

THE DANUBE SWABIANS:
SETTLEMENT, EXPULSION, AND BUILDING A NEW *HEIMAT* IN POST-1945

GERMANY

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

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The focus of this essay is the history and the formation of cultural identity of the Danube Swabians, an ethnic German minority which migrated to Southeastern Europe in the 18th century. The Danube Swabians were initially subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which ruled the respective area until 1919, after which the Danube Swabians were separated among the nation-states of newly independent Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

This essay examines how the experiences of the Danube Swabians, first as imperial subjects and then later as an ethnic minority, determined their understanding of cultural identity in the face of rising nationalism among other ethnic groups in the region. Furthermore, the essay also highlights how this ethnic group was affected by developments within the German Reich in the interwar years as well as after Hitler's ascent to power in the 1930s, and how these ties would lastly lead to this group's violent removal from its settlement area following the end of World War II. The final section of the essay examines the resettlement of the Danube Swabians to post-1945 Germany while discussing how

policies implemented by the Allied forces as well as the new Federal government of (West) Germany helped integrate these ethnic Germans into post-war society.

The topic of this essay was inspired by the experiences of the author's aunt, a Danube Swabian refugee from former Yugoslavia, who escaped the violence with her mother in the 1940s.

The Danube Swabians:

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For centuries, ethnic Germans settled throughout Europe, driven by economic opportunities, following military conquests or invited by rulers of other countries and empires.¹ These ethnic Germans were farmers and craftsmen, laborers and tradesmen, composers, artists and philosophers; they built cities, developed industries and practiced law.² They established smaller, scattered rural communities and also dwelt in larger, more densely populated cities throughout the continent.

While ethnic German communities still exist today in Western European countries such as Denmark, Belgium, France, and Italy, almost all of the German settlements in Europe's East and Southeast have disappeared. Ethnic Germans from these regions were forced to leave during and after World War II, constituting one of the largest migrations of recorded history.³

This paper will focus on an ethnic German group called the 'Danube Swabians', particularly on Danube Swabians who resided in what constitutes present-day northern Serbia. It will examine their history of migration, from their initial departure from German lands in the 18th century to their arrival in Germany as refugees and expellees after World War II. It will also highlight how the aspect of cultural identity of the Danube Swabians in

¹ Pertti Ahonen, Gustavo Corni, Jerzy Kochanowski, Rainer Schulz, Tamás Stark, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Berg, 2008), 14

² Alfred M. de Zayas, *A terrible revenge: the ethnic cleansing of the East European Germans* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 7

³ Douglas, R.M. *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans After the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 1

general was shaped primarily by outside forces and geopolitical changes rather than an innate understanding of cohesion.

The reason for choosing to focus on this particular group is based both on personal interest as well as family history. Appendix A will provide an overview of a family member's experience of the expulsions. Appendix B includes several maps of Danube Swabian settlements in order to better demonstrate how the changing borders in the 20th century affected the Danube Swabians directly and largely determined their history.

The origins of the 'Danube Swabians'

The Danube Swabians describe a group of ethnic German migrants who began settling in the Danube Plains in the 18th century. The migration of these ethnic Germans to the area, which constitutes parts of present-day Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, and Romania, as shown in Figure 1 in Appendix B, was implemented by the Austro-Hungarian rulers, which had previously seized this particular territory from the Ottoman Empire in the late 17th century.⁴

Despite the fact that the settlement of the Danube Plains by ethnic Germans occurred in the 18th century, the term 'Danube Swabian' itself is of more modern date. It was coined in 1922 by scholars who sought to establish a terminology for this ethnic group.⁵ The term 'Danube Swabian' not only highlights the proximity of the settlements to the Danube River, but also presumes the origin of these ethnic Germans. However, the

⁴ Theodor Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa V - Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien* (Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 6E

⁵ Josef Volkmar Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben: Von den Anfängen bis in die Gegenwart* (München: Amalthea, 1987), 19

aspect of ‘Swabian’ requires some clarification. The province of Swabia, and in it the city of Ulm, was indeed the point of departure for many of the original settlers. It was from this city that the migrants embarked on their journey down the Danube River. Yet it is important to note that many of the original settler families did not stem from this province, but were recruited from other parts of present-day southern Germany, or border regions in which German was the prevalent language, as was the case with the Danube Swabian interviewee in Appendix A.⁶

In order to understand why the term ‘Danube Swabian’ came into existence about two centuries after the first settlers initially migrated to the region, it is necessary to clarify that these ethnic Germans originally did not possess strong sentiments of national or cultural identity. For most of those later termed ‘Danube Swabians’, identity as such was defined by family connections or locality, and not ethnic or cultural cohesion.⁷ This phenomenon existed well into the 19th century, during which political changes to the structure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would plant the seed for Danube Swabian cultural identity, a seed which continued to grow in the early 20th century.

When looking at the migration of the Danube Swabian settlers to their designated destination, it is important to note that this happened mainly in three consecutive migration waves over several decades in the 18th century. While the first and second ‘Swabian Trek’, as these particular migration waves are also called, occurred under the rule of Habsburg

⁶ Brian Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians: The Haus der Donauschwaben as Catalyst in the Formation of an Inclusive Group Consciousness, 1945-1970*. (University of California – Santa Barbara: UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2014), 50-51

⁷ Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 52

Emperor Charles IV and his daughter, Empress Maria Theresia, the third and final call for settlers occurred during the reign of Joseph II, the successor of Maria Theresia.⁸

For the Habsburg monarchs, the recruitment of settlers to their new territory followed a strategic plan, with the consolidation of their victory over the Ottoman forces set as the primary goal.⁹ Indeed, new settlements, focusing on agricultural cultivation of the land, would serve to solidify the new 'status quo' of Habsburg rule, while also supporting Austrian military posts which remained to protect the territory from renewed Ottoman aggression.¹⁰

The decision of the Habsburg rulers to recruit primarily ethnic Germans as settlers also followed specific considerations. For one, there existed a surplus of people in German-speaking territories who were eager to escape their overcrowded towns and villages. These people were especially attracted by the Habsburg promises of bountiful farmlands, tax exemptions, upward social mobility and other possibilities of economic development which awaited these migrants in the new lands.¹¹

Moreover, the Habsburg monarchs hoped to profit from the knowledge of new farming technologies these German settlers possessed. The crucial fact, however, was that ethnic German settlers shared both language as well as the Catholic faith with the Habsburg rulers. By populating their newly seized territory with ethnic German settlers, the Austrian monarchs were able to achieve a drastic change in the ethnic composition of the region.¹² Indeed, the new German arrivals counterbalanced the predominance of the existing Slavic

⁸ Loránt Tilkovsky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen seit 1919* (Budapest: Corvina, 1991), 15

⁹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 54

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38

¹¹ *Ibid.* 57

¹² Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 49

population,¹³ and were also able to curb, at least initially, the rise in Magyar (Hungarian) influence within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a fact considered highly advantageous to the Austrian Habsburg rulers.¹⁴

As can be seen in Figure 2 in Appendix B, the settlement area of the Danube Swabians was located among different geographical regions which were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until after World War I. The ratio of ethnic German Danube Swabians to other ethnicities, most notably Slavs and Magyars, differed from region to region. However, it was within the Batschka, and especially in its city of Apatin, in which the percentage of ethnic Germans in relation to other ethnicities was the largest.¹⁵ As can be seen in Appendix A, the Danube Swabian interviewee and her family also stemmed from Apatin, where her ancestors had settled since their arrival from the Black Forest region in the 18th century.

For a large part of its Danube Swabian history, the Batschka region achieved high agricultural output, a fact duly noted by the other ethnicities in the region, particularly the Serbian population.¹⁶ Most Danube Swabians regions were in fact economically successful, although this prosperity was achieved over generations of settlement history. Indeed, many of the original settlers succumbed to illnesses and starvation due to diseases such as malaria, and natural catastrophes such as flooding. This hardship and despair is epitomized in the following saying, familiar to almost all Danube Swabians:

Der Erste hat den Tod,	The first one has Death
Der Zweite hat die Not,	The second one has Want

¹³ Zoran Janjetovic, "Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben", *Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte, Kultur und Landeskunde Südosteuropas* 58 (1999): 119-120

¹⁴ Tilkovsky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen seit 1919*, 15

¹⁵ "Stiftung Donauschwäbisches Zentralmuseum," last modified January 2019, http://danube-places.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=104&lang=de

¹⁶ Janjetovic, "Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben", 120

Der Dritte erst hat Brot.

The third one finally has Bread¹⁷

While destitution was undoubtedly a large part of life for the early settlers, the ethnic Germans in the Danube Plains were, however, the recipients of certain benefits, of which tax exemption was the most prominent. It is important to point out that such benefits were, however, only granted to the ethnic German settlers; the other ethnicities who resided in the region and who also toiled the imperial lands did not receive such favorable terms.¹⁸

Despite such unequal treatment, it appears that conflict between the different ethnic groups was rare throughout the 18th and early 19th century. Although smaller skirmishes were likely to occur from time to time, it was primarily the vast availability of land for all inhabitants which determined that the co-existence between the different ethnic groups remained largely peaceful.¹⁹ What would lastly shake the foundations of this coexistence were the political changes which occurred within the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the second half of the 19th century.

