



Youth, Nation, and the National Socialist Mobilization of Ethnic Germans in the Western Banat and the Batschka (1918-1944)

Caroline Eva Mezger

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

Florence, 8th September 2016

European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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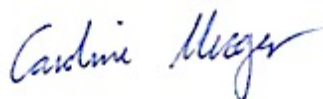
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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the National Socialist mobilization of ethnic German (“*Donauschwaben*”) children and youth in two multiethnic, post-Habsburg borderland territories: the Western Banat and the Batschka. Weaving together archival materials, the contemporary press, and original oral history interviews, it traces the evolution of boys’ and girls’ extra-curricular youth organizations from the Habsburg Empire’s 1918 collapse to the ethnic Germans’ 1944 “expulsion” from the region. Focusing initially on the interwar period, the dissertation shows how Yugoslavia’s ethnic German educational activists quickly framed their demands on national terms. From the 1920s onwards, secular and religious authorities thereby attracted Germany’s attention and aid, giving rise to a “nationalization” of local concerns and a politicization of youth. Curricular frustrations, however, spurred extra-curricular solutions: from the 1930s, *Donauschwaben* youth became a bone of contention between Catholic, Protestant, pro-*Reich*, anti-*Reich*, and Yugoslavist youth organizations, each of which promulgated its own visions of “Germanness.”

Turning to the years between 1941 and 1944— when the Batschka became Hungarian-occupied, and the Western Banat a semi-autonomous, *Reich*-occupied territory under ethnic German administration— this dissertation deploys a comparative and multiscalar approach in order to explore the experiences of *Donauschwaben* children and youth under divergent occupational regimes. In the Banat, the curricular, extra-curricular, and military domains meshed to coerce all ethnic German youth into the pro-Nazi “*Deutsche Jugend*,” extinguishing any non-Nazi “national” alternatives; in the Batschka, Hungarian nationalization projects, Catholic activism, and the Third Reich’s imperial ambitions continued to compete over the *Donauschwaben*’s loyalty, shattering communities over diverse conceptions of “Germanness.” In both regions, the majority of youth ultimately joined National Socialist organizations, thus becoming agents of their own, and their peers’, nationalization, actors in local inter- and intra-ethnic conflict, and soldiers in Nazi Germany’s devastating military campaigns.

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Abbreviations

ABV	Deutscher Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz” (also: “Adam Berenz”-Verein)
AMV	Archive of the Museum of Vojvodina
AVNOJ	Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Jugoslavije (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia)
BADSt	Bund Auslandsdeutscher Studenten
BArch	Bundesarchiv (Berlin)
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel
BMKSz	Bánáti Magyar Közművelődési Szövetség (Banat Hungarian Cultural Association)
CVJM	Christliche Verein junger Männer (YMCA)
DAI	Deutsches Ausland-Institut
DEK	Deutsche Evangelische Kirche
DJ	Deutsche Jugend
DM	Deutsche Mannschaft
DMB	Deutscher Mädelbund
DSt	Deutsche Studentenschaft
GAV	Gustav-Adolf-Verein
GBW	Generalbevollmächtigte für die Wirtschaft
HiPo	Hilfspolizei
HJ	Hitler-Jugend
HSSPF	Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer
IAZ	Istorijski Arhiv Zrenjanin (Historical Archive of Zrenjanin)
JM	Deutsche Jungmädelschaft
JV	Deutsches Jungvolk
KALÁSZ	Katolikus Leánykörök Szövetsége (Association of Catholic Girls’ Circles)
KALOT	Katolikus Legényegyletek Országos Testülete (National Association of Catholic Young Men)
KB	Abbreviation of SDKB (Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund)
KLV	Kinderlandverschickung
KWVD	Kultur- und Wohlfahrtsvereinigung der Deutschen Slawoniens

KZ	Konzentrationslager
LBA	Lehrerbildungsanstalt
LJF	Landesjugendführung
NLS	National Library of Serbia
NS	National Socialist
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSV	Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht
PA AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes
PdD	Partei der Deutschen
RKA	Reichsverband für die katholischen Auslanddeutschen
RmfdbO	Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete
SA	Sturmabteilung
SD	Sicherheitsdienst
SDKB	Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund
SS	Schutzstaffel
SSW	Serbische Staatswache
UDV	Ungarländische Deutscher Volksbildungsverein
UDVP	Ungarländische Deutsche Volkspartei
VDA	Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland
VDS	Volksdeutsche Sportstelle
VDU	Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn
VoMi	Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle
WEL	Wehrrertüchtigungslager
WHW	Winterhilfswerk

Maps

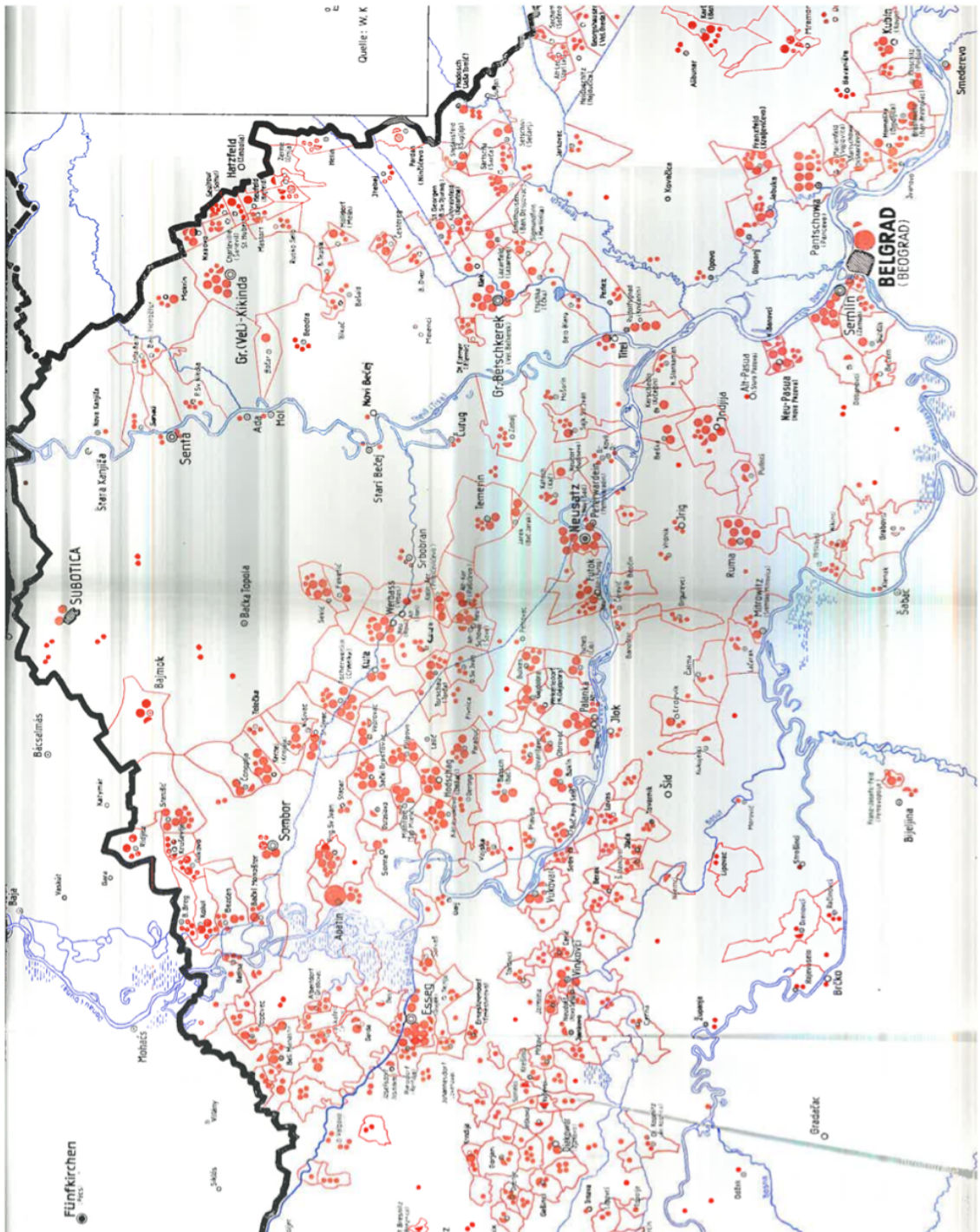
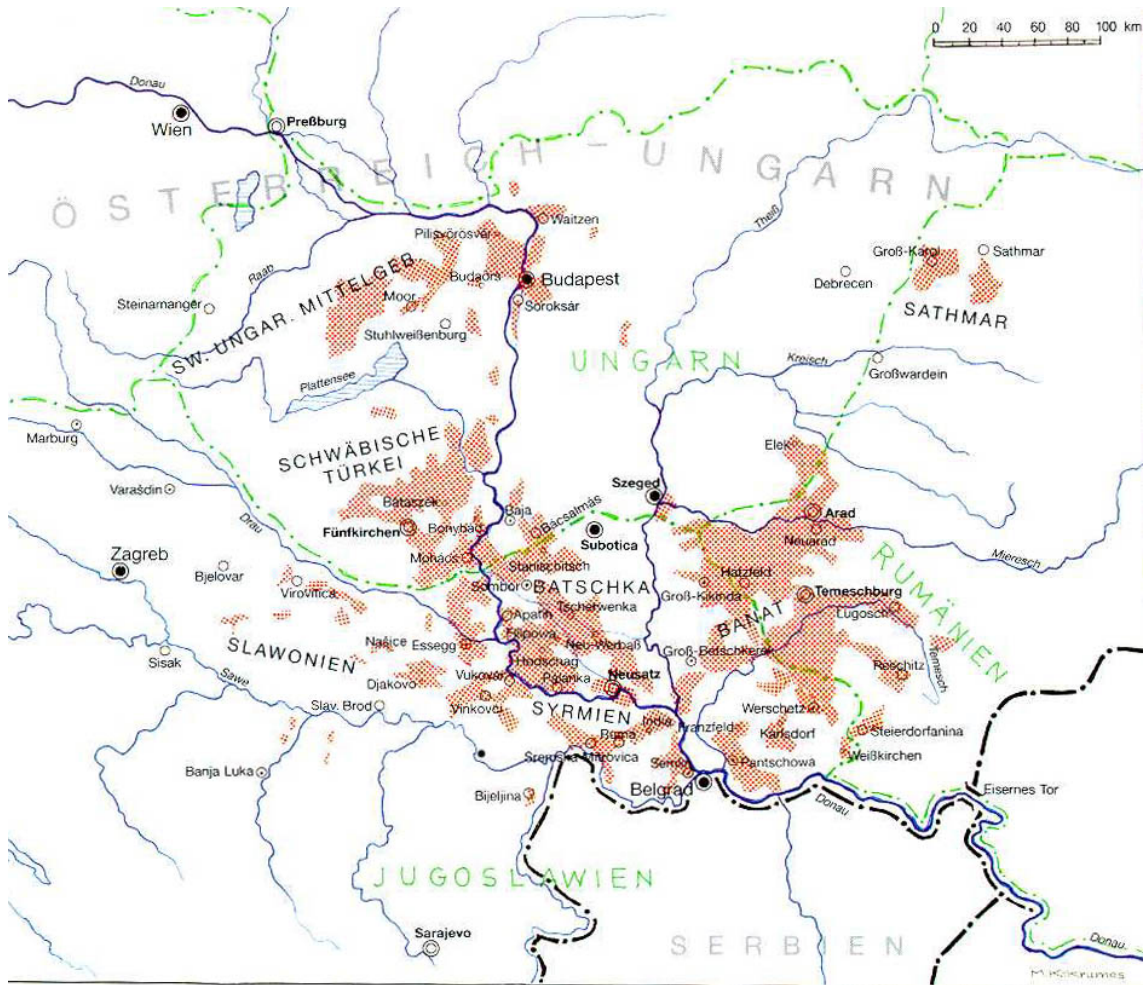


Fig. 0.1 Map of Vojvodina (Assembled by W. Krallert in Vienna in 1941). Red dots indicate ethnic German communities according to the 1931 Yugoslav census. Source: *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*. Edited by Werner Conze, Theodor Schieder, et al. Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 1961.



DONAUSCHWÄBISCHE SIEDLUNGSGEBIETE (schraffiert dargestellt)
 in Österreich-Ungarn bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges und in den Nachfolgestaaten Ungarn, Jugoslawien,
 Rumänien nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Grenzen und Namen der Nachfolgestaaten sind grün eingezeichnet.

