” la național-socialism. Pentru o istorie politică a germanilor din România între 1933 și 1940 [The road towards the “Gleichschaltung”. A political history of Romanian Germans from 1933 to 1940]. In: Trașcă, Anghel (eds.): Un veac, pp. 77–112, here: pp. 80–81.

94 Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității București [The National Council for the Securitate Archives] (henceforth CNSAS), M-FI 39553/SB, microfilm roll 488, pp. 18–25, 83–85.

ban of the Nazi Party in Austria, and to promote the cause of the latter among the South-Eastern Volksdeutsche.⁹⁵

Mariana Hausleitner documented in her chapter within this volume that the Nazis among the local Volksdeutsche established close collaborations with the Romanian far-right movements in Bukovina and Bessarabia, where the antisemitic narratives became increasingly virulent and reached the level of violent attacks. This is the case of the May 1933 attacks against Jews by Romanian antisemites in Czernowitz (Cernăuți in Romanian; Chernivtsi in Ukrainian), in which young Germans and Ukrainians also took part. The Selbsthilfe was also motivated to publish more antisemitic articles because this increased the financial support it received from Nazi Germany. Mariana Hausleitner's inquiry on the relation between Nazi Germany's financial support for antisemitic propaganda and the increase of antisemitism in Romania during 1930s confirms conclusions similar to Ivo Goldstein's in the case of interwar Yugoslavia.⁹⁶

Transnational Networks Connecting the Third Reich and the "Volksdeutsche"

Following the dismantling of Austria-Hungary, Budapest lost its position of cultural metropolis for many ethnic Germans living in Romania, Yugoslavia and the Eastern part of Czechoslovakia after the First World War.⁹⁷ This shift, combined with the active policy of Weimar Germany in cultivating cultural and economic connections with the Volksdeutsche, created several channels of cultural transfers between these groups and Germany. During the 1930s, these channels worked as effective vehicles of disseminating National Socialist ideology among the Volksdeutsche. However, as the case of the emergence of the Selbsthilfe among Romanian Germans demonstrates, this does not mean that we should downplay the importance of the local roots and factors of the far-right radicalisation of the 1930s. Without these factors working from the inside of the Volksdeutsche communities, the National Socialist ideology would have not appealed to so many of them. For example,

95 CNSAS, MM-FI 39553/SB, microfilm roll 488, p. 94. Fabritius met in Munich the leaders of the National Socialist Party in Austria and promised to promote a press campaign in South-Eastern European German language press against the Austrian government.

96 See Ivo Goldstein: *Types of Anti-Semitism in the Territory of Former Yugoslavia, 1918–2000*. In: Wolf Moskovich, Oto Luthar, Irena Šumi (eds.): *Jews and Slavs. Jews and anti-Semitism in the Balkans*. Jerusalem 2004, pp. 9–27.

97 This was the case particularly for Danube Swabians.

the fashion among the region's young ethnic Germans to study in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s created occasions for them to come into contact with radicalised milieus in the Reich. Many of the Volksdeutsche studying in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s joined various youth associations with a far-right political agenda (Jugendbünde). When they returned to their home states in the late 1920s and 1930s, they found societies facing economic hardships, with high rates of unemployment, particularly among youth with higher education.⁹⁸

According to Caroline Mezger, “German youths—both from within and outside of the Reich—became envisioned as a cornerstone to Nazi Germany’s” policies in Eastern Europe.⁹⁹ By focusing her research on the Third Reich’s policies on the ethnic Germans in Batschka, she concluded that the youth was “exceptionally important” for the Nazi policies in the region.¹⁰⁰ These policies involved both a massive “‘import’ of reichsdeutsche youths into the Batschka”, and a large mobilisation of local Danube-Swabian youths into Nazi organisations.¹⁰¹ The so-called Landdienst, established in 1934, channelled thousands of German youths from the Third Reich into the homes of Volksdeutsche across Europe. When the first German youths and youth instructors from the Reich came to Batschka in the mid-1930s, they found an organisational structure that had been designed in the 1920s to promote German language education and culture.¹⁰² Drawing on this institutional background, organisations from Nazi Germany such as the VDA, the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (henceforth VoMi), and the so-called Reichsjugendführung carried out policies of indoctrination of the local German youth in Batschka.¹⁰³ This flux of youth between Reich and Volksdeutsche was not only a one-way road. As the report of the Schäßburg (Sighișoara in Romanian, Segesvár in Hungarian) town office of the secret police in interwar Romania from January 1936 brought to the fore, the emergence of the local Nazi movement as a prominent political force was fuelled by the Romanian

98 See Dragoș Sdrobiș: *Limitele meritocrației într-o societate agrară. Șomaj intelectual și radicalizare politică a tineretului în România interbelică* [The limits of meritocracy in an agrarian society. Intellectual unemployment and political radicalization of youth in interwar Romania]. Iași 2015.

99 Caroline Mezger: *Entangled Utopias. The Nazi Mobilization of Ethnic German Youths in the Batschka, 1930s–1944*. In: *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9 (2016) 1, pp. 87–117, here: p. 88.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 94.