When looking at the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the years 1866 and 1867 deserve special mention as they brought forth important changes within the political balance of the Empire. The year 1866 saw Austria-Hungary's defeat against the Kingdom of Prussia, which had direct implications on the relationship between these two powers. However, the Empire's defeat also resulted in a substantial shift of power from the Austrian to the Hungarian part within the dual monarchy.²⁰ While the character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained in theory that of a multi-ethnic empire, in reality the increase

¹⁷ G.C. Paikert, *The Danube Swabians: German Populations in Hungary, Rumania, and Yugoslavia and Hitler's impact on their Patterns* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 27

¹⁸ Janjetovic, "Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben", 120

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119-120

²⁰ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 145

of political powers for the Hungarians brought about efforts of Magyarization within the eastern half of the Empire. This severely affected the Empire's minorities, and the ethnic German communities such as the Danube Swabians in particular.²¹ For them, it was the rise of Hungarian autonomy and the push for Magyarization by the authorities which was the most threatening as it led to the loss of their status and preferential treatment within the Empire. Such status had been based, to a large part, on the German language which they shared with their Austrian rulers, amongst other aspects which deemed the ethnic German Danube Swabians loyal subjects to the Austrian crown.²²

It was in regard to language that the political changes of 1867 brought the most profound consequences for the Danube Swabians. While the Austrian rulers had granted the ethnic German communities in their Empire, including the Danube Swabians, permission to establish their own schools with German as the language of instruction, such privileges were curtailed and revoked by Hungarian authorities after 1867.²³ Magyar gradually came to replace German in most primary and secondary schools in the German settlement areas.²⁴

Indeed, the aspect of education and language instruction was part of a larger effort of homogenization by the Hungarian authorities after 1867, which was increasingly perceived as a threat by many members of the community. However, these Magyarization efforts can be seen as an indirect influence on the gradual formation of a cultural 'Danube Swabian' identity, especially in the later decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century.

²¹ Tilkovsky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen seit 1919*, 24

²² Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 59

²³ Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa V*, 21E

²⁴ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 153

It was primarily in cities in which the bourgeoisie came to believe that establishing and promoting their own ethnic ‘Danube Swabian’ identity would be a fruitful strategy to not only stymie Magyarization, but would help achieve higher levels of cultural autonomy as well.²⁵ Many of those in favor of promoting such an identity also viewed political participation as essential to furthering their cause, and the formation of parties such as the *Ungarländische Deutsche Volkspartei* (Hungarian German People’s Party) in 1906 was an important achievement. Unfortunately, however, such hopes for political participation and cultural autonomy did not translate into overall success as the severe resistance by Hungarian authorities as well as the skewed political system continued to work in favor of Hungarian dominance.²⁶ Paradoxically, the Magyarization efforts lastly did bear fruit after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when many Danube Swabians remained loyal to their identity as imperial subjects in the wake of growing nationalism within the successor states of the Empire.²⁷

The Aftermath of World War I and the Interwar Years

The First World War in Europe and its aftermath brought about cataclysmic changes for most of the continent. As the empires of tsarist Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary collapsed, the peoples of these former empires saw themselves affected by geopolitical changes as borders were redrawn and nation-states formed. Especially ethnic minority groups such as the Danube Swabians were profoundly impacted by these effects, not only geographically, but also politically. However, many of them also regarded the

²⁵ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 158

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 159

²⁷ Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa V*, 27E

changing geopolitical landscape as an opportunity to achieve cultural autonomy and strengthen their group's identity, efforts which had been stifled under Hungarian rule in the past.²⁸

The fate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I was sealed with the Treaty of Saint-Germain of 1919 and the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, which were signed by the victorious Allied forces and representatives of defeated Austria and Hungary, respectively. The Treaty of Saint Germain formalized the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, granting Hungary and other states independence,²⁹ with the Treaty of Trianon further determining which regions of the former Empire could be claimed by the successor states now independent from Austria.³⁰

The Danube Swabians were directly affected by these treaties and the aftermath of World War I. For them, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire meant the disbanding of their own territory, as can be seen in Figure 3 in Appendix B. While they had previously been imperial subjects on Austro-Hungarian lands, with the creation of states out of the former Empire, they now found themselves strewn across the newly independent countries of Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia.³¹

Despite the challenges the geographical separation of Danube Swabian territory entailed, many within this ethnic group supported the new nation-states in the hope that they could finally achieve more cultural autonomy and political participation which had

²⁸ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 188-189

²⁹ "Treaty of Saint Germain," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified September 03, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Saint-Germain>

³⁰ "Treaty of Trianon," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified May 28, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Trianon>

³¹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 192-193

previously been obstructed under imperial rule.³² Such hopes were particularly fueled by the protection of minority rights reinforced by the Allied forces and the ideals of self-determination brought forth by President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points in early 1918.³³

However, not all Danube Swabians shared such support for the new nation-states. Even though the last decades of Hungarian rule had seen an overall rise in awareness that Magyarization efforts presented a real danger to Danube Swabian cultural identity, many of them nevertheless had come to accept Magyar-dominated society. The reluctance to support the new nation-states was based primarily on the high levels of social stability and relative economic prosperity they had been able to achieve under Hungarian rule. For many, the fear ran deep that such stability and prosperity would be impacted by the governments which came to power in the newly independent states.³⁴

Although the early years of independence initially provided chances for increased political participation and cultural autonomy for the Danube Swabians in the successor states of the Empire, it was especially within Yugoslavia where such possibilities became more and more limited as the 1920s progressed. Many of those who had originally supported the idea of independence and self-determination in Yugoslavia witnessed the growing role nationalism and national identity came to play within the dominant Slavic population.³⁵ The Yugoslav government was increasingly influenced by nationalistic parties which many Serbs supported and which created a significant strain on interethnic

³² Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 193-194

³³ "Fourteen Points," *HISTORY*, last modified November 16, 2009, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/wilson-delivers-fourteen-points-speech>

³⁴ Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa V*, 27E

³⁵ Marina Cattaruzza, "Endstation Vertreibung: Minderheitenfrage und Zwangsmigrationen in Ostmitteleuropa, 1919–1949," *Journal of modern European History* 6, no.1 (2008): 14

relations between the Serb majority and the Danube Swabian minority.³⁶ Indeed, the strengthening of nationalism occurred at the expense of interethnic relations, which would lead to disaster in the 1930s and 1940s.

The aftermath of World War I also had severe implications for the German Reich, which had allied itself with the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the start of the war. While the Allied forces had not demanded a dissolution of the country comparable to that required of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Peace treaty of Versailles had nevertheless dictated that Germany relinquish control over a substantial part of its Eastern provinces, the former Prussian territories which had been incorporated into the German Reich through unification in 1871.³⁷

Burdened by payments of war reparations to the Allies forces and impacted by the loss of territory in the East, the Weimar Republic, the democratic government which replaced the previous imperial system in 1918 started to focus on ethnic German communities throughout Eastern and Southeastern Europe, for both economic and political reasons. The governments of the Weimar Republic were aware that many of these ethnic German communities were centers of economic success and high agricultural productivity, and worked to establish stronger cultural bonds between these communities and the German 'fatherland'. Through connections with the German minorities, the governments of the Weimar Republic also hoped to gain influence on the administrations of the communities' host countries for economic and political purposes.³⁸

³⁶ Janjetovic, "Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben", 133-134

³⁷ "Treaty of Versailles," *HISTORY*, last modified October 29, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/treaty-of-versailles-1>

³⁸ Tilkovsky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen seit 1919*, 44

While increased access to countries in Southeastern Europe would encourage profitable trade relations, the governments of the Weimar Republic also envisioned that strengthening bonds between Germany and ethnic Germans outside the Reich would benefit their own population as well. Considering that many Germans viewed the peace treaties of World War I as particularly unjust for Germany, promoting new bonds of solidarity with ethnic Germans throughout Eastern and Southeastern Europe could possibly help counter the feelings of devastation the harsh terms the Treaty of Versailles had left on the national German psyche.³⁹

For the Danube Swabians, the interwar years brought increased cultural orientation towards Germany, strategically promoted by foreign policies of the Weimar Republic and readily accepted by many within the communities. Such acceptance of German influence can be explained by the failure of many Danube Swabians to fully identify with the new successor states of the Empire, as mentioned above, and the disappointment many experienced after realizing that their hopes for cultural autonomy and full political participation would not be achieved. Indeed, the rise of nationalist ideology in the later years of the Weimar Republic found approval within the Danube Swabian communities, leading many, to support the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party in the 1930s.⁴⁰

The Danube Swabians during the Nazi regime and World War II

Although the ethnic German communities had already been of strategic interest for Germany during the Weimar Republic, it was Hitler and the Nazis who developed the idea