(Quelle: J. V. Senz, Donauschwäbische
 Siedlungsgebiete, München 1974)

Fig. 0.2 *Donauschwaben* Settlements of the Interwar Period. Source: *Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien. Band II. Erlebnisberichte über die Verbrechen an den Deutschen durch das Tito-Regime in der Zeit von 1944-1948*. Edited by Leopold Barwich et al. Munich/Sindelfingen: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1993. p. 9.

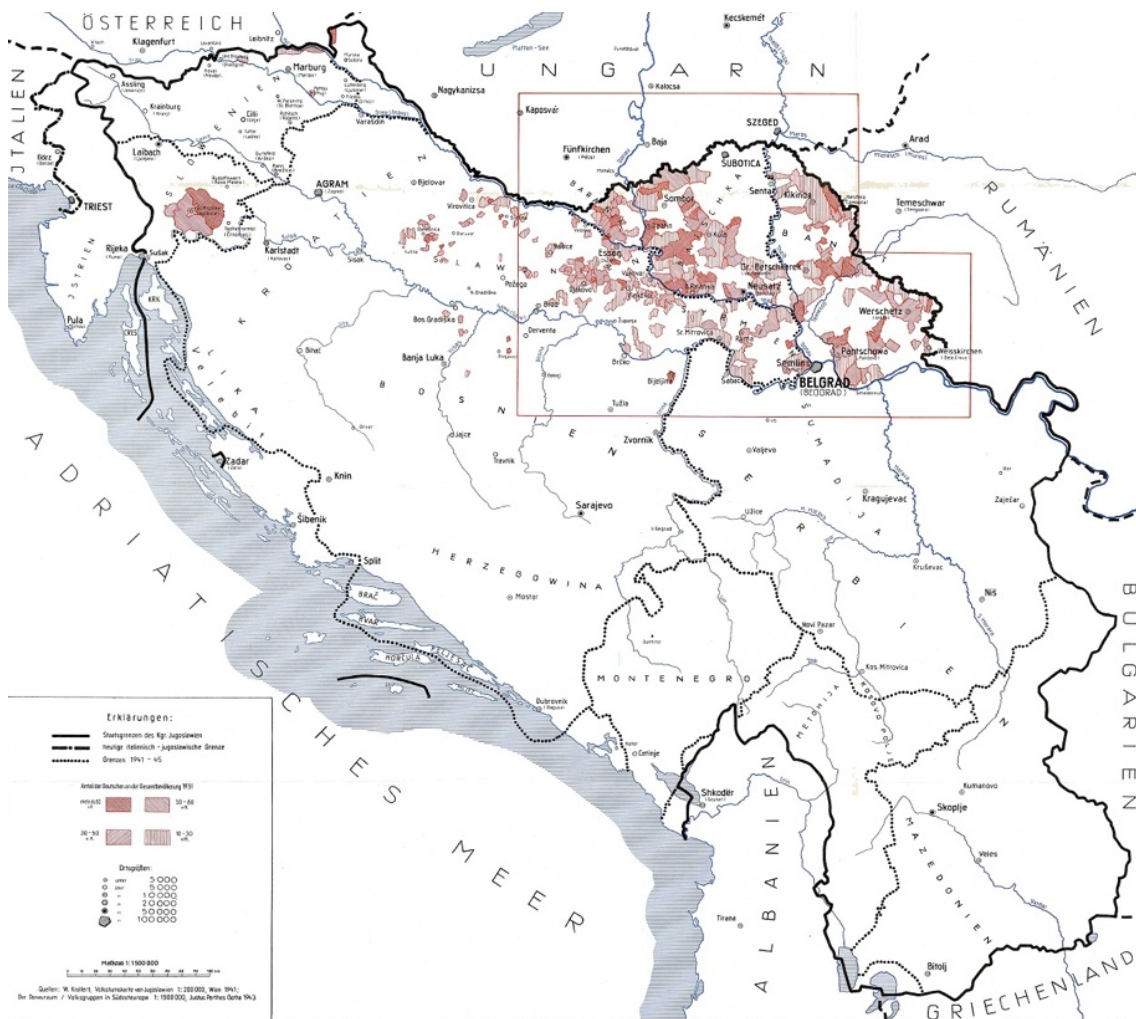


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Fig. 0.4 Vojvodina (Interwar Period) with the Southern Batschka and the Western Banat. Source: *Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien. Band II. Erlebnisberichte über die Verbrechen an den Deutschen durch das Tito-Regime in der Zeit von 1944-1948*. Edited by Leopold Barwich et al. Munich/Sindelfingen: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1993. p. 18.

Prologue

In June 2014, eighty-two-year-old Johanna Koch* reflected on her life.¹ Sitting in a sun-drenched room near her husband's deathbed, she waited for the telephone to ring. The phone sounded, Johanna answered the call, and she began to tell her story.

Johanna was born in Alt-Siwatz/Ószivác/Starí Sívac, a multiethnic town in the Batschka/Bácska/Bačka, a borderland territory now primarily in northern Serbia that was nestled, for centuries, between states, empires, and nation-building projects. A native German speaker, Johanna spent only her first twelve years in Southeastern Europe. She experienced the rise of National Socialism within her ethnic German community; she watched the Axis invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941; she observed Hungarian, then German occupation; she bade farewell to her male relatives who were drawn into the *Waffen-SS*; and she witnessed with horror the deportation and mass murder of the region's Jews. In October 1944, she, too, was forced to leave: Yugoslav Partisan and Soviet forces swept through her hometown, pillaging, murdering, raping and deporting those ethnic Germans who had not yet fled their homes. In tears, Johanna explained decades later that she still could not understand how "one country [Germany] could bring so much strife into the world." However, it was probably "not him [Hitler] alone, but all the little Adolfs who surrounded him."²

This dissertation is not about the Holocaust, the "expulsion" of some twelve million ethnic Germans from Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe after 1944, or the countless other abominations that unfolded in a World War II Europe wracked by extremism, ethnic cleansing, and war. It is, however, a dissertation about individuals who, at a young age, found themselves in the midst of these conflicts. It is about their ethnic German communities, which, over the course of their decades-long nationalization process, found and fought (for) National Socialism and ultimately collapsed. It is about

¹ *Name changed as per agreement signed between interviewer and interviewee. Unless otherwise indicated, the interviews were conducted in German. Transcripts reflect the interviewees' dialects as much as possible. All translations were done by the author.

² "Ich kann das gar ned versteh'n, dass ein Land so viel Unfriede auf die Welt bringe hat könne, aber dann denk' ich also s'ischt nicht er allein gewese. Die viele kleine Adolfe was um ihn rum ware ..."
Johanna Koch*, telephone interview with Caroline Mezger (18.6.2014).

the creation of these individuals' identities— contested, fluctuating, and continuously revised under various conditions of reconstruction, occupation, and war. It is about the experiences and memories of individuals who, in childhood and youth, both helped shape these events and were eternally shaped by them.

Introduction

The swans were peculiarly restless that afternoon, paddling in circles in their tiny, glittering pond, whistling, snorting, squeaking, ruffling their plumage and spraying water droplets with their long, clipped wings. This was by no means a conventional archive, but my archive it was, at least for a few short hours. I was in Apatin, a once prosperous Habsburg merchant town on the banks of the Danube, where ships ferried Europe's goods between East and West, where Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish believers, Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, German, Slovak, and Romanian speakers intermingled continuously to create the fabric of everyday life. The region's inhabitants had hardly seen many halcyon days. However, the twentieth century ravaged the region with an unprecedented brutality, uprooting the region's inhabitants, obliterating social structures, and scarring the landscapes they had cultivated in multiple waves of occupation, war, and ethnic cleansing.

Now located in Vojvodina, an autonomous province in northern Serbia, Apatin is merely a stone's throw— or a hypothetical swim across the (here heavily patrolled) Danube— away from Croatia. First mentioned in church records in the thirteenth century, it was only after 1748, following the end of local Ottoman administration, that German-speaking Christians settled in the town *en masse*. Spurred by economic incentives and hopes for a better life, thousands of so-called “*Donauschwaben*” migrated to these southeastern fringes of the Habsburg Empire. By 1918, when Apatin passed from the Habsburg Empire to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the town boasted some twelve thousand inhabitants, most of whom were German-speaking Catholics.¹ These *Donauschwaben*, as well as their neighbors of multiple faiths, ethnicities, and mother tongues, would see turbulent times. In 1941, the Axis invaded, dismembered, and occupied Yugoslavia, paving the way for civil wars, ethnic cleansings, the mass National Socialist mobilization of ethnic Germans, and the Holocaust. In October 1944, after Josip Broz Tito's Partisans— backed by Soviet forces— swept across the region, Apatin was first cleansed of its German-speaking population, and then incorporated into the Federal

¹ For an early history of Apatin and its *Donauschwaben*, consider: Hans Jurg, *Apatin: Heimatbuch der größten donau-deutschen Gemeinde* (1940), reprint (Straubing: Apatiner Gemeinschaft e.V., 1989).

People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Its once formidable German estates were nationalized and populated in part by peasants from Bosnia, who— as local lore now has it— had been accustomed to such squalor that they dismantled these houses' parquet floors, using their carefully carpented blocks as firewood.²

A mere half century later, the mass industrialization and socialist utopian visions invoked under Tito, too, would collapse. During the early 1990s, the brutal conflicts that ripped apart the former Socialist Federal Republic also left their mark on Apatin and its surrounding villages.³ Paramilitary groups aligned with Vojislav Šešelj's Serbian Radical Party (SRP) tore through Vojvodina with the aim of forcibly removing its non-Serb populations, causing thousands of Croats, Hungarians, and members of other minorities to flee. Thousands of Serb refugees, in turn, streamed into the region from neighboring Slavonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Across Vojvodina, former German churches were looted, vandalized, and burned.⁴ In 1991, in the midst of the violent creation of the "Republic of Serb Krajina" (RSK), bombs flew from Croatia to Apatin, damaging the town's former *Donauschwaben* cemetery.⁵ What remained of the cemetery thereafter is currently vanishing: those graves not regularly tended to by the buried's descendants— their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, now mostly settled in the

² For more on these resettlement policies to Vojvodina and the settlers' ensuing importance as supporters of Tito's government, see: Catherine Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 20.

³ For a helpful overview of these conflicts, see: Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Serbiens, 19.-21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 411-450; Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe*, translated by Charlotte Kreutzmüller (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2014), 211-223.

⁴ James Ron, *Frontiers and Ghettos: State Violence in Serbia and Israel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 80-86; Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, 80. Šešelj was tried and held by the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia between 2006 and November 2014, whereupon he was released temporarily due to his declining health. On March 31st, 2016, the ICTY acquitted Šešelj of the charges brought against him. For his official ICTY case information sheet and judgment, see: "Case Information Sheet Vojislav Šešelj," UN ICTY, http://www.icty.org/x/cases/seselj/cis/en/cis_seselj_en.pdf (accessed 4.2.2016); "Trial Judgement Summary for Vojislav Šešelj," http://www.icty.org/x/cases/seselj/tjug/en/160331_judgement_summary.pdf (accessed 2.5.2016). For a report in the international press on these events from 1992, see: Chuck Sudetic, "Serbs Force an Exodus from Plain," *The New York Times* (26.7.1992). The plundering and destruction of German churches in particular has not been the object of a study (local or international) so far. However, according to members of the local German minority, this destruction started during the fall of 1990, and continued for several years, as paramilitary troops aligned with Šešelj and Željko Ražnatović ("Arkan") plundered in the region.

⁵ For more on the RSK, see: Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, 61-62, 136. According to Serbian sources, Croatian military units were responsible for this particular bombardment.

“West”— are being uprooted by the local Roma community, who adopt the plots for their own deceased.

Uprooted, dying, and vanishing, however, are not descriptors that Apatin’s few remaining *Donauschwaben* accept. Indeed, already during the late 1990s, a handful of them toured the surrounding countryside, excavating any surviving archival materials, ecclesiastical libraries, and cultural artefacts from the charred remains of the region’s once magnificent baroque churches. In 2001, they established the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* (“German Citizens’ Association ‘Adam Berenz’”), named after one of Apatin’s few celebrities, a German Catholic priest who led an anti-Nazi resistance movement during the 1930s and early 1940s. With funds from Germany, the association restored Adam Berenz’s former living quarters and office— which was turned briefly into a drug rehabilitation center in 2012— and converted it into an archive. It was there that I was able to delve, in September 2014, into piles of previously unexplored publications, church ledgers, and library fragments. Despite the organizers’ major efforts and personal devotion, conditions are still far from ideal, and the neighborhood’s electric supply a matter of chance rather than of careful construction. Left without light one afternoon, I took my sources into the open, bringing them with me to the swan-inhabited garden of the technicolor Roma-operated hotel in which I was staying.