³⁹ Tilkovsky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen seit 1919*, 39-41

⁴⁰ Paikert, *The Danube Swabians*, 270 in Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 78-79

of ethnic cohesion between Germans and ethnic German groups even further.⁴¹ In the later years of the Weimar Republic, many German nationalists had already been actively promoting the idea that the millions of *Auslandsdeutsche* (ethnic Germans from outside the Reich) might prove to be valuable assets in the struggle to regain the Reich's former territories. After his ascent to power, Hitler and his followers referred to the ethnic Germans living throughout Europe as *Volksdeutsche*, a term inferring that Germans and ethnic Germans were indeed one *Volk* (people). The incorporation of these *Volksdeutsche* into the Third Reich served as an important element with which Hitler sought to cement his quest for European domination.⁴²

For Adolf Hitler and his supporters, revoking the Peace Treaties of World War I and reclaiming the territories Germany had lost as a result were a top priority. However, Hitler also pursued the annexation and conquest of countries throughout Eastern and Southeastern Europe in order to fulfill the need of territory, of *Lebensraum* (living space), he believed the 'Aryan master race' needed and deserved.⁴³

The creation of *Lebensraum im Osten*⁴⁴ saw the forceful removal of the local population from the territories the Nazis conquered, to the so-called Generalgouvernement, an area in Eastern Europe in which many of the concentration and death camps were located and where some of the most horrid atrocities of the Third Reich were committed.⁴⁵

⁴¹ de Zayas, *A terrible revenge*, 33

⁴² Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees from the First World War Through the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 219-220

⁴³ Pertti Ahonen, Gustavo Corni, Jerzy Kochanowski, Rainer Schulz, Tamás Stark, Barbara Stelzl-Marx *People on the Move*, 11

⁴⁴ The idea of creating *Lebensraum im Osten* (living space in the East) for the 'Aryan master race' was the ideological foundation of Hitler's quest to conquer and subjugate much of Eastern Europe (Ahonen et al, *People on the Move*, 11)

⁴⁵ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 221

In order to repopulate the *Lebensraum* territories, the Nazis relocated many Germans from within the Reich to the newly vacated lands. Additionally, the Nazis also implemented the *Heim ins Reich* policy, which saw the relocation of ethnic Germans from the respective parts of Eastern and Southeastern Europe to either Germany proper or the territories the Nazis annexed, invaded, or conquered after 1939.⁴⁶

While the *Heim ins Reich* policy proved successful especially among ethnic Germans in the Baltic States⁴⁷, the ethnic German communities in Southeastern Europe, including the Danube Swabians, were less responsive and supportive of this policy. Within Yugoslavia in particular, the *Heim ins Reich* program was met with strong opposition, not only by the local ethnic German population, but also by Nazi supporters within these communities. These supporters successfully argued against such transfers, basing their resistance primarily on the argument that these evacuation efforts were to harm “valuable German stock” and remove “a potentially useful element for future imperial expansion.”⁴⁸ With the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, which was supported by a substantial part of the Danube Swabian community, it appears that this argument proved accurate.

The rise of Nazi ideology in the later interwar years strongly impacted interethnic relations in countries which hosted ethnic German minorities, especially in Yugoslavia. Frequent exhibitions of support for Hitler and his anti-Slavic ideology caused concern and anger amongst the Slavic population, which in turn led to increasingly anti-German sentiments.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 220

⁴⁷ It appears that the ethnic Germans in the Baltic States participated in the *Heim ins Reich* initiative more willingly due to fear of Sovietization rather than support of this Nazi policy (Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 223).

⁴⁸ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 224

⁴⁹ Janjetovic, “Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben“, 148

Furthermore, the increasing acceptance of Nazi ideology by many Danube Swabians also led to conflict among this ethnic group's own members. Indeed, as within other ethnic German communities and even within Germany itself, the upsurge of Nazi ideology resulted in a clash between those who supported Hitler and his party and those who rejected the Nazis' agenda profoundly. It appears that such clashes were particularly strong among the different generations within the Danube Swabian community. While many of the older generation remained consistent in their support for the political status quo, despite its hardships and the changes the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had brought in the interwar years, it was in particular the younger generation on which the influence of Nazi ideology had the strongest hold.⁵⁰

When looking at strategies employed to promote their ideology, there is no doubt that the Nazis invested heavily in creating a vast propaganda network, which included a specific focus on the German youth.⁵¹ While propaganda was spread extensively within the Third Reich, the Nazis also succeeded in reaching the youths of ethnic communities such as the Danube Swabians with their ideas and messages. Many younger Danube Swabians in particular were enthralled by the Nazi ideology they received via press, cinema, and the radio, as well as through direct contact with Germans in the Third Reich. In the late 1930s and especially after the occupation of Yugoslavia by German forces after 1941, youth groups were sent to Germany on 'educational' trips to experience life within the Third Reich where they were subjected to Nazi propaganda directly.⁵²

⁵⁰ Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa V*, 38E

⁵¹ Erin Blakemore, "How the Hitler Youth Turned a Generation of Kids into Nazis," *HISTORY*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.history.com/news/how-the-hitler-youth-turned-a-generation-of-kids-into-nazis>

⁵² Caroline Mezger, "Entangled Utopias: The Nazi Mobilization of Ethnic German Youths in the Batschka, 1930s–1944". *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no.1 (Winter 2016): 100

Those who remained were also able to meet Germans in their own towns and villages. Especially in the years of German occupation of Yugoslavia, many SS soldiers entered the region in efforts to recruit and enlist ethnic Germans, oftentimes disguised as *Wanderlehrer* (traveling teachers), engaging in propaganda efforts to spread Nazi ideology while targeting the ethnic Germans for recruitment and enlistment within their force.⁵³

For many ethnic Germans throughout Europe, Hitler's claim as the leader of all Germans, *Reichsdeutsche* (Germans within the Reich) as well as *Volksdeutsche*, raised the difficult question of allegiance, especially after the start of World War II in 1939 and Nazi Germany's initial victories.⁵⁴ Although some Danube Swabians opted to join the ranks of their host countries' armies or avoided military duty through escape,⁵⁵ by the early 1940s the vast majority of adult male Danube Swabians had been incorporated into the Waffen-SS or the Wehrmacht through intensive mobilization efforts by the Nazis.⁵⁶

The role ethnic Germans played in the Nazi forces which invaded and ransacked much of Eastern and Southeastern Europe is often claimed to be one of the main reasons for the later expulsions of ethnic Germans. However, in this context it is important to note that there is substantial debate regarding the true levels of 'recruitment' of ethnic Germans into the Wehrmacht, the SS, or other Nazi forces. Indeed, while many ethnic Germans certainly supported Hitler and his party and volunteered to participate in the war, many others were more likely to have been coerced into joining the armed forces and fighting for the Third Reich.⁵⁷

⁵³ Mezger, "Entangled Utopias", 100

⁵⁴ Valdis O. Lumans, "The Military Obligations of the "Volksdeutsche" in Eastern Europe towards the Third Reich". *East European Quarterly* 23, no.3 (Fall 1989): 305

⁵⁵ Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa V*, 46E

⁵⁶ Mezger, "Entangled Utopias", 106

⁵⁷ Mezger, "Entangled Utopias", 106

In the aftermath of the Second World War, with the gradual defeat of the Nazi forces by the Red Army, the question of voluntary or forced recruitment of ethnic Germans ceased to matter. Like the *Reichsdeutsche* fighting on the Eastern front, many of the *Volksdeutsche*, including Danube Swabians, were to end up as prisoners of war in Soviet prison camps, forced to conduct excruciating physical labor. For those who remained in their ethnic German communities, most often women, children, and the elderly, the conclusion of the war and Germany's defeat would prove catastrophic. For the vast majority of ethnic Germans, the arrival of the Red Army and the end of the war brought unimaginable horrors, resulting in the destruction of ethnic German communities and the expulsion of around 12 million ethnic Germans to defeated Germany.⁵⁸

The End of World War II and its Impact on the ethnic German Danube Swabians

Many of the ethnic Germans throughout Eastern and Southeastern Europe started to flee their towns and villages once Germany's impending defeat became clear. During the war years, Nazi propaganda of the brutality of the Red Army had instilled fear in Germans throughout the Reich and beyond, a fear which very often became reality. Indeed, in the last years of the war the Red Army advanced with a vengeance, committing unimaginable acts of violence against the ethnic German population. It was the fear of such brutality and retribution for Nazi crimes which drove many ethnic Germans in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, including the Danube Swabians, to leave their homes and head west, either before or with the receding German forces.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Beer, Mathias. *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen* (München: Beck, 2011), 129

⁵⁹ Frank Grube, Gerhard Richter, ed., *Flucht und Vertreibung: Deutschland zwischen 1944 und 1947*, (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), 6

It is estimated that prior to the outbreak of the war, around half a million of ethnic Germans, mostly Danube Swabians, resided in Yugoslavia.⁶⁰ Almost half of this number of ethnic Germans were able to escape the approaching Red Army, with the other half remaining in their homes and thereby coming under Soviet and Partisan control in the last months of the war.⁶¹ Many of the evacuees chose to leave with the belief that their flight would only prove temporary; they hoped they could return after the end of the war and after peace terms had been established.⁶²

As with other Germans escaping the advance of the Red Army, the majority of Danube Swabian evacuees were women, children, and the elderly. This was also the composition of those who decided to stay behind as the adult men had either lost their lives in the war, were held as prisoners of war in various countries, or had been able to escape to Germany as part of the retreating forces.⁶³

While the fear of the advancing Soviet forces drove many ethnic Germans to evacuate their homes, those who remained did so with the hope that Soviet 'liberation' would prove less punitive than feared. A large number of ethnic Germans, including the Danube Swabians, wanted to believe that their interactions and relations with other ethnic groups had largely been harmonious, not only in the recent years of Nazi occupation or dominance, but also in the past. Many were convinced that their abstinence from Nazi Party membership and non-involvement in the war would shield them from any repercussions once the Nazis or their puppet regimes had been defeated. Indeed, it has been argued that

⁶⁰ de Zayas, "A terrible revenge", 21

⁶¹ Alfred M. de Zayas, "Die Flucht", in *Flucht und Vertreibung*, ed. Grube, Richter (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), 130-131

⁶² Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 95

⁶³ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 63

the ethnic Germans failed to grasp how severely their non-German neighbors had been traumatized and radicalized by the Nazis in the territories they controlled. As members of the ‘master race’, ethnic Germans throughout Nazi-occupied Europe had enjoyed privileged treatment and had not been subjected to the regime of terror which had imprisoned, deported, tortured and executed so many of the other ethnicities.⁶⁴

However, during the Second World War, the anger of the Slavic population against their German neighbors for their initial support of Hitler and the Nazis intensified with the advance of Nazi forces and the atrocities they committed, creating “profound hatred and deep-rooted fear of Germans in general.”⁶⁵ Many Slavs remembered how the rise of Nazi ideology in the interwar years had been accepted and supported by members of the Danube Swabian population, disregarding the fact that such support was oftentimes in response to the strengthening ethnic nationalism of the Slavic population and its consequences for minority groups.⁶⁶

Although this hatred of Germans in the countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe at the end of the war was not universal, it was nevertheless widespread, and facilitated the expulsion and internment of the ethnic Germans which the governments of these countries conducted.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 63

⁶⁵ Ahonen, Pertti. *After the Expulsions: West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2003), 23

⁶⁶ Cattaruzza, “Endstation Vertreibung”, 25

⁶⁷ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 325

Expulsions, deportations, and internment: The fate of the Danube Swabians in Yugoslavia

The end of World War II brought about one of the largest movements of people as ethnic Germans were expelled from their host countries throughout most of Europe. Overall, it is believed that between 12 and 14 million *Volksdeutsche* lost their homes in the aftermath of the war, with the majority arriving in war-torn Germany as refugees after 1945.⁶⁸

It is important to point out that these large-scale operations did not occur spontaneously, but had been decided upon even before the war had ended.⁶⁹ The expulsions were officially justified as reducing the possible threat of renewed German aggression, a danger perceived as particularly high in Germany's border regions and in larger settlement areas of ethnic Germans in the East.⁷⁰

While evidence exists that the leaders of the Western Allied forces initially had reservations against such actions, they nevertheless legitimized and sanctioned the expulsions of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary during the Potsdam Conference in 1945, with the understanding that this transfer would occur in an 'orderly and humane' way.⁷¹

However, the expulsions, which were conducted by the Red Army and local partisans, resulted in the violent and chaotic removal of millions of ethnic Germans from all over Eastern and Southeastern Europe, by far exceeding the number of three or four

⁶⁸ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 1

⁶⁹ Christian Habbe, "A Time of Retribution: Paying with Life and Limb for the Crimes of Nazi Germany," *Der Spiegel*, May 27, 2011, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/a-time-of-retribution-paying-with-life-and-limb-for-the-crimes-of-nazi-germany-a-759737.html>

⁷⁰ Cattaruzza, "Endstation Vertreibung", 6

⁷¹ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 91

million expellees the Allied forces had originally envisioned. In the majority of cases, the expellees were given only a short amount of time to collect their most valuable or useful possessions, and forced to leave the majority of their belongings behind,⁷² an experience also described by the Danube Swabian interviewee in Appendix A.

The expulsions produced millions of refugees from Germany's former Eastern territories in present-day Poland, and from the Sudetenland, the border region to Germany in what is today the Czech Republic. This is due not only to the fact that the Allied forces had permitted the expulsions of Germans from these areas during the Potsdam Conference, but also because the number of ethnic Germans in these regions had been the largest.

When looking at the expulsion of Danube Swabians from Yugoslavia in particular, it is important to note that this was never sanctioned by the Allied forces. Although the Potsdam Agreement included Hungary as an expelling country, the Allied forces refused to permit the expulsion of around 130 000 ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia in 1946. Despite this refusal, the Yugoslav forces nevertheless proceeded with the expulsions. In many cases, they simply deported the ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia to Hungary from where expulsions had been allowed, thus circumventing the Allied forces' decision to stymie the forced transfer of Germans from Yugoslavia.⁷³

In addition to violent expulsions, ethnic Germans, including the Danube Swabians, also suffered another fate, namely the deportation to the Soviet Union, where they were placed in labor camps and forced to conduct backbreaking and excruciating labor. Those

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 122

selected for deportations were women between the ages of 16 and 30 and adult men who had returned from the war or who had never left.⁷⁴

For the Soviets, this forced labor was seen as necessary in their efforts to rebuild what Germany's assault on their country had destroyed. Moreover, such deportations were also conducted to ensure that the ethnic Germans could not be able to form partisan or resistance movements in the territories the Red Army had 'liberated.'⁷⁵

When looking at overall numbers, it has been estimated that around tens of thousands of Danube Swabians, not only from Yugoslavia but also from Hungary and Romania, were deported to the Soviet Union in the years after the war. Around one fifth of the deportees perished either on the journey or due to the atrocious conditions of such camps and the physical labor the inmates were forced to conduct.⁷⁶

For the Danube Swabians, expulsions and deportations were not the only horrors they were forced to face at the end of the war. As within many regions of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the new administrations moved decisively against the remaining ethnic Germans. Such was especially the case in Yugoslavia where local forces acted the most radically towards their German minority.⁷⁷ Indeed, as early as 1944 Tito's forces had prepared to disenfranchise its German population, implementing policies which deprived the remaining Germans of almost all of their belongings and forced them to leave their homes.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the authorities imprisoned the ethnic Germans in internment camps. Those who could work were forced into compulsory labor either within the camps or on

⁷⁴ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 229

⁷⁵ Arno Surminski, 1980, in *Flucht und Vertreibung*, ed. Grube, Richter (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), 69

⁷⁶ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 229

⁷⁷ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 86

⁷⁸ de Zayas, *A terrible revenge*, 99

surrounding farms and villages.⁷⁹ Within these camps, sanitary conditions were abysmal, and medical care was virtually non-existent. The death rate was staggering as thousands of Danube Swabians perished from diseases, malnutrition, or outright starvation. It has been determined that internment in these camps was not merely a temporary solution before the internees were to be expelled, but rather a deliberate method of inflicting “misery and death on as many ethnic Germans as possible.”⁸⁰ Such camps continued to exist until 1948, after which they were dissolved, with the remaining internees deported to Hungary or Austria, from which the majority were gradually able to reach occupied Germany.⁸¹

In the case of Yugoslavia, the aftermath of World War II led to the virtual disappearance of the ethnic Germans, with only a tiny fraction of Danube Swabians remaining in the country today.⁸² Of the approximately 500 000 Danube Swabians which lived in Yugoslavia prior to the Second World War, it is believed that over 200 000 left during the evacuations, with the rest becoming victims of the violence which ensued in the closing years of the war by the Red Army and Tito’s partisans.⁸³ Of those who remained, around 10 000 were killed in the months leading up to Germany’s surrender in 1945. Additionally, approximately 12 000 Danube Swabians from Yugoslavia were deported to the Soviet Union, of which around 2 000 did not survive this ordeal. Furthermore, it is believed that around 167 000 people were imprisoned in the internment camps. According to official numbers, roughly 50 000 of these prisoners died and were buried in mass graves

⁷⁹ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 142-143

⁸⁰ de Zayas, *A terrible revenge*, 100.

⁸¹ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 93

⁸² Ralph Menz, “Apatin: eine Arche für die Kultur der Donauschwaben,” *Sonntagsblatt: Eine deutsche Zeitschrift aus Ungarn*, 2016-2019, http://sonntagsblatt.hu/2017/07/31/apatin-eine-arche-fuer-die-kultur-der-donauschwaben/?fbclid=IwAR2qvVZAflBKUYiP5RgHdP0Kb0b1nNbl_7cVfofnmlu10pOXjNL5HFwfZls

⁸³ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 91

adjacent to the camps.⁸⁴ The existence of such mass graves is also remembered by the Danube Swabian interviewee in Appendix A.