Historical investigation is never easy. Sources, if not lost, are scattered; misconceptions lead to dead ends; witnesses lie. Even if fortunate and faced with an abundance of material, successfully sifted and analyzed in its full tantalizing detail, historians face the challenge of narration. They cobble together facts, attempting to build bridges between experiences and conditions of the past, interests and expectations of the present, and readers’ imaginations of the future. Historians are conjurers, delving into forgotten troves to create images of landscapes transformed, lives lived, and events long since unfolded.

This dissertation is the result of multiple journeys between times, places, and narratives. It reconstructs the history of the *Donauschwaben* in the Batschka/Bačka/Bácska and the Western Banat, two regions located in today’s Vojvodina. Adopting a multi-layered and comparative approach, this dissertation traces the *Donauschwaben*’s interwar and World War II nationalization and political radicalization from the vantage point of their most heavily disputed demographic: youth. From the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918 to the “expulsion” of the regions’ over 300,000 *Donauschwaben* in late 1944, ethnic German youth found themselves at the center of

contestations that would become so emblematic of twentieth-century Europe. Targeted by nation-builders, Yugoslavists and fascists, Catholics and Protestants, cultural revivalists and athletic activists, teachers and extra-curricular educators, singing circles and military mobilizers alike, the region's *Donauschwaben* youth became, for almost three decades, a battleground of (local) national self-definition.

Following the Habsburg Empire's demise, nationality suddenly became key. As newly created (nation-) states replaced the Empire as the source and guarantor of social, civil, and political rights, the region's ethnic minorities increasingly came to define themselves, and be defined by, nationality. National ascription circumscribed legal and political rights; it seemingly determined childrens' educational path and future place in society; and it created a platform for the undertakings of activists and opportunists from both the region and abroad. From the 1920s onwards, these dynamics gave rise to a fateful collusion between local ethnic German activism and Germany's rising nationalist and imperialist ambitions in Eastern Europe. Youth in particular were now targeted by educators and extra-curricular organizers as the bearers and future bedrock of a "German" identity, and the vanguard of "German" interests in the region. By the late 1930s, over ninety percent of *Donauschwaben* youth indeed had been mobilized into German-specific youth groups. However, in a series of events that could not have been foreseen by the earliest youth mobilizers, these young *Donauschwaben* were, by the early 1940s, aligned in National Socialist organizations. By the tens of thousands, they wore Hitler Youth-inspired uniforms, chanted Nazi slogans, terrorized their neighbors, and contributed both on the military and home fronts to Hitler's onslaught in Europe's Southeast. Notions of "Germanness," as we shall see, were crucial to these enterprises, and formed the foundation of conflicts within the Batschka and the Western Banat's communities that reverberate to the current day. This dissertation explores the "from above" and "from below" dynamics that unfolded over those twenty-six years, as Germany's ambitions in Eastern Europe met with the *Donauschwaben*'s nationalization process, as an entire generation was engulfed by political radicalization and war, and as even individual children and youth were forced to take a stance on their national (self-) identification.

1. The Batschka and the Western Banat: A Geographic and Historic Introduction

Embedded for centuries at the border between kingdoms, empires, and nation-building projects, the Batschka and the Western Banat provide an ideal avenue for the exploration of minority issues, conditions of war and occupation, and multilingual, multireligious, and multiethnic environments. The Batschka is a territory currently split between Hungary and Serbia. Its northern segment lies within southern Hungary's Bács-Kiskun County, and its southern segment—the majority of the Batschka's territory, and the region under investigation here—forms the northwestern part of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The Western Banat (also known as the “Serbian Banat”) now comprises Vojvodina's eastern district.⁶

For centuries, these territories' paths alternately collided and diverged. Formally part of the Kingdom of Hungary from the Middle Ages onwards, both the Batschka and the Western Banat experienced Ottoman administration—the Batschka between 1527 and 1699, the Banat between 1552 and 1716.⁷ Becoming Habsburg-administered once again thereafter, both territories became the focus of intensive repopulation policies during the eighteenth century. Faced by a region largely devastated by war, the Habsburg monarchy launched three successive “waves” of predominantly German-speaking, Christian settlement to the region.⁸ The first, initiated by Karl VI, lasted from 1722 to 1726 and ostensibly targeted the Banat, which—unlike the Batschka—was not integrated into Hungary until 1779, and initially formed part of the Habsburg province “Banat of Temeswar” (Temeswarer Banat/Banatul Timișoarei/Temesi Bánság/Tamiški Banat). The second “wave” of migration, conducted between 1763 and 1770, focused

⁶ For a detailed description of the different historical notions and boundaries of Vojvodina, consider: Carl Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941: Identitätsentwürfe und ethnopolitische Mobilisierung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 62-67; Zoran Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito: The Disappearance of Vojvodina Germans* (Belgrade: s.n. 2005), 21.

⁷ For more on these regions under Ottoman administration, consider: Oskar Feldtänzer, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte: Das Jahrhundert der Ansiedlung 1689-1805* (Munich: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 2006), 95-99, 110-111; Károlyi Kocsis and Eszter Kocsis-Hodosi, *Ethnic Geography of the Hungarian Minorities in the Carpathian Basin* (Budapest: Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1998), 140.

⁸ According to a Hungarian census, the Batschka's tax-paying households, by 1720, were 97.6% Serbian and Croatian, 1.9% Hungarian, and 0.5% German. Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi, “Chapter 5: The Hungarians of Vojvodina,” 140.

primarily on the (now comparatively underpopulated) Batschka. It was launched by Maria Theresia, who provided settlers with various economic incentives, freedom from military service, and a five- to ten-year tax exemption if they established their farms and workshops in the region. The third, carried out by Maria Theresia's son Joseph II between 1784 and 1787, further extended German immigration, as he allowed not just Catholics, but Protestants to settle in the area.⁹ In all three cases, these "German" settlers had originated from across the Holy Roman Empire, particularly from its southern and western regions (including Luxemburg, Alsace-Lorraine, and the Alpine territories).¹⁰ Upon their registration, the often Swabian dialect-speaking migrants generally reached their new homelands by traveling down the Danube on barges— hence their name, "*Donauschwaben*" ("Danube Swabians").

However, not only German speakers migrated to the region. Indeed, the eighteenth century saw settlement by Hungarian, French, Spanish, and Italian migrants, as well as an upsurge in the Romanian, Serbian, Ruthenian, Bunjevci/Bunjevác/Bunjewatz, Šokac/Schokatz/Sokác, Roma, and Jewish populations.¹¹ According to a Hungarian census, by 1880 some 1.2 million inhabitants, of which 35.5% were Serbian, 24.4% German, 22.6% Hungarian, and 6.2% Croatian, lived on the territory of today's Vojvodina.¹²

Between 1849 and 1860, the Batschka and the Banat were briefly united under Vienna's authority as an Austrian province, the Voivodeship of Serbia and Banat of Temeschwar. Thereafter, the Batschka and the Banat became Hungarian territories until the end of World War I. Following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the 1920 signing of the Treaty of Trianon, most of the Batschka— except for a small sliver in the north, which remained in Hungary— was incorporated into the newly established

⁹ Josef Volkmar Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben* (Munich: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1987), 48-56; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 122-124; Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“: Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2003), 89-98; Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi, "Chapter 5: The Hungarians of Vojvodina," 140-141; Akiko Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 23-26.

¹⁰ Stephan Olaf Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland? Die Kämpfe um die deutsche Jugend im rumänischen Banat (1918-1944)* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2009), 23-24.

¹¹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 49; Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi, "Chapter 5: The Hungarians of Vojvodina," 138-142; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 267-268; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 25.

¹² This was the first Hungarian census conducted on the basis of linguistic (mother tongue) affiliation. Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi, "Chapter 5: The Hungarians of Vojvodina," 142.

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (termed the “Kingdom of Yugoslavia” after 1929). The Banat, in turn, was divided between Romania in the east and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in the west.¹³ According to the Yugoslav census (conducted on the basis of mother tongue), by 1931 some 21.64% of the Batschka’s population (out of a total population of 784,896) was German, 34.24% was Hungarian, and 24.05% was Serb. In the Western Banat, out of a total population of 585,579 in 1931, 20.58% were Germans, 16.37% were Hungarians, and 44.59% were Serbs. In total, some 290,399 individuals were counted as “German” in these two regions by 1931.¹⁴

In 1941, these populations would once again see significant transformations. On April 6th, 1941, the Axis invaded Yugoslavia. Eleven days later, Yugoslavia surrendered unconditionally and was partitioned into more occupied zones than any other European state during World War II.¹⁵ The Batschka came entirely under the purview of Axis-allied Hungary. As such, it transformed briefly into a part of German-occupied Hungary after March 1944. The Western Banat came under *Reich* occupation and was converted into a semi-autonomous territory under ethnic German leadership. As we shall see, ethnic cleansings and forced population transfers instigated under these occupations would affect tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and members of other minorities over the next three years. In September and October 1944, with the arrival of Yugoslav Partisan and Soviet forces, the tables once again turned: the local ethnic Germans, targeted as “traitors” and collaborators of the Nazi regime, either fled, or faced the retribution they had come to fear. Out of a total prewar population of over half a million Yugoslav ethnic Germans, perhaps 180,000 were interned in Tito’s Partisan camps over the following four years; up to 12,000 further served as forced laborers in the Soviet Union; over 50,000 ultimately died in these locations. Some 24,403 ethnic German children from Vojvodina

¹³ For more on the diplomacy behind these divisions, see: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 26-29; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 139-157. As Bethke explains, however, the Yugoslav-Romanian border was only settled with the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres and a protocol signed in Belgrade on 24.11.1923. As a result, borders within the Banat were still adjusted until April 1924 (Bethke, 147).

¹⁴ Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 27; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 647. This census was conducted on the basis of mother tongue, and therefore does not necessarily reflect national and/or ethnic affiliations. As Bethke indicates, for instance, the term “Serb” was problematic in this census as it included all Orthodox Serbo-Croatian speakers, which may have inflated these statistics somewhat (Bethke, 647). Furthermore, as Shimizu explains, up to 10,021 Jews in Yugoslavia were registered as native German speakers, and were therefore counted as “Germans” (Shimizu, 27).

¹⁵ Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2008), 133.

alone were interned in Yugoslav camps by late 1945, where an estimated 5,582 died. Of the thousands of *Donauschwabern* who fled westwards over the months following September 1944, dozens more perished on the road, from illness, starvation, and acts of violence.¹⁶ By 1991, the Yugoslav census revealed that 3,873 ethnic Germans still lived in Vojvodina. The statistic, however, most probably reflects an underestimate— many *Donauschwabern*, still fearing retribution, declared themselves as “Hungarians,” “Yugoslavs,” or members of other ethnicities instead.¹⁷

2. Children and Youth as Agents of Borderland Nationalization

As any analytic concept, the term “nation” cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, as historians and social scientists have shown over the past decades, the idea that “nations” are “well-defined entities whose members shared eternal and easily recognizable traits” is derived from nationalist ideologies and activists themselves.¹⁸ As historians like Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, and Benedict Anderson have illustrated, the “nation” is a modern construct, conceived largely as a result of political, economic, and cultural modernization processes.¹⁹ As such, nations do not encapsulate immutable, bounded, and essentialist ethnic, cultural, social historical, or linguistic truths.²⁰ Furthermore, while the

¹⁶ Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 247, 261, 329-330; Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948: Ihre Rolle im rumänischen und serbischen Banat* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), 299-303. Such statistics have always been highly contested; the ones listed above are drawn from recent (and relatively conservative) estimates (see: Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 327-339). For counts of child victims (born after 1930) by ethnic German investigators themselves, see: “Berichte über das Schicksal der deutschen Kinder im kommunistischen Jugoslawien,” *Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien, Band III: Erschießungen—Vernichtungslager—Kinderschicksale in der Zeit von 1944 bis 1948* (Munich: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1995), 475-476; “Heimatorte mit hohen Kinderverlusten,” *Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien, Band IV: Menschenverluste—Namen und Zahlen* (Munich: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1994), 1032.

¹⁷ This census was based on “ethnicity,” not (like some previous ones) on “nationality.” Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi, “Chapter 5: The Hungarians of Vojvodina,” 143; Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 338.

¹⁸ Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁹ For their most seminal works, see: Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991).