It is difficult to assess the exact numbers of those who survived in the overall chaos of the post-war years. Many Danube Swabian refugees took the opportunity to immigrate to the United States or Canada, with others building new lives in South American countries.⁸⁵ According to Federal German census information of 1950, around 300 000 Danube Swabians were able to reach Germany in the years after the war, though this number included those from Hungary and Romania as well. For Danube Swabians from Yugoslavia in particular, it is believed that around 146 000 arrived in Germany in the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁸⁶

The Resettlement of the Danube Swabians in the Federal Republic of Germany

The aftermath of the Second World War brought a huge number of ethnic German refugees to the territory of occupied Germany. Around 12 million people arrived in Germany in the years 1944 to 1949, destitute and traumatized from their experiences. Approximately four million people reached the Soviet sector in Eastern Germany, with the remaining eight million refugees seeking shelter in the American and British sectors.⁸⁷

The arrival of 12 million ethnic German refugees posed serious problems for the Allied forces who occupied Germany after its surrender in 1945 and who were entirely

⁸⁴ Fritjof Meyer, "Die Rache der Sieger: Hohn für die Opfer," *Der Spiegel*, June 01, 2002,

<https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/spiegelspecial/d-22937248.html>

⁸⁵ "Donauschwaben History", last modified 2019,

<http://www.donauschwabencleveland.com/aboutus/donauschwaben-history>

⁸⁶ Hans W. Schoenberg, *Germans from the East: A Study of Their Migration, Resettlement, and Subsequent Group History Since 1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 317

⁸⁷ Robert. G. Moeller, "Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on a Post—Cold War History of World War II's Legacies." *History and Memory* 17, 1-2, Special Issue: Histories and Memories of Twentieth-Century Germany (Spring-Winter 2005): 151

overwhelmed by the number of such refugees reaching Germany after the end of the war. Not only was the influx of such vast numbers of refugees an enormous logistical problem, it also had the potential to create unrest within post-war Germany.⁸⁸ In order to stymie the threat of potential unrest, the Allied forces implemented several policies, of which enforced assimilation and a ban on political organization by refugee groups were most notable.

A large number of the ethnic German refugees had found shelter in provisional camps after their arrival; however, such clustering in camps was viewed as counterproductive for the Allied forces' goal of assimilation. Therefore, they aimed at dispersing the ethnic German refugees to different regions in their military sectors.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Allied forces also required the local German population to provide rooms in their homes for ethnic German refugees. However, the housing situation in post-war Germany posed a serious problem for this undertaking. More than one fifth of habitable space in Germany had been destroyed during the war, especially in cities. In order to alleviate the competition of refugees and local population over this limited resource, the Allied forces oftentimes moved refugees to rural areas which had been less affected by air raids than the cities.⁹⁰

While the Allied forces worked to ensure that the refugees and expellees achieved the same legal rights and treatment as the local German population, they did, however, forbid these groups from forming representative organizations in the early years of military occupation. This decision was based on Allied fear that the large numbers of destitute

⁸⁸ Ahonen, *After the Expulsions*, 2

⁸⁹ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 103-104

⁹⁰ Jochen Oltmer, "Zwangswanderungen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, last modified March 15, 2005, <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/dossier-migration-ALT/56359/nach-dem-2-weltkrieg>

refugees could pose a serious threat to the fragile stability in war-torn Germany.⁹¹ Although this ban was strictly enforced in the beginning, the Allied forces reduced its severity in the later years of military occupation, partially to alleviate the dire refugee situation and partially because the onset of the Cold War saw a shift within the Allies' priorities.⁹²

During the years of military occupation, the Protestant and Catholic Churches played a major role as substitute organizations for the relief and aid of refugees.⁹³ Such church-led relief groups were tacitly tolerated by the Allied forces, thus circumventing the ban on refugee organizations.⁹⁴ These church-led groups proved to be lifelines for the majority of the refugees and expellees. Not only did they offer direct help, but they also provided the opportunity for refugees to connect with others who had experienced similar traumatic events.⁹⁵ In many cases, it was through such organizations that the ethnic German refugees were able to find family members and friends they had lost in the chaos of the expulsions and flight.⁹⁶

In addition to the immense logistical problems for the Allied forces, the arrival of millions of refugees also had a serious impact on the local German population. Overall, the German population accepted the country's unconditional surrender in May 1945, and resistance towards the Allied forces and their occupation of Germany was largely non-existent.⁹⁷ However, the influx of millions of refugees created different levels of

⁹¹ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 105

⁹² Ahonen, *After the Expulsions*, 25-26

⁹³ Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 148

⁹⁴ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 105

⁹⁵ Demshuk, Andrew. *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 169

⁹⁶ Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 105

⁹⁷ James Dobbins, James, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal Andrew Rathmell, Rachel Swanger, Anga Timilsina, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2003), 8

intolerance and hostility, primarily as the refugees and expellees were seen as direct competitors for already limited resources. Especially Housing Law Nr. 18, in which the Allied forces assigned rooms in the homes of the local population for refugees and expellees, affected many local Germans in urban areas, who resented such arrangements.⁹⁸

While such resentment by the local population did not often translate to physical attacks, it did, however, spark general hostility against and even harassment of the refugees. In many cases, the local population did not regard them as true ‘Germans’ as many of their dialects sounded antiquated or were distinctly different from the German spoken in the country’s various regions and provinces.⁹⁹ Many of the ethnic German refugees reported being called ‘Polacks’ or ‘Gypsies’ and experienced other racist and derogatory attitudes from the local population. As the intensifying Cold War and the relations of Germany with its Eastern neighbors made it clear that the refugees were there to stay, such hostility oftentimes intensified.¹⁰⁰ Further hostility also resulted from legislation implemented by the Federal German government in the 1950s, which aimed at helping refugees and expellees by taking funds from the German population, as will be discussed below. However, with the onset of Germany’s economic recovery and a general improvement of living standards within the country in the later 1950s, these feelings of hostility largely began to abate, and the integration of refugees and expellees into German society lastly succeeded.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 104

⁹⁹ Jane Perry, Clark Carey, “Political Organization of the Refugees and Expellees in West Germany,” *Political Science Quarterly* 66, no.2 (1951) in Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 66

¹⁰⁰ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 107-108

¹⁰¹ Oltmer, “Zwangswanderungen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg“

The creation of the Federal Republic of (West) Germany from the American, British and French military sectors in 1949 saw profound changes for the government of the country, bringing about important changes for the ethnic German refugees as well. As the new German government retained the Allied perception that the vast number of German refugees posed a threat to political and social stability, it therefore implemented important legislation to address the hardship the refugees were facing, and to effectively improve their situation.¹⁰²

When looking at the incorporation and assimilation of the eight million refugees within West Germany in the first decades after the war, it is remarkable how successfully this feat was accomplished.¹⁰³ It is therefore beyond doubt that legislation enacted by the first Federal German administration played a key part in this accomplishment.¹⁰⁴

One of the first actions the new German administration took was to revoke the ban on political organizations, thereby permitting the refugee and expellee groups to form parties and seek political representation. Indeed, after the ban on political organization was lifted, the refugee community brought forth its own political party, the *Gesamtdeutscher Bund/ Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten* (All German Bloc/ League of Expellees and those Deprived of Rights), also referred to as GB/BHE. This party achieved relative success in the early years of the Federal Republic, garnering many refugee votes in 1953 and representing this community's interests in the Bundestag, the German parliament.

¹⁰² Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 115-116

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 115

¹⁰⁴ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 238

However, during the next election in 1957, it failed to reach the necessary votes to continue its political office, and gradually faded from the political arena.¹⁰⁵

However, the main political parties also worked to attract voters from the refugee and expellee community as the vast number of such votes could bring decisive gains for these parties. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the governing party in the first two decades of the Federal Republic, proved to be the most successful in this undertaking. The CDU under the chancellorship of Konrad Adenauer was fully aware of the danger to social and political stability a strong refugee party could pose. In order to avoid such a development, the CDU incorporated refugee issues in their party's agenda, thereby alleviating the economic hardship the refugees were facing and attracting refugee votes in return.¹⁰⁶ While the other political parties, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), also increasingly targeted refugee voters, it was the CDU which was able to hold the majority of these votes in the first two decades of post-war German politics.¹⁰⁷

In addition to permitting expellee organizations to form, another visible sign of support for the refugees was the formation of the *Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte* (Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and the War-damaged) in 1949. While this ministry was not substantially involved in developing specific legislation for the afflicted, it was, however, tasked to ensure the rapid integration

¹⁰⁵ "Parteien, die in der Vergangenheit das bundesdeutsche Parteiensystem mitgeprägt haben," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, last modified May 26, 2015, <http://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/208456/in-der-vergangenheit-praeegende-parteien?p=3>