²⁰ Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 11-14; Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1884-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 7-9; Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 6-8; Pieter M. Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German’ in Habsburg

nation is often imagined as being grounded on a particular territory— and, as such, may give rise to expansionist aims towards imagined “national” irredenta²¹— territories, this dissertation contends, are not inherently national. Nations, as historians like Pieter Judson, Tara Zahra, and Rogers Brubaker have more recently shown, are constructed by individuals’ self-identificatory and ascriptive practices. “Perspectives on the world” more than “things in the world,” nations as such have no agency; individuals acting on behalf of the nation, however, do.²²

As recent historians especially of the Habsburg Empire have illustrated, nations were the product of painstaking activism, which— through measures ranging from political campaigns to welfare schemes, and educational initiatives to census-taking— attempted to “remake ... populations ... into nationally polarized peoples.”²³ In nationalists’ view, individuals merely required an “awakening” of national identities that, from the outset, had lain dormant within them.²⁴ However, as Brubaker claims, “identity” is not “something all people have, or ought to have, or are searching for.” Identity is not “something to be *discovered*, and something about which one can be *mistaken*”; it does not, moreover, necessarily require the “strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity” so central to the identity-building enterprises of nationalists.²⁵ The presence of a national identity in particular, as Zahra has shown, should not be presupposed, as individuals under Habsburg rule (for instance) remained nationally “indifferent” even when directly targeted by nationalization endeavors. “Indifference,” she rightly states, is perhaps a more accurate and fruitful starting point for historical investigation; only after pre-supposing national indifference should historians explore

Central Europe,” *The Germans and the East*, edited by C. Ingrao and F. Szabo (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007), 114; Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 69, no. 1 (2010): 96.

²¹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14. For a similar sentiment, see: Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 32.

²² Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17; Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 8.

²³ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 4. See also: Tara Zahra, “‘Each nation only cares for its own’: Empire, Nation, and Child Welfare Activism in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1918,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 111, no. 5 (2006): 1378-1402.

²⁴ Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German,’” 114, 125.

²⁵ Rogers Brubaker, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 37. Quotation’s italics in original.

“how and why people allied themselves politically, culturally, and socially from the ground up.”²⁶

Following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, the creation of its successor nation-states, and the emergence of international minority protection clauses, however, it became increasingly difficult for individuals to circumvent national affiliation.²⁷ As this dissertation shows, nationality—conceptualized on ethnic, linguistic, and ultimately racial terms—was, if not necessarily personally embraced, at least ascribed by the state and its bureaucracies, by activists, and by fellow community members. Using Brubaker’s terms, national identity at least in part became a matter of “identification and categorization.” “External” agents like the state identified individuals according to national categories using their own “formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization,” as expressed in part by modern technologies like the census.²⁸ As a result, “nationality was rarely [entirely] determined by individuals’ self-perception or sense of belonging but by how bureaucratic institutions classified them.”²⁹

Nationality is not merely a matter of ascription by external actors, however. Indeed, as Brubaker posits, identification (including on national terms) can also be carried out by individuals. Unlike the term “identity,” the term “identification ... invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying.” As such, “identification ... does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve.”³⁰ The concept of identification allows for self-identification, which exists “in dialectical interplay with external identification” (whereby “the two need not converge”).³¹ Nationality or a national identity cannot be taken for granted or assumed for the subjects and actors of the past. However, as this dissertation argues, national identification affected all individuals after 1918, as individuals were targeted, classified,

²⁶ Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities,” 118.

²⁷ See also: Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German’,” 110; Pieter M. Judson, “When is a Diaspora not a Diaspora? Rethinking Nation-Centered Narratives about Germans in Eastern Europe,” *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*, edited by Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, Nancy Reagin (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 219; King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*, 5-6.

²⁸ Brubaker, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” 41-42. For more on the problem of censuses, national ascription, and the creation of national categories, see: Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German’,” 121-123; Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 5-6.

²⁹ Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States*, 5.

³⁰ Brubaker, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” 41.

³¹ Brubaker, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” 42.

and— ultimately— mobilized and even killed for their (assumed) nationality. Caught within contestations over this identification, and the precise definition of the “nation” to which they were ascribed, individuals, too, came to identify themselves at least in part on national terms. The name, ideological content, and delineations of this national (self-) identification varied from individual to individual, and across life courses; however, between nation-building projects, Nazi occupation, expulsion, and postwar reconstruction, national (self-) identification was negotiated by all of the Batschka and the Western Banat’s twentieth-century inhabitants.

Key to the nationalization endeavors in these territories was these regions’ borderland status. Much research has been conducted in recent years on Europe’s twentieth-century “borderlands” and their centrality to nation-building projects. As this work has shown, borderlands, by their very placement on the fringes of political entities like the empire or the (nascent) nation-state, were endowed with enormous symbolic power.³² Often the site of multilingual, multiethnic, and multireligious populations, borderlands held a special position in nationalist narratives and activities. As Judson has stated, for instance, borderlands and “language frontiers ... called [activists’] fundamental beliefs about nations [their ‘well-defined,’ ‘easily recognizable,’ and ‘eternal’ qualities] into question by suggesting that national identity constituted a mutable quality rather than a fixed one.” Placed in societies where multilingualism and “apparent indifference to national identity” were the norm, “frontier people” rarely even saw themselves as belonging to a peculiar borderland culture, or as being situated on “frontiers between nations.”³³ Moreover, in the context of the twentieth century’s increasing drive to national homogenization, the “ambiguous national identities” seemingly fostered in borderland regions further called into question the very reliability and loyalty of their citizens, especially if they were connected to a currently belligerent nation (such as Germany).³⁴ It was therefore in borderlands and “language frontiers”— often only

³² Machteld Venken, “Nationalization Campaigns and Teachers’ Practices in Belgian-German and Polish-German Border Regions (1945-1956),” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2014): 223; Friederike Kind-Kovács, “Memories of Ethnic Cleansing and the Local Iron Curtain in the Czech–German Borderlands,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2014): 199-200.

³³ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 2-3.

³⁴ Matěj Spurný, “Reliability and the Border: The Discourse of the Czech Borderlands, 1945–49,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft (ÖZP)*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2013): 83–94.

stylized as such by nationalists themselves— that some of the heaviest battles were fought over people’s national identity.³⁵

As Friederike Kind-Kovács has stated, “borderlands— composed of villages, landscapes, and cities— are first and foremost places and spaces for people.”³⁶ Despite the borderlands’ status as a geographic entity, an often tenuously drawn space between spaces, even nationalists understood that a nationalization of the borderlands would, first and foremost, require a nationalization of its people. In Eastern and Central Europe, this nationalization— or, the creation of a national (self-) identification down to the individual level— had already been launched under Habsburg rule, as pamphleteers and politicians, school teachers and social workers alike aimed to “solidify the permeable community boundaries that had hitherto failed to differentiate nations from each other.”³⁷ In part, nationalization was conceived as a matter of education, as a “national education” would not only help bring to light a “national identity [already] lodged in the blood,” but also provide individuals with the means to live and defend this identity.³⁸ In part— and as will become apparent over the course of this dissertation— nationalization would also require the redirecting of existing and perceived differences and conflicts. Linguistic and religious varieties were to be framed as “forms of identity difference”; “nationalism” was to be made “particularly relevant to local concerns”; and “rural social conflicts” were to be framed as “national ones ... to forge from them enduring national loyalties and identities.”³⁹ Nationalization, on the local level, would require consciousness-building and the construction of differences along “national” lines; it would entail the redirection of local political and social efforts according to “national” agendas, and the reformulation of collective and individual complaints as grievances arising from unsurmountable national disparities. As this dissertation shows, however, the contestations that inevitably arose from such nationalization efforts tore rifts not only between members of different nationalities, between the now supposedly exclusive “German,” “Hungarian,” “Serb,” and other nations. Rather, they raged between different factions of the purportedly same

³⁵ On activists’ role in shaping even current perceptions and discourses on the “borderland” and “language frontier,” see: Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 8; Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 5-6.

³⁶ Kind-Kovács, “Memories of Ethnic Cleansing,” 200.

³⁷ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 24. This occurred even in the post-World War II period. Consider: Venken, *Nationalization Campaigns and Teachers’ Practices*, 223-241.

³⁸ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 24.

³⁹ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 4-5, 10.

national group, as the activists, targets, and spectators of nationalist campaigns disagreed over the definitions and nature of national belonging.

Singled out by nationalist activists for their seeming cultural, linguistic, political, and social liminality, borderland populations further harbored an especially “problematic” demographic: youth. Already caught by nature of their age within various liminal spaces— between developmental stages, social roles, internal fantasy worlds and external realities— borderland youth confronted nationalist activists with further conundrums based on their geographic context.⁴⁰ As Zahra has shown in her work on childhood nationalization projects in the Bohemian lands, for example, borderland children and youth “became targets of nationalist activism in part because they presented tremendous problems for nationalists” as they “seemed to slip so easily between linguistic and national communities” and “therefore threatened to expose the deepest assumptions of nationalist politics as myths.” Already deemed “problematic” by nationalists under Habsburg authority, children’s liminality presented nationalist activists with even more pressing difficulties under National Socialist occupation. As she states: “Children blatantly exposed contradictions between Nazi understandings of the nation as a racial, descent-based community and the social and cultural ambiguities of language frontiers, where individuals often moved easily between national communities.” “Reclaim[ing] children allegedly lost” to the interwar period’s non-German nationalization efforts thus became “one of the first priorities of local Sudeten German Nazis” after the region’s annexation by Germany in 1938.⁴¹

This dissertation explores similar efforts that unfolded under two different systems of Axis occupation in Europe’s Southeast. Certainly, as we shall see, major differences existed not only between groups like the Sudeten Germans and the *Donauschwaben* after 1918 and 1938/1941, but even within *Donauschwaben* communities under divergent conditions of interwar reconstruction and World War II-era occupation. This dissertation aims in part at providing additional contexts and nuances of “Germanization” efforts in Europe’s post-Habsburg borderlands. However, it also intends to establish an alternate

⁴⁰ For more on the liminality of youth, see: Victor W. Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*,” *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* (1964): 4-20; Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2002), 8.

⁴¹ Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 3-4, 171.

approach to the role of children and youth targeted by the nationalization efforts within their realm.

The history of childhood and youth has been a flourishing field in recent years, especially in relation to questions of twentieth-century nationalization processes, curricular and extra-curricular mobilization, and childhood experiences of war. Many works dedicated to such topics have explored, often with great acuity, the nuances of national, political, and social activism surrounding childhood and youth.⁴² However, until very recently, most of this research has framed children and youth primarily as the targets of activism and the recipients of aid, education, and identities. Only very rarely are they considered as agents to the processes in which they are embedded. The reasons for this lacuna are multiple. To begin with, the notions of childhood and youth are still heavily influenced by what historians like Nicholas Stargardt have identified as a Victorian “cult of childhood innocence.”⁴³ In this framework, children— placed apart from “adult” consciousness, the ability to participate as full citizens in the “public sphere,” and the intellectual, emotional, and material means to visibly impact the workings of the state— are depicted as simply lacking agency.⁴⁴ In other cases, when historians seem to acknowledge the possibility of individual childhood subjectivity and agency, gaps arise from a lack of source material. For just as sentiments like “national indifference” hardly “left a paper trail,” so, too, do children’s activities and subjectivities seldom leave behind the types of traces that have been traditionally used by historians.⁴⁵

⁴² Consider recent works such as: Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives under the Nazis* (London: Random House, 2005); Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land*; Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Slobodan Naumović and Miroslav Jovanović, eds., *Childhood in South East Europe: Historical Perspectives on Growing Up in the 19th and 20th Century* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004); “Special Issue: Growing up in the Shadow of the Second World War. European Perspectives,” *European Review of History*, vol. 22, no. 5 (2015): 199-410.

⁴³ Nicholas Stargardt, “German Childhoods: The Making of a Historiography,” *German History*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1998): 6; Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 7-10.

⁴⁴ One recent example includes a statement by the historian of childhood Michael Mitterauer, who claimed in 2004: “Children do not actively contribute to the events from which states and nations derive their self-confidence.” Michael Mitterauer, “A History of Childhood: Research and Teaching in South Eastern Europe,” *Childhood in South East Europe: Historical Perspectives on Growing Up in the 19th and 20th Century*, edited by Slobodan Naumović and Miroslav Jovanović (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 13.

⁴⁵ On this “paper trail,” see: Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities,” 106. For a discussion on the scant source base on childhood and the need to reconceptualize the use of sources in history, see: Nicholas Stargardt, “Children’s Art of the Holocaust,” *Past and Present*, no. 161 (1998): 191-235.