¹⁰⁶ Ahonen, *After the Expulsions*, 115

¹⁰⁷ Ahonen, *After the Expulsions*, 156-162

of the refugees into German society and to create of a more level ground for these people who had lost most of their property in their former homelands.¹⁰⁸

The German government also set out to pass the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (Federal Expellee Law) in 1953. Within this law, refugees and expellees were not only legally granted the same status as the local German population, but provisions were also made to guarantee state support for these groups' cultural identity and their political representation.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the government also sought to promote the study of the refugees and their cultural history by tasking scholars with the documentation of the expulsion of Germans from East and Southeast Europe.¹¹⁰

One of the most important pieces of legislation for refugees and expellees in Germany was the *Lastenausgleichsgesetz* (Equalization of Burdens Law) of 1952.¹¹¹ As evident in this law's description, it was aimed at the redistribution of financial resources among the German population, with those who had lost less during the war providing for those who had lost more, or indeed everything.¹¹² Specifically, this law mandated that German citizens would have to provide a substantial part of their assets and funds to the Federal government, which in turn would redistribute these resources to those who had been left with nothing after the war.¹¹³ While this law was unpopular with the overwhelming majority of the German population, it did, however, help the refugees

¹⁰⁸ "Vertriebenen-Minister: Ohne Geschäftsbereich," *Der Spiegel*, last modified June 29, 1960, <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43066117.html>

¹⁰⁹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 241

¹¹⁰ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 117

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118

¹¹² Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 76-77

¹¹³ Carsten Hoefer, "Die Flüchtlinge müssen hinausgeworfen werden," *Die Welt*, October 12, <https://www.welt.de/geschichte/zweiter-weltkrieg/article147487793/Die-Fluechtlinge-muessen-hinausgeworfen-werden.html>

financially, permitting them to gradually find their place within West Germany and to participate in the country's economic success of the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹⁴

After looking at the policies which the Federal German government enacted to address the problems the millions of displaced ethnic Germans refugees and expellees were facing in their new homeland, it is also necessary to highlight the strategies the refugee groups themselves applied in order to deal with their relocation and integration into post-war German society.

In addition to the creation of the political party GB/BHE, refugee and expellee groups also formed the *Zentrum für vertriebene Deutsche* (ZvD).¹¹⁵ This organization viewed itself as a non-partisan interest group, with the declared goal of representing all expellee and refugee interests. While the ZvD aimed to provide an 'umbrella' organization for all ethnic German groups regardless of their pre-1945 origins, the refugees and expellees also formed *Landsmannschaften* (homeland societies) which were specific to the regions from which the different ethnic Germans originated.¹¹⁶

The above-mentioned organizations were instrumental in shaping the public discourse and debate of the refugee questions and the aspect of commemoration, especially in the first post-war decades. Supported by the German government in these years, documentation projects on ethnic Germans in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and their expulsions were created in order to examine the plight these people had experienced at the end of the war.¹¹⁷ Despite the fact that such studies and first-hand accounts give valuable

¹¹⁴ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 122

¹¹⁵ The *Zentrum für vertriebene Deutsche* (Center for Expelled Germans) later changed its name to *Bund der Vertriebenen* (League of Expelled Germans), also referred to as BvD. It remains active to this day.

¹¹⁶ Ahonen, *After the Expulsions*, 29

¹¹⁷ Moeller, "Germans as Victims?", 160

historical insight to this chapter of German history, they have also been criticized as enabling a “rhetoric of victimization” by focusing on ethnic Germans as targets of Communist brutality and the recipients of ‘unjust’ violence.¹¹⁸ Indeed, such criticism was based especially on the narrative of the expulsions, which was seen by many as a possibility for Germans to portray themselves as war victims instead of perpetrators of the war.¹¹⁹

The Danube Swabians also participated within the ZvD and created their own *Landsmannschaften* in the early years of the Federal Republic. However, it is important to note that in terms of cultural identity, they differed from other ethnic German groups. While groups such as the Sudeten Germans constituted one of the largest refugee groups and also established one of the most influential *Landsmannschaft*, the Danube Swabian groups were far less organized in creating a truly homogenous identity. Indeed, the Danube Swabians initially appeared as different cultural groups from their previous homelands, forming the *Landsmannschaft der Ungarndeutsche* (homeland society of Hungarian Germans) and *Landsmannschaft der Jugoslawiendeutsche* (homeland society of Yugoslav Germans) in 1949, respectively. Danube Swabians from the Romanian province of the Banat established their own homeland society, the *Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben*, in the following year.¹²⁰

These groups also differed from the organizations of other refugee groups in one important aspect, namely on the issue of returning to the territories from which they had been expelled. Many of the ethnic German groups, particularly from the Sudetenland or regions in Eastern Europe, were unyielding in their demands of returning to their homes in

¹¹⁸ Moeller, *War Stories*, 1013

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 144

the foreseeable future.¹²¹ These ethnic German groups were adamant that their ‘right to return’ would eventually be realized, and that the new Eastern German border along the Oder and Neisse rivers would only be seen as a provisional border until new negotiations achieved a return of their former homeland.¹²² Indeed, the influence of these refugee voters on the political parties played a substantial part in determining Federal Germany’s foreign policy towards its Eastern neighbors, the so-called *Ostpolitik*, in the early post-war decades.¹²³

Such demands of returning to their Hungarian, Yugoslav or Romanian countries were far less pronounced for the Danube Swabians. This was based in part on the fact that their settlement regions had never constituted a part of the German Reich, unlike the Eastern territories or the Sudetenland, which was permitted to join Hitler’s Germany in 1938.¹²⁴ More importantly, for the majority of Danube Swabians, the impression that their homelands were irrevocably lost was extreme. This impression had been enforced by the brutality with which the expulsions had occurred; they therefore viewed their expulsion as final. While many Danube Swabians continued to yearn for their homelands and cherish memories of their old towns and villages, returning to the countries which had expelled them was, for the vast majority, an undesirable option.¹²⁵

Over the years, a more cohesive Danube Swabian cultural identity began to form in the Federal German Republic, with the different Danube Swabian *Landsmannschaften* finding common ground within the shared history of their ancestors as migrants to the

¹²¹ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 107

¹²² Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 63-64

¹²³ Ahonen, *After the Expulsions*, 115

¹²⁴ “Sudetenland,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified September 27, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudetenland>

¹²⁵ Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 145

Danube Plains of the Habsburg Empire.¹²⁶ Today, there are numerous organizations and institutions which present and research Danube Swabian history, of which the most notable are the *Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung* (Danube Swabian Cultural Foundation) in Munich,¹²⁷ the *Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde* (The Institute of Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies) in Tübingen,¹²⁸ and the *Haus der Donauschwaben* (House of the Danube Swabians) in Singelfingen.¹²⁹ As with other expellee organizations, however, interest in this part of German history, especially within Germany's younger generations, is gradually waning. Nevertheless, cultural institutions such as the *Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung* continue to distribute publications and research about Danube Swabian history, especially since collaborations with and insights into Serbian archives have become possible.¹³⁰

Apart from the political discourse, the aspect of commemoration has also been present in the personal and public sphere. In terms of personal commemoration, it has largely been the *Landmannschaften* in which ethnic Germans have been able to come together to form new bonds with other expellees, together sharing in the memories of cities, towns, and villages which they had lost.¹³¹

For commemoration in the public sphere, the construction of monuments across West Germany, especially in the late 1960s, has been an important element which continues to provide a visible symbol for this part of German history. For the Danube Swabian organizations in particular, the dedication of a monument in Ulm to memorialize

¹²⁶ Ernst, *Remembering the Danube Swabians*, 144

¹²⁷ Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, <https://kulturstiftung.donauschwaben.net/>

¹²⁸ Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde, <https://www.idglbw.de/de>

¹²⁹ Haus der Donauschwaben, <http://www.haus-donauschwaben.de/wordpress/>

¹³⁰ Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, <https://kulturstiftung.donauschwaben.net/>

¹³¹ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 81

the Swabian Treks has been, alongside the construction of the *Haus der Donauschwaben* in Sindelfingen, one of the most prominent examples of such commemoration efforts.¹³² It is within such monuments that the history of the Danube Swabians will continue to survive for next generations when the last witnesses of these expulsions will, sadly, be no more.

Conclusion

The history of the Danube Swabians, their migration to and settlement in Southeastern Europe is only one small part of German history and its people's influence within the continent. The fate of the Danube Swabians, the expulsions, deportations and imprisonments, was not unique, but was shared by millions of other ethnic Germans who were left at the mercy of those who sought revenge for Nazi atrocities. As promising as the migration was which brought the first settlers to the Danube Plains, so horrific were the circumstances which lastly brought them back to the land of their ancestors.

What makes the Danube Swabians special was the fact that their sense of cultural identity, indeed the very necessity to establish such an identity, was primarily the result of geopolitical changes which affected these Germans. Defining themselves as one 'Danube Swabian ethnicity' was not part of these people's history, but was the consequence of outside pressures on their ethnic group. In the wake of increasing Hungarian influence in the 19th century, the very idea of a 'Danube Swabian people' came into existence and was nurtured by strengthening nationalistic ideas which attracted so many others in the 20th century as well.

¹³² Landeskunde Baden-Württemberg, "Ein Denkmal am Donauufer," *Landeszentrale für politische Bildung*, last modified 2019, <https://www.landeskunde-baden-wuerttemberg.de/7515.html>

For those Danube Swabians who made it to Germany in the late 1940s and 1950s, their arrival was impacted by the horrors of their experiences and the destruction which resulted from Hitler's war on Europe. However, together with their German compatriots, the Danube Swabians would slowly be able to rebuild their 'new' homeland, gradually overcoming the hardship and deprivation the expulsion from their 'old' homeland and entailed.

Appendix A:

An Unwilling Migrant into Germany Looks Back on Her Early Life

The author conducted this interview with her aunt, Mrs. Anni Geuder, on Sunday, April 14, 2019. The interviewee provided most of the information on her own; questions by the interviewer were hardly necessary and limited to those asked in order to better understand the chronology of events. The interview below has been written by the author based on the information the interviewee provided. The interview was conducted in German, and the author translated it into English.¹³³

„My name is Anni Geuder, my family name before I got married was Kromer. I was born on April 12, 1937 in Apatin in the Batschka region. My mother’s name was Katharina Kromer (née Münz), and my father was Jakob Kromer. Both were born and raised in Apatin where their families had lived for centuries. We were Batschka Germans. I did not have any siblings. My mother also remained an only child. She was born in 1914 after her father had left to fight in World War I. He was killed in 1918 without ever meeting his daughter.

My maternal grandmother’s name was Elizabeth Münz (née Moser). She lived with us at our address in Apatin, Somborer Strasse 1949. In fact, it was her house in which we lived. After my parents got married, my father came to live with my mother and

¹³³While the information below has been edited by the author to provide a chronological structure of events, all the information are reflections and memories provided by the interviewee on her own account. The majority of the interview focuses on the interviewee’s experiences of the expulsion from the Batschka and her journey to Germany, where she arrived in 1954.

grandmother. Our family structure was patriarchal, which at times upset my grandmother. After all, it was her house, but my father always wanted to be in charge and make all decisions. Our neighborhood consisted of Danube Swabian (German), Serbian, and Hungarian families, though I think that the Serbian families might have been the majority in our area. I have always been told that the Kromer family originated from the Black Forest region and migrated to the area under Habsburg rule in the 18th century.¹³⁴ The dialect we spoke I found is similar to the dialect of Rhaeto-Romance.¹³⁵ When I was in Kindergarten we were taught Hungarian. My parents did not speak Hungarian, however, and I only remember a few words.¹³⁶

While I was at Kindergarten I remember two militia men appearing one day during recess, with guns and uniforms and everything. I remember our teachers quickly shepherding us back inside. We were later told that these were German SS soldiers.¹³⁷

My father was drafted to join the German forces, although I do not know when this occurred or what forces he joined. We were later told that he had been in the Waffen SS.¹³⁸ He had a tattoo on his upper arm, about the size of a coin, that showed an ‘O’. He told us

¹³⁴ The interviewee was not readily familiar with the term *Schwabenzug* (Swabian Trek). However, she believed that her family had migrated to the area under Empress Maria Theresia. The interviewer explained the different waves of migration. It is possible that the Kromer family migrated to Apatin during the reign of Maria Theresia as this seemed familiar in the context of migration to the interviewee. However, as there are no family documents available, this is only speculation.

¹³⁵ This is mere speculation by the interviewee as the dialect she originally spoke with her family and parents was never analyzed. Examining the origin of her dialect is beyond the scope of this interview.

¹³⁶ Based on the events unfolding during World War II, the Batschka region at the time the interviewee attended Kindergarten was ruled by Hungary, which had claimed this territory during the war.

¹³⁷ The interviewee and the interviewer discussed that this incident might have occurred in 1941 or 1942. As discussed in the essay, it was 1941 in which German forces invaded Yugoslavia. Although at the time the Batschka had been under Hungarian control, it is possible that these soldiers appeared in efforts to ‘recruit’ local Danube Swabian men, although it is not clear why they appeared in the interviewee’s kindergarten.

¹³⁸ The interviewer explained that based on the research she conducted for her essay, it is indeed likely that the interviewee’s father was drafted into the SS.

later that this was because his blood was type O, so he was able to donate blood to other blood groups. I believe he received this tattoo during his time as a soldier. After the war my father was a Prisoner of War, first in Hungary, then in the Soviet Union. According to him, he was treated far better in the Soviet Union than in Hungary.

I do not remember much of the war, although I do remember standing with my mother on a meadow, gathering grass for our rabbits (we kept about a dozen rabbits) and hearing bombs drop nearby. The shockwaves actually made us fall down! We ran back to Apatin and our house, but there was no damage.

It must have been towards the end of the war that some people left. They actually left before the German soldiers came through; they must have somehow received information that the German soldiers had been defeated and were retreating. Then German soldiers passed through, and only afterwards did the Red Army arrive. I believe this was in 1943 or 1944, but I do not know for sure.

The arrival of the Red Army caused some concern and fear among us and our neighbors, but did not really affect us directly. However, during the time the Red Army was in our area, my mother was often gone. She went into hiding somewhere outside Apatin, though I don't know where. I don't remember seeing her much during that time. She was hiding from the Russian soldiers as they acted terribly towards young women. My mother at the time was in her twenties, so she stayed away from them. I remained in our house with my grandmother. At one point, Russian soldiers came in and tried to occupy our guest room. There also was a Russian doctor who kept asking about my mother, but I don't remember what we told him.

One day, a Russian soldier came in and jumped on my grandmother. I jumped on him and tried to get him off my grandmother. He let go of my grandmother and tried to slap me. My grandmother fled and left me alone with the soldier! Nothing happened though and the soldier left. My grandmother came back with some neighbors and took me with her. That night, we stayed at a neighbor's place. When we came back home the next day, our door had been kicked in and our house had been vandalized. One of our other neighbors had also been beaten badly.

I do not remember when the Russians left, but they were gone when we were expelled. We found out by the town crier that we were supposed to leave.¹³⁹ More and more people came to the town center and heard the news. My mother, grandmother, and I packed some of our belongings – I remember taking a tablecloth and throwing some of my clothes in it. I believe this all happened in May or June of 1945. We knew that Germany had lost the war, but we were not prepared to be forced to leave our home.

We were only able to take a few things. We must have also packed some food, but I can't remember exactly. What made us really sad was that we had to leave our pets behind. We had a dog, 2 cats, and about a dozen rabbits. After we left, we found out that Serbs and Hungarians had come into our homes and taken our belongings. We don't know what they did with our animals. It was terrible having to leave them behind.

We ended up in a camp in Kruschiwl – I don't know how we got there. This camp was not a barracks, but houses which had somehow been vacated by their previous owners. My grandmother and I were forced to share a room with some of our neighbors. They were called Schweitzer and Bayer – typical German names.

¹³⁹ The interviewee tried to explain this 'town crier' as a person who regularly would walk around with a drum spreading news.

I stayed there with my grandmother as my mother was not with us in Kruschiwl. She had been selected for labor duty and had left the camp soon after we arrived. At first we did not know where she went, but we later found out from somebody that she was back at Apatin working in a hemp factory. Essentially, most of the people in the camp were either elderly or children. The adults had almost all been sent out to work somewhere. Most of the men were prisoners of war somewhere, or dead.

Our internment at Kruschiwl was horrible. Each house had a well, but only makeshift toilets outside. People had to make them using the reeds of corn. There was a piece of wood over a hole which was the 'toilet'. We had no mattresses or anything. Our room was perhaps 18 square meters and we shared it with at least 6 other people. We slept on straw that was provided or which we found somewhere.

There were no doctors at the camp, and no medication. There was no food for babies; most of them died. At first we got bean soup and some sort of corn bread – I don't know if this bread was baked or had just been put out in the sun. Later we got pea soup and after that we only got barley soup, more water than barley. There were dead bugs in the soup, too. It was horrible. So many people died in this camp. My grandmother died there, too. She was only 50. Every morning a cart would come by to pick up the dead bodies. They were then brought to a mass grave near the camp.

After my grandmother died I went to find my mother. One of my aunts was also in this camp, on the other side. We had somehow found her. Her son tended to the horses and had made contact with some other young people through whom we found out that my mother was working in Apatin. One day I set off with these people to walk back to Apatin. We were close to Apatin when my stomach began to really hurt. I told the others to go

ahead as I recognized my surroundings. I sat at the side of the road under some mulberry trees and rested. After I felt better I continued on my own and walked to the factory where my mother was supposed to work. It was no problem as I was familiar with the area. Afterwards I found out that my travel companions had been beaten and taken away somewhere.

I was able to reunite with my mother in the hemp factory where she worked. The managers of the factory were called Mariza and Iwo – I believe they were both Serbs. They were in charge of the everyday business in the factory, and they had a cart and horses. The owner of the factory was called Milic. He was probably Serbian as well, but I don't know for sure.