However, neither argument in favor of minimizing children's and young people's subjectivity and agency is fruitful, or entirely accurate. For denying from the outset that children and youth have agency not only reifies notions of their passivity; it also allows for simplistic conclusions as to the innocence and culpability of young people implicated in some of the twentieth century's greatest atrocities.⁴⁶ Studying childhood and youth mobilization therefore demands that historians find ways to explore such topics from the perspective of children and youth themselves. This dissertation's topic is privileged in this sense, as many of those children and youth who found themselves in the midst of the nationalization battles of the 1930s and early 1940s were still able to speak about their experiences seventy years later. Though told from the perspective of later adulthood, their stories reveal childhood conflicts, perceptions, impressions, and even dialogs that otherwise, in a traditional archive, would have been lost forever.⁴⁷

Childhood and youth, of course, are also concepts that changed in meaning, definition, and lived reality across time, societies, and space.⁴⁸ As Susan Whitney explains, terms like childhood and youth can refer "to an idea or mystique, a group, an individual, a stage of life, or a cultural or political identity." Furthermore, depending on context, rites of passage, and "who is doing the designating," childhood and youth change in "roles and meanings ... at different historical moments."⁴⁹ As Laura Downs has stated, furthermore, especially during the interwar and World War II periods, "the frontiers between different age groups were highly mobile," as mass mobilization, wartime experiences, and confrontations between rural and urban populations caused continuous

⁴⁶ This concept can be contextualized with recent deconstructions by feminist historians of depictions of women as passive creatures lacking agency, and thereby as automatically innocent in regards to the Holocaust's crimes. Consider: Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Andrea Pető, "Gendered Exclusions and Inclusions in Hungary's Right-Radical Arrow Cross Party (1939-1945): A Case Study of Three Female Party Members," *Hungarian Studies Review*, vol. 41, no. 1-2 (2014): 107-130. For more on political uses of depictions of childhood innocence, especially in relation to postwar nationalist politics, see: Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 8-9.

⁴⁷ For more on the capacity of oral history interviews to reflect *a posteriori* the experiences, observations, and perceptions of a childhood, consider: Anna Wylegała, "Child Migrants and Deportees from Poland and Ukraine after the Second World War: Experience and Memory," *European Review of History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2015): 292-309.

⁴⁸ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 9; Machteld Venken and Maren Röger, "Growing up in the Shadow of the Second World War: European Perspectives," *European Review of History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2015): 201-203.

⁴⁹ Susan Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 8.

adjustments, both lived and declared, of categories like “childhood” and “youth.”⁵⁰ Following the language of available written sources, this dissertation uses “children” to denote boys and girls up to the age of fourteen, and “youth” to signify fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds (the age at which service in National Socialist “youth,” or “*Jugend*,” formations became mandatory).

Such formal delineations in vocabulary, however, say little as to the role, activities, and subjective experiences of those young individuals targeted by borderland nationalizers. Departing from studies that analyze the nationalization of borderland children and youth only from the vantage point of adult activists, this dissertation also considers the perspectives, activities, and assertions of agency of the targeted children and youth themselves. As Eric Hirsch illustrated in an article on the 1930s and early 1940s Hungarian Boy Scouts movement, despite possibilities of national indifference, many young people incorporated into nationalist organizations “came to experience a profound identification” with the nation and (in this case) “Hungarianness.” However, even in the most “extreme case,” when “nationalist leaders [were] able to reach Scouts at so deep a level, to foster tangible experiences of nationality,” the evocation of sincere national (self-) identifications were “never as simple as the straight-forward indoctrination of completely passive subjects by articulate and aware agents.” In Hirsch’s view, youth exhibited “subject agency,” as they “asserted agency not only as willing participants, but also as active seekers of experiences and meanings.”⁵¹ Such “assertions of agency” became especially crucial to nationalist borderland projects, as Scouts themselves were forced to bridge “a gap between the language of nationalism and the experience of nationality.” Nationalist teachings, including of a “‘folk soul’— a national community entirely fixed through all of history,” simply could not be comfortably applied in regions that exhibited different linguistic and cultural patterns. Scouts placed within a nationalizing project hence were forced to create their own meanings “which would make the contradictory ideology seem sensible.”⁵²

Children and youth placed within nationalizing projects themselves became national activists. They created the nation, insofar as the nation is both the product of

⁵⁰ Laura Downs, “‘Each and Every One of You Must Become a Chef’: Toward a Social Politics of Working-Class Childhood on the Extreme Right in 1930s France,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 81, no. 1 (2009): 14.

⁵¹ Eric Hirsch, “Voices from the Black Box: Folk Song, Boy Scouts and the Construction of Folk Nationalist Hegemony in Hungary, 1930-1944,” *Antipode*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1997): 198-199, 200.

⁵² Hirsch, “Voices from the Black Box,” 200-202.

identificatory and self-identificatory processes. Children and youth of the interwar and World War II Batschka and Western Banat actively negotiated the meanings of the nationality ascribed to them; they continuously adjusted their opinions thereof; they proselytized, fought, and died for it. It is in this context that the Third Reich was able to enter the *Donauschwaben* communities' core: through *Reich* efforts, National Socialism became a possible marker of local "Germanness," an indicator adopted by different individuals in different contexts to fight larger social, political, and even personal battles.

3. The Batschka and the Western Banat as Nazi Imperial Spaces

Recent years have seen the flourishing of historical studies that analyze the imperial and colonial dimensions of Nazi Germany's ambitions in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The analytic connection between National Socialism and imperialism, certainly, is not new—indeed, they hark back at least to Hannah Arendt's famous 1950s studies on the imperial foundations of totalitarianism.⁵³ New, however, is a certain post-colonial framework: besides focusing on the dynamics of "from above" power at the "colonial" center, historians of Nazi occupations in Eastern Europe, too, have begun to turn to "from below" perspectives, which explore "the agency of the popular classes" and individuals' everyday experiences "at the 'peripheries' of the Nazi empire."⁵⁴ Works on the ideological, organizational, military, and macroeconomic foundations of the National Socialist enterprise in the "East" by authors such as Doris Bergen, John Connelly, Catherine Epstein, David Furber, Valdis Lumans, and Carola Sachse have therefore been supplemented with studies on the "from below" perspectives of the occupiers and occupied themselves.⁵⁵ Historians like Elizabeth Harvey and Mark

⁵³ David Furber, "Near as Far in the Colonies: The Nazi Occupation of Poland," *The International History Review*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2004), 543; Hannah Arendt, "Imperialism," *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edition with added prefaces (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1994), 123-304.

⁵⁴ Tara Zahra, "Looking East: East Central European 'Borderlands' in German History and Historiography," *History Compass*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2005): 7.

⁵⁵ Consider: Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1994): 569-582; John Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice," *Central European History*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1999): 1-33; Catherine Epstein, "Germanization in the Warthegau: Germans, Jews and Poles and the Making of a 'German' *Gau*," *Heimat, Region, and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism*, edited by Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 93-111; Furber, "Near as Far in the Colonies"; Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of

Mazower, for instance, have provided astute studies of everyday life in Nazi-occupied Poland and Greece, respectively.⁵⁶ Prevalent geographic foci on regions like Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Greece, too, are currently being extended: the past decade in particular thus has seen a rise in literature on the Nazi enterprise in countries such as Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania.⁵⁷

Despite this proliferation of studies on the Third Reich's occupational policies, not much has been written on the "from below" perspectives of Europe's ethnic Germans, who became— as we shall see— crucial to the extension and maintenance of Nazi authority in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, studies that directly compare the micro-level experiences of individuals under (and partially complicit to) different conditions of Axis occupation are lacking. Such a comparison, however, is crucial. For as historians of Nazi policies towards Southeastern Europe have emphasized, regions such as the Batschka or the Western Banat never formed part of Germany's "traditional" irredenta (as Silesia, the Sudetenland, or Alsace). Targeted rather for their agricultural goods, raw materials, mobilizeable population, and potential "borderland fortress" status, these regions accordingly did not undergo a direct incorporation into the *Reich*, their ethnic Germans did not automatically receive German citizenship, policies of "Germanization" and ethnic cleansing were initially carried out in a more circuitous manner, and local ethnic German organizations never became fully integrated into structures like the NSDAP.⁵⁸

North Carolina Press, 1993); Carola Sachse, eds., *"Mitteleuropa" und "Südosteuropa" als Planungsraum: Wirtschafts- und kulturpolitische Expertisen im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010); Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*.

⁵⁶ Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*; Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁵⁷ Consider: Stephen G. Gross, "Nazi Economic Expansion, Romanian Volksdeutsche, and the German-Romanian Chamber of Commerce, 1929-1941," *Nationalsozialismus und Regionalbewusstsein im östlichen Europa*, edited by Burkhard Olschowsky and Ingo Loose (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 173-188; Roumiana Preshlenova, "Netzwerke und Einflussnahme. Die Besonderheiten des deutsch-bulgarischen Verhältnisses vor und während des Zweiten Weltkrieges," *Nationalsozialismus und Regionalbewusstsein im östlichen Europa*, 423-440; *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa, 1919-1944*, edited by Erwin Oberländer, Rolf Ahmann, Hans Lemberg, and Holm Sundhausen (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001); Arnold Suppan, *Hitler-Beneš-Tito: Konflikt, Krieg und Völkermord in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa, Teil 2* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 537-728, 925-1212.

⁵⁸ Carola Sachse, "Einführung: 'Mitteleuropa' und 'Südosteuropa' als Planungsraum. Der Mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftstag im Kontext," *"Mitteleuropa" und "Südosteuropa" als Planungsraum: Wirtschafts- und kulturpolitische Expertisen im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, edited by Carola Sachse (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), 16-17; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 20, 627, 639; Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland?*, 292-293.

Furthermore, as Mazower has highlighted, “Hitler’s empire” depended heavily on the “parallel” “occupation regimes” run by Axis powers like Hungary and Romania, and fed off of local conflicts and civil wars.⁵⁹ In its comparison between the German-occupied Western Banat and the Hungarian-administered Batschka, this dissertation explores the multifaceted nature of Nazi occupational authority during World War II. As it shows, the Third Reich’s ambitions in Southeastern Europe varied synchronically and diachronically; Nazi occupation came in many variations; and experiences gathered under these regimes— even by groups deemed indispensable to Nazi rule— consequently differed considerably.

To study the intricacies of the Third Reich’s various World War II occupations, however, historians also need to consider more *longue durée* perspectives of preceding developments, as they unfolded both in Germany and in the regions it later occupied. Indeed, although they may emphasize different “from above” or “from below” dynamics, most recent works on the Third Reich’s “colonial” ambitions in Eastern Europe paint a similar image as to the origins of Nazi Germany’s imperial aims. Following the collapse of Germany’s overseas colonies, its crushing World War I defeat, its loss of territories on the Western and Eastern fronts, and the emergence of a “crisis of sovereignty” in the Weimar Republic, Germany increasingly turned its irredentist gaze towards Eastern Europe.⁶⁰ Eastward expansion and the acquisition of more German “*Lebensraum*” (“living space”), already explicitly advocated in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, were to provide the means for future greatness.⁶¹ The conquest of already German-inhabited lands, furthermore, would simultaneously flout the punitive Versailles Treaty borders and ultimately create the “unity of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural homogeneity that lay at the basis of the nationalist imaginary”— an imaginary that so far had eluded each historical iteration of the German state.⁶²

⁵⁹ Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire*, 96-101, 167-173, 327-330, 340-353.

⁶⁰ For a particularly insightful overview of this “sovereignty crisis,” see: Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East 1914-1922* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 3-17.

⁶¹ Gerhard Hirschfeld, “Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe,” *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Eduard Mühle (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 67-69.

⁶² Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*, 5, 12-17. See also: Maiken Umbach and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, “Introduction: Towards a Relational History of Spaces under National Socialism,” *Heimat, Region, and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism*, edited by Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 7.