Milic, Mariza, and Iwo had no problem that I was there. I was tasked to bring soup to some of the workers on the field, so I guess that they found I could be useful. All the workers in the factory, apart from Mariza and Iwo, were German. Milic, the owner, had gone to the camps and requested workers. He provided food and shelter, but there was no pay. There was a guard at the factory who was supposed to prevent people fleeing, but he was not very successful. One day, my mother told me that we would flee as well. We left the factory at night and walked to Sombor. Sombor is about 20 km away from Apatin. On our way to Sombor we were discovered by some people. We were loaded onto some sort of truck and were brought to Sombor where we were placed in another camp. This camp was different than the one I had been at Kruschiwl as it looked like a barracks. We were at this camp for a few days, but my mother was keen on fleeing again. One day she discovered that other inmates had dug some space underneath the barbed wire – I presume those who dug this were able to escape as well.

We escaped from the camp in Sombor at night and walked to Gakowa, where my mother knew her in-laws were interned, as well as her husband's sister, Kati. Kati had also been at the hemp factory in Apatin, but had escaped much earlier than my mother and I. She had planned to try to get to Hungary, and from there to Austria, which is what my mother then also decided for us to attempt.

On our journey to Gakowa we saw workers in the field cutting grass. They were inmates from a camp in Gakowa, and also German. Since they were cutting grass on the field, I'm guessing it must have been June, and presumably 1946. My mother asked the workers if they could hide us on the carts on which they loaded the grass, but the workers refused, not because they did not want to help us, but because the camp guards would check the carts by sticking pitchforks into the grass loaded on the carts. The field workers told us to go to a wooded area nearby and wait until the evening or nighttime during which we could then try to enter the camp. My mother and I went to the wooded area to hide. There was a lake in these woods, and all of a sudden we saw a man standing there! He saw us, too. My mother and I were very afraid – we could not swim and we did not know what the man would do to us. As it turned out, this man was in charge of the internment camp – we have absolutely no idea what he was doing there in the woods by himself. Luckily, the man was not going to hurt us, but took us to the camp with him. We found my paternal grandparents in the camp, but Kati was not there anymore. She had already departed.

In the camp in Gakowa my mother met some acquaintance from Apatin who also wanted to flee to Austria. My mother's acquaintance had 2 sons who helped us on our escape. Together we left Gakowa and made our way towards the Hungarian border. Before

reaching the border we came to a farm house. We were starving – I don't know when we had eaten prior to our journey from Gakowa. There had hardly been any food for us.

We begged for food at the farm house, and we received a bowl of soup. It was delicious.

After crossing the Hungarian border we made our way to the next town. We asked around to see if there was any work for my mother to do. My mother told everyone that we were from Russia – I have no idea why she told such a fantastic story! She could not speak Hungarian, and she could not speak Russian either. The people in this town directed us to go see a lady who owned a vineyard. She lived by herself and tended the vineyard, producing and selling wine. She told us that there really was not work for us and that we couldn't stay long-term, but she was able to take us in for one or two weeks. The food we ate there was good. We stayed with this lady for about two weeks.

After we left we went back to the town where we had first searched for work. Or we went to another town – I can't really remember. At this time it was only my mother and myself – I do not know where our previous companions had gone. We found out that there was work available on a nearby farm. The farm was huge! There, my mother was instructed to clean out the stables, and I was supposed to help dig up carrots or some other vegetable and bring them to a basement. At least, I think this is what I was told to do, but I didn't really understand the people giving orders, and I must have done something wrong as the lady in charge of the farm yelled at me terribly, making me cry. My mother decided that we could not stay there if people would be mean to us, so we left and we went to the local train station. We just sat there – we had no idea when a train would come or where the tracks led. We also had no money to buy tickets – we had absolutely nothing at this point. At the train station we were found by a policeman. He took us to the local jail, where we

stayed overnight. We had running water there and a toilet, so we were able to clean up a little bit and sleep. The next day the policeman took us back to the train station and we boarded a train to Budapest.

After we arrived in Budapest we ended up in another sort of jail with lots of other Germans, all of whom wanted to reach Austria. We all had to stay in this camp for a few days before we were taken to the Austrian border. I can't remember how we got to the border, if we were on a train, on a truck, or had walked, but considering the distance, it must have been by train.

The people who took us there showed us the border and told us to cross it – that was it. They just dumped us there and waited for us to continue our journey into Austria. From the border we went to the Wiener Neustadt – again, I don't know how we got there, but I'm guessing we had to walk.

From Wiener Neustadt we were able to get to Vienna. We were received by nurses from the Red Cross who brought us to a facility where we were treated with DDT as we were covered with lice. In this facility we also received food and new clothing. From this facility we were brought to an old school which had been turned into a refugee center. Most of the other people there were refugees as well, although there were also people from Vienna who had lost their homes during the air raids. I remember this center was called "Hundsturm 18". We also met acquaintances from Apatin in this center. There were some children there, but not that many.

The center was comfortable compared to what we had experienced before. We shared an old classroom with several other people, but we had our own bed. There was running water, a kitchen where people could cook food, toilets, and also a washing room

with bathtubs. I believe we stayed in Austria for about 2 years. My mother had some occasional work, and I had to attend school where I learned 'proper' German. We had food stamps which helped us to get food.

During our time in the refugee center in Vienna my mother had heard that France was willing to accept Danube Swabian refugees, and she signed us up. We were accepted and we left Vienna in 1949, I believe. We traveled by train from Vienna to Mulhouse in Alsace, where we were placed in a camp with other German refugees from Yugoslavia. Local farmers came to this camp to gather workers and farmhands. My mother was able to find employment with a family in Dieulefit, in the department of Drôme. The couple who took us in had German-sounding names, though we never found out more about their heritage. Their family name was Diederich. For both Monsieur and Madame it was their second marriage; previously, Mme Diederich had been Mme Hofer, née Kiehner. She brought a daughter into the marriage, and her husband had three children with his late wife. They had one daughter together who was born in 1950.

The family Diederich was extremely nice, and my mother and I both have fond memories of our time there. I attended school in a nunnery nearby, in Couvent de Poëtlaval, where I learned French. After about 2 years, I attended regular school in Dieulefit. We would most likely have stayed in France, but in 1953 we heard from my father. He had been released as a prisoner of war in 1953 after nearly 10 years in Hungary and the Soviet Union. He came to Germany through the Bavarian border town of Piding in 1953 where he was also placed in a refugee camp. There, he found our address in France through the Red Cross. He wrote to us and we wanted to reunite with him in Germany. My father ended

up in Ochsenfurt, a town in northern Bavaria, where I later met my husband and where I have lived ever since.

After we heard from my father, my mother informed the Diederichs that we would leave. They really did not want us to go and were very sad, but they helped us handle a lot of the bureaucracy. We had to go to the town hall in Valence, the capital of Drôme, to get out papers so we could leave. We thought that this, in combination with our tickets, would be sufficient. We left the Diederichs and proceed to Strasbourg, from where we planned to enter Germany. However, at the German border we were denied entry – we did not have the required visas! The paperwork we had did not suffice, and we had to write to my father about this problem. My father had to apply for our visas at the town hall in Ochsenfurt; luckily, he was able to get them processed very quickly. While we waited in Strasbourg, my mother and I first stayed at a hotel, but later we had to look for shared accommodation as the hotel was too expensive. In total, we stayed in Strasbourg for about 8 days before we finally received our visas and could enter Germany. We arrived in Germany in 1954 and finally saw my father again.

Looking back, I do believe that had our father not found us, or had he not been released from labor camp, or had he not survived, my mother and I would have stayed in France. However, it was wonderful to hear from my father after all those years we had been separated – I had only been a small child when he was drafted into the German forces in the early 1940s.

After my mother and I joined my father in Ochsenfurt, Germany, we were allocated an apartment in the town and also had some money for furniture – I do not know if this is what my father had been able to save in the months he was in Germany, or if this was

money he had received from the government. After arriving in Germany, and until he retired, my father worked as a mason, the trade he had learned back in Apatin before the war. I believe that he received funds from the government after the Equalization of Burdens Law, similar to most refugees and expellees. My mother did not go out to work; she was a homemaker, and I attended a trade school and worked as a translator in a local business until I got married.

My mother and I did not speak much about our experiences at home. Even though there were some Danube Swabian homeland societies in the area, my parents did not join them; I think they were trying to create a new life in Germany and not look back to what they had lost.”

Appendix B

Figure 1: Historical Danube Swabian settlements within present-day state borders.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Blumenwitz, Dieter. *Rechtsgutachten über die Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944 1948*. (München: Verlag der Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 2002)

Figure 2: Central Europe and the Danube Swabian settlement areas prior to World War I.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹Blumenwitz, *Rechtsgutachten über die Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944 1948*

Figure 3: Central Europe and the Danube Swabian settlement areas after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Blumenwitz, *Rechtsgutachten über die Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944 1948*

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