Key to any eastward expansion would be these regions' ethnic German populations.⁶³ As Michael Wildt has shown, during the 1920s, the term "*Volk*" ("people") saw a fundamental change in political meaning. Breaking with Enlightened imaginations of the *Volk* as an "assembly of free and equal citizens," the *Volk* and "*Volkstum*" came to be conceptualized as "a state-creating elemental power. The Volk is not, as in a democracy, situated *in* the state, but rather *above* the state." The "extra-constitutional political unity of the Volk"— which, for Wildt, formed the "basis of the notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft*" ("people's community")— would thus become the means for overcoming official borders, as "Germans" across Europe could unite under the umbrella of the "*Volksgemeinschaft*" and help conquer, administer, and ultimately "purify" and "Germanize" much of Eastern Europe.⁶⁴

After World War I, perhaps twenty-seven million ethnic Germans lived outside of Germany's borders.⁶⁵ Labeled primarily as "*Auslandsdeutsche*" ("Germans abroad") before 1937, and as "*Volksdeutsche*" ("*Volk* Germans") thereafter,⁶⁶ these ethnic Germans became the focus of intensive academic investigation from the Weimar period onwards. Research institutions dedicated to *Ostforschung* (the "study of the East") and *Kulturraumforschung* (the "study of cultural space"), with a focus on *Auslandsdeutsche*, mushroomed across Germany. The *Stiftung für deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung* in Leipzig, the *Institut für Osteuropäische Wirtschaft* in Königsberg, and— most prominently— the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* (DAI) in Stuttgart were thus founded and/or expanded, financed, and operated by the German government from the the early interwar period onwards.⁶⁷ Central to these centers' investigations were

⁶³ To that effect, also consider: Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche'," 570.

⁶⁴ Michael Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919-1939*, translated by Bernard Heise (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), 28-29.

⁶⁵ Z.A.B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 71.

⁶⁶ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 18-19.

⁶⁷ Eduard Mühle, "The European East on the Mental Map of German Ostforschung," *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Eduard Mühle (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 109-112; Ingo Haar, "German *Ostforschung* and Anti-Semitism," *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing (1919-1945)*, edited by Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2006), 2; Dietrich Beyrau, "Eastern Europe as a 'Sub-Germanic Space': Scholarship on Eastern Europe under National Socialism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2012): 692-693. For more on these specific institutions, see: Ingo Haar, "Leipziger Stiftung für deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung," *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Personen—Institutionen—Forschungsprogramme—Stiftungen*, edited by Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2008), 374-383; Martin Seckendorf, "Deutsches Ausland-Institut," *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften*, 140-149. On Königsberg, consider: diverse authors, *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften*, 98, 190, 328, 449, 457.

the compilation of “*Volksgeschichten*” (“people’s histories”), an amalgam of ethnographic and eugenic studies that situated the various branches of the “German *Volk*” abroad in their historic and geographic context. Framed in terms of a “*Grenzkampf*” (“border battle”), in which the German *Volk* had emerged over centuries as victorious over its (generally “racially inferior”) neighbors, *Volksgeschichten* not only promoted notions of German blood-based national superiority; they also provided academic legitimation for irredentist aims.⁶⁸

Though not part of Germany’s “traditional” irredenta, regions like the Batschka and Banat, too, came under the scrutiny of “*Volkstumforscher*” (“*Volk* researchers”) during the interwar period. Already in 1931, Hermann Rüdiger, a specialist on *Auslandsdeutsche* and a later DAI director, published a *Volksgeschichte* on the “*Donauschwaben* of the South-Slavic Batschka.”⁶⁹ It was thus Rüdiger who popularized the term “*Donauschwaben*,” after it had been coined in 1922 by Robert Sieger, a geographer in Graz.⁷⁰ In 1943, the (by now indirectly SS-controlled⁷¹) DAI published a second volume on the “Germandom” of the portions of the Batschka and the Banat that had remained in Hungary after World War I. Now writing in a thoroughly *gleichgeschaltet* manner, its author, Erich Walz, departed from his predecessor in providing not only population statistics, historical and geographical overviews, and a cultural analysis, but also viewpoints entrenched in National Socialist “*Blut und Boden*” (“blood and soil”) rhetoric. As he wrote: “For over half a century, a repetitively increasing and decreasing stream of the best German blood flowed into the wide territories of the European East and Southeast.”⁷² The regions’ Germans, now no longer in close contact with the German

⁶⁸ Willi Oberkrome, “Entwicklungen und Varianten der deutschen Volksgeschichte (1900-1960),” *Volksgeschichten im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit*, edited by Manfred Hettling (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 42; Manfred Hettling, “Volk und Volksgeschichten in Europa,” *Volksgeschichten im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit*, edited by Manfred Hettling (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 8-20.

⁶⁹ For more on Rüdiger, see: *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften*, 146, 554. For his study, see: Hermann Rüdiger, *Die Donauschwaben in der südslawischen Batschka*, Schriften des Deutschen Ausland-Instituts Stuttgart. A: Kulturhistorische Reihe, Band 28 (Stuttgart: Ausland und Heimat Verlags-Aktiengesellschaft, 1931). For a more detailed analysis of this work, see: Caroline Mezger, “Entangled Utopias: The Nazi Mobilization of Ethnic German Youths in the Batschka, 1930s-1944,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2016): 105-126.

⁷⁰ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 18.

⁷¹ Katja Gesche, *Kultur als Instrument der Aussenpolitik totalitärer Staaten: Das Deutsche Ausland-Institut 1933-1945* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 82-86.

⁷² Erich Walz, *Das Deutschtum in den 1920 bei Ungarn gebliebenen Teilen von Batschka und Banat*, Schriften N.R. Deutsches Ausland-Institut (Brünn: Rohrer, 1943), 9.

“motherland,” nevertheless had always considered their “*Volkstum*” as “the highest good and the content of their entire longing.” However, as Walz emphasized, this “Germandom” was also in need of *Reich* support: decades-long “Jewish” abortion practices and Hungarian Magyarization policies had created a “yoke” of “oppression” that could only be lifted through a *Reich*-initiated “powerful reconstruction” in “*völkisch*, biological, and economic terms.”⁷³

Such unambiguous calls for *Reich* intervention in the *Donauschwaben*’s affairs, however, were not only produced by established academics. Indeed, as Elizabeth Harvey has shown, even student associations— like the *Bund Auslanddeutscher Studenten* (BADSt) and the *Deutsche Studentenschaft* (DSt)— were mobilized from the early 1930s onwards to conduct “*volkswissenschaftliche Forschung*” (“research in the *Volk* sciences”) among Southeastern Europe’s *Auslandsdeutsche*.⁷⁴ Two of these missions led “*reichsdeutsche*” students to the Batschka.⁷⁵ Between 1934 and 1937, groups of students from Halle traveled to the Batschka and conducted a range of ethnographic and anthropometric studies with the support of local pro-*Reich* activists (“*Erneuerer*”), including Johann Wuescht, leader of Yugoslavia’s ethnic German “*Wohlfahrtsgenossenschaft*” (“welfare cooperative”). Targeting the Protestant village Bačko Dobro Polje in 1934 and the Catholic town of Bukin in 1936, these students sketched and photographed the *Donauschwaben*’s agricultural and architectural environment; they recorded eye and hair colors, “physical constitutions” (“*Körperbau*”), phrenologies, age distributions, and causes of death; they traced economic chains, social structures, and family trees. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these students ultimately reported that the “biological segregation” of the local ethnic German population had remained intact over the centuries. However, especially in relation to hygienic practices, lagging birthrates, and insufficient ties to the *Reich*, it would be up to the “young generation” and its “renewal movement” (“*Erneuerungsbewegung*”) to reform the Batschka’s

⁷³ Walz, *Das Deutschtum*, 9-10, 64, 72-77, 79, 92, 111.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Harvey, “Mobilisierung oder Erfassung? Studentischer Aktivismus und deutsche ‘Volkstumsarbeit’ in Jugoslawien und Rumänien 1933-1941,” *“Mitteleuropa” und “Südosteuropa” als Planungsraum: Wirtschafts- und kulturpolitische Expertisen im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, edited by Carola Sachse (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), 363-365.

⁷⁵ Roughly speaking, “*Reichsdeutsche*” denotes Germans born within, and “*Volksdeutsche*”/“*Auslandsdeutsche*” ethnic Germans born outside of, the German *Reich*. For a helpful overview of these terms and how they relate to the *Donauschwaben*, see: Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 17-21.

Donauschwaben population.⁷⁶ These *Reich*-initiated student expeditions to the Batschka resulted in a range of publications, including a group study named “best work in the *Reich* on racial and health sciences” (“*Reichssiegerarbeit*”) in a 1936/37 German-wide student competition, individual publications by biology student Hans Grimm, and a doctoral dissertation by Werner Burchard.⁷⁷ Interestingly, however, the results were not only instrumentalized for propagandistic purposes within the *Reich*; rather, Johann Wuescht, too, published the studies in local *Donauschwaben* periodicals and women’s journals, using their insights to “educate” Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans on their ways, faults, and potentials for betterment through National Socialism.⁷⁸

These *Volksgeschichte*-based studies illustrate three themes that are central to this dissertation. First, Europe’s *Volksdeutsche* inhabited a paradoxical role, from which they, according to National Socialist visions, derived their very utility. On the one hand, the *Volksdeutsche* represented an ideological imperative for the Third Reich’s “Eastern policy”: the presence and “misplacement” of Germans outside the German “homeland” invested especially Eastern Europe with an enormous “symbolic value,” provided justifications for eastward expansion, and pointed to sources of a prospective (“racially pure”) vanguard for the National Socialist cause abroad.⁷⁹ On the other hand, the *Volksdeutsche* were often framed by *Reich* activists as not quite “German” enough, as culturally, linguistically, and even racially “corrupted” by their “foreign” environments, and as requiring an “*Umvolkung*” and “Germanization” through a conversion to National

⁷⁶ Harvey, “Mobilisierung oder Erfassung?,” 374-381.

⁷⁷ Harvey, “Mobilisierung oder Erfassung?,” 378. The original manuscripts, photographs, and drawings are filed at the *Bundesarchiv* today under: NS 38/4840 and NS 38/4841 (“Volkheitskundliche Erhebungen im deutschen Siedlungsgebiet in der Südslawischen Batschka”). Unfortunately, access to these files is still restricted due to German copyright laws. Copies of Burchard’s published studies are available in Berlin’s *Staatsbibliothek*. See: Werner Burchard, “Eine Körperbau- und Familienkundliche Untersuchung, sowie eine Erhebung über die hygienischen Verhältnisse und über die Todesursachen aus zwei deutschen Dörfern im deutschen Siedlungsgebiet in der jugoslawischen Batschka” (Dr. med. diss. Medizinische Fakultät Martin Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1939); *Volkshitskundliche Untersuchungen im deutschen Siedlungsgebiet in der südslawischen Batschka. Schriftenreihe der Reichsstudentenführung*, edited by Gustav Adolf Scheel (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1938).

⁷⁸ Johann Wuescht, “Die Altersschichtung der Sterbefälle in Bačko Dobro Polje” and “Beitrag zur biologischen Lebensbilanz der Deutschen in der Wojwodina,” *Woge-Blatt. Zeitschrift für ländliche Wohlfahrtspflege*, edited by Johann Wuescht, vol. 5, no. 1 (1936): 12-21, 22-26. Such articles, citing the work of Burchard and Wuescht, were also published in scholarly articles across Germany. Consider: “Die hygienischen Verhältnisse in dem Dorfe Bukin (Südslaw. Batschka),” *Südostdeutsche Forschungen*, edited by Fritz Valjevac, Südostinstitut München, vol. 3, no. 1 (1938): 256-260.

⁷⁹ Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*, 15; Burkhard Olschowsky and Ingo Loose, “Einführung,” *Nationalsozialismus und Regionalbewusstsein im östlichen Europa*, edited by Burkhard Olschowsky and Ingo Loose (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 10.

Socialism.⁸⁰ Second, the Third Reich's Germanizing endeavors were not a purely "top-down," "from above" procedure, but rather a process that unfolded within a network of "complex reciprocal relationships between centre and periphery."⁸¹ From at least the 1930s, *Donauschwaben* activists themselves had become instrumental to the spreading of National Socialist ideologies, organizations, and definitions of "Germanness." Working in conjunction with *Reich* agencies, *Donauschwaben* formations like the "*Erneuerungsbewegung*" promoted their own Nazi publications, cultural clubs, and youth organizations. The *Reich*, as we shall see, closely monitored these activities and became responsive to them. Ultimately, *Donauschwaben* national activism and *Reich* imperial ambition worked in (an occasionally contentious) tandem to radicalize the Batschka and the Western Banat's ethnic German population. Finally, and as in most nationalization projects, youth—both from within and outside of the *Reich*—would become crucial both to the forging of ideological aspirations, and to these ambitions' ultimate realization.

Youth as empire-builders along national lines were not the invention of Nazi Germany. Indeed, as historians like Jeff Bowersox and Luke Springman have indicated, youth organizations had been vital to the promotion of German colonial interests even prior to 1914.⁸² Furthermore, youth organizations also became agents of British and Japanese empire-building in early twentieth-century Asia, as work by individuals like Jialin Christina Wu and Sayaka Chatani has shown.⁸³ More generally, the first half of the twentieth-century saw a burgeoning youth mobilization race: from fascist Italy to interwar France, from the Soviet to the Southern Slavic spheres, political, national, ecclesiastical,

⁸⁰ Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 136, 160; Olschowsky and Loose, "Einführung," 11; Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 5-7; Hirschfeld, "Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe," 75; Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche'," 569-582.

⁸¹ Umbach and Szejmann, "Introduction," 10, 12.

⁸² Luke Springman, "Exotic Attractions and Imperialist Fantasies in Weimar Youth Culture," *Weimar Culture Revisited*, edited by John Williams (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 99-116; Jeff Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire: Youth and Colonial Culture, 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸³ Jialin Christina Wu, "'A Malayan Girlhood on Parade': Colonial Femininities, Transnational Mobilities, and the Girl Guide Movement in British Malaya," *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Richard Ivan Jobs and David Pomfret (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 92-112; Jialin Christina Wu, "'A Life of Make-Believe': Being Boy Scouts and 'Playing Indian' in British Malaya (1910-42)," *Gender & History*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2014): 589-619; Sayaka Chatani, "Nation-Empire: Rural Youth Mobilization Japan, Taiwan, and Korea 1895-1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2014).

and especially state actors began to encourage, and even mandate, extra-curricular youth training.⁸⁴ Germany, from the 1920s, was no exception. In 1922, the “Youth League of the National Socialist Worker’s Party” was founded amidst a panoply of competing youth organizations. Named the “*Hitler-Jugend*” (“Hitler Youth,” or HJ) after 1926, the NSDAP’s official youth branch included primarily fourteen- to eighteen-year-old boys. Over the following four years, however, branches for females (the “*Bund Deutscher Mädel*,” or BDM) and ten- to fourteen-year-olds (the “*Jungvolk*,” or “*Pimpfe*”) were also established. Following Hitler’s “*Machtergreifung*” (seizure of power) in January 1933, the Hitler Youth developed a monopoly over Germany’s youth. In 1936, all non-*Hitler-Jugend* youth formations were declared illegal, and in 1939, Hitler Youth service became mandatory for all ten- to eighteen-year-old “Aryans.” At least according to Nazi statistics, some 98.1% of Germany’s male and female youth had been mobilized into the Hitler Youth by early 1939.⁸⁵

The Hitler Youth’s National Socialist ideological mission, however, was not envisioned as pertaining only to “Aryan” youth within Germany. Rather, as historians like Gerhard Rempel, Michael Kater, Elizabeth Harvey, and Zsolt Vitári have shown, the *Hitler-Jugend* was cast as crucial to Germany’s “Eastern policy” from the 1920s.⁸⁶ Working with the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (“Association for Germans Abroad,” or VDA), Joachim von Ribbentrop’s Foreign Office, and Alfred Rosenberg’s Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (“*Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*,” or RmfdbO), the Hitler Youth and its subsidiaries began crafting increasingly elaborate schemes to bring *reichsdeutsche* youth into Europe’s contested borderlands during the 1930s and early 1940s. The “*Landdienst*” (established in 1934), for instance, brought hundreds of thousands of youth from Germany into short-term agricultural and domestic service in ethnic German homes and farms across Europe. Focusing initially on Germany’s more “traditional” irredenta, such as the Polish-German

⁸⁴ Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth*, 36; Downs, “Each and Every One of You Must Become a Chef”; Dejan Zec, “The Sokol Movement from Yugoslav Origins to King Aleksandar’s 1930 All-Sokol Rally in Belgrade,” *East Central Europe*, vol. 42 (2015): 48-69; Matthias Neumann, *The Communist Youth League and the Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1917-1932* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁸⁵ H.W. Koch, *The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development 1922-1945* (New York, NY: Dorset Press, 1975), 47-48, 60-69; Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7, 16-23, 77; Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 166. As Kater states, however, these figures also varied regionally. For a more detailed (and perhaps less inflated) breakdown of membership statistics according to year, age, and gender, consider: Zsolt Vitári, *A Hitlerjugend és Délkelet-Európa* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2012), 33.

⁸⁶ Rempel, *Hitler’s Children*, 21, 143-144.

borderlands, Hitler Youth members, by the late 1930s, extended their activities to more remote locations, touring territories like Bessarabia, Bukovina, the Baltic states, Volhynia, or—as we shall see—northern Yugoslavia.⁸⁷

These youth were not merely to support ethnic Germans as laborers, however crucial this may have become as Germany relied more heavily on foreign goods and manpower over the course of World War II.⁸⁸ Rather, their function was also ideological. The *reichsdeutsche* young people's tools in their "foreign service" thus included not merely the "sword and plow," but also the dictionary, songbook, and medical pamphlet.⁸⁹ In their interactions with ethnic Germans abroad, *reichsdeutsche* youth were to act as instructors, teaching the *Volksdeutsche* German language, literature, and grammar, Nazi-specific culture, and "German" standards of nutrition and hygiene.⁹⁰ The goal of these activities became no less than an "*Umvolkung*" of ethnic German populations across Europe: ethnic Germans were to become not only "racially pure," but also ardent followers of "Germanic" culture and Nazi thought.⁹¹

The *Reich*, however, relied not merely on labor service programs like the *Landdienst*. Even from the early 1930s, *Hitler-Jugend* formations from Germany engaged in additional "cultural" programs. According to Baldur von Schirach, Hitler Youth chief from 1933 to 1940, one of the main pillars of the Hitler Youth's "*Auslandsarbeit*" (foreign work) would include "field trips," "study trips," and exchange programs with youth groups from abroad.⁹² Coordinated by offices like the *Mittelstelle Deutscher Jugend in Europa* ("Office for German Youth in Europe") and the *Reichsjugendführung* (head of the HJ, or RJF), *Reichsdeutsche* youth were to seek contact with ethnic Germans abroad,

⁸⁷ For more on the *Landdienst*, consider: Rempel, *Hitler's Children*, 109, 141-145; Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 34-35. On the BDM experience abroad, see: Elizabeth Harvey, "'We Forgot All Jews and Poles': German Women and the 'Ethnic Struggle' in Nazi-Occupied Poland," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 10, no. 3, *Theme Issue: Gender and War in Europe c. 1918-1949* (2001): 447-461. As Rempel estimates, some 215,633 youth participated in the *Landdienst* and its subsidiary programs by 1944 (Rempel, *Hitler's Children*, 136). This number was partially so large because participation in the *Landdienst* became compulsory for all German youth in 1942 (Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 35).

⁸⁸ In relation to Southeastern Europe in general, consider: Sachse, ed., "*Mitteleuropa*" und "*Südosteuropa*" als *Planungsraum*. On borderlands like the Batschka and the neighboring Banat specifically, see: Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen*", 323-351; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 383-340. In relation to East, Central, and Southeastern Europe more generally, see: Olschowsky and Loose, "Einführung," 11.

⁸⁹ Or, as Kater puts it: "... plow in one hand and gun in the other" (Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 35).

⁹⁰ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 34-35; Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 50-57, 65-71.

⁹¹ Rempel, *Hitler's Children*, 160.

⁹² Baldur von Schirach, *Die Hitler-Jugend: Idee und Gestalt* (Leipzig: Koehler und Amelang, 1934), 154-156; Vitári, *A Hitlerjugend és Délkelet-Európa*, 452-454.

and engage them in folk song, theater, dance, and similar cultural productions to create a “connection to the new Germany.” The aim of these initiatives, for von Schirach, was “... that every Hitler Youth and every BDM girl, regardless of their location in the world, will create a large camaraderie [*Kameradschaft*], and that they will— despite spatial separation— march in one direction and live and act within the same spirit.”⁹³

Such programs bore fruit even in regions like the Batschka and the Western Banat. Indeed, as Foreign Office documents attest, from 1935 onwards, *Reich*-authorized and unauthorized pro-Nazi youth formations alike from Germany toured regions like Vojvodina in study groups, song circles, and motorcycle units.⁹⁴ Studies on these *reichsdeutsche* youth groups in Southeastern Europe— let alone on Vojvodina specifically— are sparse, and are limited to the works of historians like Vitári, Harvey, and Stephan Olaf Schüller.⁹⁵ These studies, though insightful, are quite cursory. Most official *Reich* documentation on the *Hitler-Jugend*, after all, was destroyed by the Nazi regime and ensuing bombardments in 1945, hindering any detailed investigation into topics as specific as HJ journeys to Yugoslavia.⁹⁶ Furthermore, and crucially, these and other existing studies on the National Socialist youth mission in Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe do not consider the perspectives of the targeted “*auslandsdeutsche*” youth themselves. This dissertation fills such lacunae not only by analyzing the Third Reich’s interest in ethnic German youth in Southeastern Europe, but also by focusing on the experiences, activities, opinions, and memories of those “*Volksdeutsche*” who were suddenly confronted by the *Reich*’s National Socialist (youth) projects.

4. Historiographical Placement and Approach

This dissertation is conceptualized as a contribution to the topics of borderland nationalization, National Socialist youth mobilization, the Third Reich’s “imperial” ambitions and occupation policies in Southeastern Europe, and the history of childhood

⁹³ Schirach, *Die Hitler-Jugend: Idee und Gestalt*, 157-158, 162.

⁹⁴ Letters (15.3.1935, 14.4.1935), PA AA, R 63614-8081; letter with “Antrag” for Motor-HJ journey (18.8.1939), PA AA, R 27145.

⁹⁵ Harvey, “Mobilisierung oder Erfassung?”; Vitári, *A Hitlerjugend és Délkelet-Európa*; Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland?*.

⁹⁶ For a helpful overview and partial reproduction of the sources that have survived in Germany on the Hitler Youth, see: Jakob Benecke, ed., *Die Hitler-Jugend 1933 bis 1945: Programmatik, Alltag, Erinnerungen. Eine Dokumentation* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2013).

and youth, as presented above. However, it seeks to break historiographical ground in two additional respects: in presenting the previously unexplored history of childhood and youth in relation to the Batschka and the Western Banat's ethnic German communities, and in its development of a multiscale, comparative approach.

Studies of nationalization processes among Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European German-speaking communities, certainly, are not new. Indeed, starting in the 1980s, historians like Gary Cohen, Jeremy King, and Tara Zahra published astute studies on the creation of "German" national identities in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bohemian lands.⁹⁷ Similar studies on populations like the Transylvanian Saxons ("*Siebenbürger Sachsen*"), the Hungarian Germans ("*Ungarndeutsche*"), or Poland's German-speaking minorities were quick to follow.⁹⁸ Furthermore— and as we have seen— histories of ethnic German communities as the targets and collaborators of Nazi policies in regions like the Sudetenland or Silesia, too, have mushroomed over the last decade.

Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben*, however, have only much more recently drawn the attention of historians connected to the international academic enterprise. For decades, most histories of the *Donauschwaben* in regions like the Batschka or the Western Banat were written by these (now displaced) communities themselves. From the early 1960s, community-based histories in the form of "*Heimatbücher*" or periodicals ("*Zeitschriften*" and "*Hefte*"), as well as autobiographies and self-published volumes on topics such as *Donauschwaben* school or settlement history, offered the main source of secondary literature on these minorities. However, such sources remain problematic to the current day. The authors— generally members of Germany's postwar expellee organizations and occasionally former Nazi functionaries themselves— mostly gloss over the war years, eschew questions of wartime mobilization, National Socialism, and the period from 1933 to 1944 almost entirely, assume narratives ensconced in victimhood and naiveté, and

⁹⁷ Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*; King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*; Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*.

⁹⁸ Cristian Cercel, "The Relationship between Religious and National Identity in the Case of Transylvanian Saxons (1933–1944)," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2011): 161–180; Gerhard Seewann, "'Ungarndeutsche' als Identitätskonzept und politische Ressource," *Staat, Loyalität und Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1918–1941*, edited by Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 99–126; John C. Swanson, "Nation, Volk, Minderheit, Volksgruppe: Die deutsche Minderheit in Ungarn in den Begriffskämpfen der Zwischenkriegsära," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, vol. 55 (2006): 526–547; Winson Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

engage in polemics against “Titoist” interpretations of history.⁹⁹ Alternately, works by Yugoslav authors from the same postwar period rarely move beyond interpretations of the *Donauschwaben* as a collective “fifth column” and their “departure” in 1944 as just, even voluntary.¹⁰⁰ During the 1990s— when archives opened across Europe, and the first generation of *Donauschwaben* historians dwindled— a new phase of research on the *Donauschwaben* began, which, in an attempt to overcome politically-driven misinterpretations, assumed a more empirical approach. Archives in Berlin, Belgrade, and Budapest were now to provide the context and insight necessary for understanding the *Donauschwaben* and their controversial position and activities during the interwar and World War II periods; transnational empiricism became the declared panacea for previous historiographical transgressions.

Histories written within this spirit are numerous and increasing. In many ways, they form the inspiration and foundation for this work. Studies by historians like Carl Bethke, Johann Böhm, Mariana Hausleitner, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler on the early twentieth-century nationalization and organization of Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans are crucial to any critical study of the region’s *Donauschwaben*, as are works written on the larger (inter-) national context of the *Donauschwaben* minority (consider: Valdis Lumans or Norbert Spannenberger).¹⁰¹ Other recent histories by Thomas Casagrande, Akiko Shimizu, and Ekkehard Völkl have provided valuable insight into the *Donauschwaben*’s social, economic, and military mobilization during World War II, while works penned by Zoran Janjetović and Michael Portmann are fundamental to understanding their “*Vertreibung*” (expulsion) and immediate postwar fate.¹⁰² Even the mobilization of ethnic

⁹⁹ Prominent examples include: Sepp Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (Graz: Leopold Stocker Verlag, 1982); Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 27; Johann Wüsch, *Jugoslawien und das Dritte Reich. Eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-jugoslawischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis 1945* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1969). For a helpful discussion of these controversial authors, consider: Johann Böhm, *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), 15-26; Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland?*, 449.

¹⁰⁰ For more on this postwar Yugoslav historiography, consider: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 8-18; Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 15-17.

¹⁰¹ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*; Johann Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat. Ihr Verhältnis zum Dritten Reich 1941-1944* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012); Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalitätenpolitik in Jugoslawien: Die deutsche Minderheit 1918-1978* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980); Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*; Norbert Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944 unter Horthy und Hitler* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002).

¹⁰² Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*; Ekkehard Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944. Die deutsche, die ungarische*

German youth in Southeastern Europe has not been neglected entirely: Zsolt Vitári and Stephan Olaf Schüller have thus written on the pro-Nazi “*Deutsche Jugend*” in Hungary and the Romanian Banat, respectively.¹⁰³

Despite the rising number of professional and insightful studies on the *Donauschwaben* and their involvement with National Socialism, certain gaps remain. The most prominent problem with current writings arises in part from the very approach that makes them so useful: their archival method. Critical of previous histories, which were so heavily subjective, recent historians of the *Donauschwaben* avoid questions of personal experience, memory, and subjectivity almost entirely. In a claim to greater objectivity and thoroughness, they dismiss “from below” sources like oral history from the outset. Nevertheless, it is often those authors who discredit such personal and micro-level sources most vehemently who ultimately draw conclusions of the micro scale, claiming insight into the “success” at the individual level of ideological programs (like the *Deutsche Jugend*), the creation and contestation of national identities, and the postwar repercussions of interwar and wartime experiences.¹⁰⁴

This dissertation is conceptualized with the conviction that it is not only possible, but necessary to consider both the “subjective” and the “objective,” to ascend and descend the analytic scale, and to analyze sources ranging from the archival file to the propaganda leaflet to the oral history account to gain a more holistic insight into topics as mired in contestation and riddled with taboos as the involvement of Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans in the Third Reich’s projects.¹⁰⁵ This research therefore not only presents a first history of childhood and youth activism among the Batschka and the Western Banat’s ethnic Germans during the interwar and World War II periods, exploring childhood and youth as a battleground for state-building and ideological and political contestation, and as a

und andere Volksgruppen (Munich: Ungarisches Institut München, 1991); Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*; Michael Portmann, *Kommunistische Abrechnung mit Kriegsverbrechern, Kollaborateuren, „Volksfeinden“ und „Verrätern“ in Jugoslawien während des Zweiten Weltkriegs und unmittelbar danach (1943–1950)* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2002).

¹⁰³ Vitári, *A Hitlerjugend és Délkelet-Európa*; Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland?*.

¹⁰⁴ Consider: Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn*, 12; Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland?*, 17; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 35-36.

¹⁰⁵ For theoretical considerations on (changing) scales of analysis, see: Jacques Revel, ed., *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996). More on such theoretical considerations to follow in this introduction.

nexus between “private” and “public” concerns.¹⁰⁶ Rather, in employing a wide range of sources and a consciously multi-layered and comparative approach, this research aims at exploring more deeply those questions that have irked historians for decades: not only the basic “hows,” “whats,” “whens,” and “whys” of the National Socialist mobilization of ethnic Germans in Southeastern Europe, but also larger questions of the possibilities and limitations of (collective and individual) agency within the context of a minority entrenched in mass violence, occupation, and war.

To explore these questions, this dissertation pursues three, overlapping analytic levels.¹⁰⁷ The first, “macro” level, investigates the Third Reich’s evolving interests in the Batschka and the Western Banat from the interwar period to 1944, looking in particular at its establishment of political, economic, military, cultural, and youth programs in the region. The second, “meso” level, traces the creation and “*Gleichschaltung*” of German minority organizations in interwar and World War II Hungary and Yugoslavia, placing an emphasis on the Batschka and the Western Banat. Uncovering in particular the emergence of National Socialist youth organizations, this level explores the manner in which political, social, and cultural grievances of the interwar period gave rise to nationally-framed, and ultimately National Socialist, local activisms. The third (and most original) “micro” level investigates the impact of these National Socialist formations on the *Donauschwaben*’s ideological affiliations, social interactions, and national (self-) identifications from the perspective of the targeted children and youth themselves.

In order to pursue a multiscalar approach, this project draws upon a wide range of sources. First, to reconstruct the Third Reich’s perspective on its activities in Southeastern Europe, this dissertation employs archival materials from the German national archives (the *Bundesarchiv*) and German Foreign Office archives (the *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes*) in Berlin. In order to shed light on the Batschka and the Western Banat’s local administrative efforts and perspectives, it further utilizes the still largely unsorted and uncited collections of archival documents left by the regions’ former German-language administrations and organizations (like the “*Kulturbund*,” “*Volksbund*,” and “*Volksgruppe*”). Most relevant documentation, as we shall see, was

¹⁰⁶ For a helpful deconstruction of the concept of rigid and distinct “public” and “private” spheres, see: Tara Zahra, “Each nation only cares for its own”; Susan Gal, “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2002): 77-95.

¹⁰⁷ As Revel and others have stated, levels of analysis are always constructed, flexible, and overlapping. More on this in the following introductory sections.

unfortunately destroyed towards the end of World War II, as fleeing Nazi administrators, arriving Partisans, and local inhabitants in need of firewood burned much of the evidence that these bureaucracies had produced.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, I have been able to track down relevant materials in Serbia, in the Archive of the Museum of Vojvodina (Novi Sad), in the historical archives of Zrenjanin, Sombor, and Novi Sad, and in the collections of the *Deutsche Bürgerverein "Adam Berenz"*.

Besides archival materials, this dissertation makes abundant use of the region's German-language press of the interwar and World War II periods. It employs regional and town-based newspapers, nationalist journals, Catholic and Protestant literature, ecclesiastical and National Socialist youth magazines, and *Reich*-imported books and school materials from libraries across Serbia and Hungary: from the *Matica Srpska* in Novi Sad, the City Library (*Gradska biblioteka Karlo Bijelicki*) in Sombor, the *Deutsche Bürgerverein "Adam Berenz"* in Apatin, the Serbian National Library in Belgrade, and the *Ungarndeutsche Bibliothek* and Hungary's National Széchényi Library in Budapest. Furthermore, various national, regional, and *Donauschwaben*-based institutions across Germany contain valuable primary publications and secondary materials used in this dissertation: the *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek* and the *Institut für deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas* in Munich, the *Haus der Donauschwaben* in Sindelfingen, and the *Staatsbibliothek* in Berlin. Such sources were especially helpful in reconstructing the great diversity of *Donauschwaben* actors, organizations, and ideas involved in nationally-oriented youth mobilization between 1918 and 1944, as well as these efforts' larger (local) political, cultural, and social context.

Most significantly, this dissertation also makes extensive use of oral history interviews. Between 2011 and 2014, I conducted interviews with five *Donauschwaben* men and women who had been born in the Western Banat and twelve who originally came from the Batschka. Born between 1921 and 1943, either Catholic or Protestant, and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, these interviewees experienced the interwar and World War II years diversely, encountered various postwar fates, and therefore remembered and narrated their childhood and youth very differently. Some interviewees, as we shall see, spoke at great length about their personal involvement in National Socialist youth groups. Others recalled discrimination at the hands of their Nazi-mobilized peers. Still others reported very little on topics such as youth mobilization,

¹⁰⁸ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 21.

either because perceived personal, societal, and familial taboos had created silences that were difficult to break even decades later, or because these individuals had not cared much for these matters even during their childhood.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, each interviewee was able to recall, often in rich detail, the many changes, conflicts, and brutalities that arose as National Socialist projects and, ultimately, Axis occupation reached their communities.

The rich variety of personal narratives elicited by these oral history interviews are presented throughout this dissertation in several thematic sections dedicated to topics such as youth organizations, religion, schooling, and military mobilization. Whenever possible, an analysis of the impact on experience and memory of factors like age, gender, religion, family background, and educational pathway is provided. In this, the dissertation implements qualitative methods, especially as derived from anthropological theories of “thick description” and as employed by oral historians.¹¹⁰ Specifically, the oral history interviews conducted for this thesis followed a two-phase, life story-based framework.¹¹¹ In the first phase, I began the formal interview with basic questions as to the person’s biography (such as place and date of birth and descriptions of their original hometowns), thereby encouraging a relatively free-flowing, life history-based narrative. In a second phase, I asked more specific questions based on the stories they had told. I inquired more particularly about topics such as youth mobilization, community reactions to National Socialism, and childhood experiences of war from within the framework and vocabulary the interviewees themselves had provided.¹¹² The interviews were held with individuals now living in Germany, the United States, and Serbia. They were conducted in person or

¹⁰⁹ For fruitful analysis on silences in oral history, especially in relation to National Socialism, see: Gabriele Rosenthal, “National Socialism and Antisemitism in Intergenerational Dialog,” *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, edited by Gabriele Rosenthal (London: Cassell, 1998), 240-247; Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 16-18; Luisa Passerini, “Introduction,” *Memory and Totalitarianism*, edited by Luisa Passerini (New Jersey, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 16.

¹¹⁰ For a helpful overview, see: “Thick Description,” *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: Sage, 2001), 99-118.

¹¹¹ Gabriele Rosenthal, “The Narrated Life Story: On the Interrelation Between Experience, Memory and Narration,” *Narrative, Memory and Knowledge: Representations, Aesthetics & Contexts*, edited by K. Milnes, C. Horrocks, N. Kelly, B. Roberts, and D. Robinson (West Yorkshire, England: University of Huddersfield, 2006), 1-17.

¹¹² For a discussion of the benefits (and pitfalls) of free-flowing interviews, and the importance of precise vocabulary and the establishment of trust, see: Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 197-199.

by telephone, in English or German (depending on the interviewees' preference), recorded, and transcribed.¹¹³ For ethical considerations and privacy protection, a written agreement was signed before each interview that explained in full detail the interviews' aims and intended audience, ensured anonymization, gave interviewees the right to stop the recording, and limited the right to view the original recordings and transcripts to the interview partners and my doctoral committee.¹¹⁴

The interviews' aim, certainly, was not to gain "facts" in a traditional Rankean sense, as an account of "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" ("how it actually was").¹¹⁵ Rather, and much more importantly to a micro-level investigation of subjective experiences, the interviews sought "truths" on a different epistemological plane.¹¹⁶ As Alessandro Portelli has explained, oral history "tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*." Events and acts are recounted not necessarily as they occurred, but as what the interviewees "... wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did." The importance of oral history hence often lies "not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge ... 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true,' and ... this truth may be equally important as factually reliable accounts."¹¹⁷ Furthermore, oral history is inherently dialogic: individual memory— already often shaped by collective experiences and the intertextuality of a lifetime of external references— is recounted to an interviewer within the confines of a particular linguistic code and expectations about the interview's audience. The interviewer then interprets the narrative through their own cultural, social, political, and

¹¹³ Generally speaking, interviewees who had spent the majority of their lives in the United States chose to do the interview in English (perhaps at least in part because I contacted them in English first). However, especially when these interviewees recounted particular dialogs, specifically regional and/or National Socialist vocabulary, or particularly traumatizing events, they often slipped into their native German language.

¹¹⁴ For more on the ethical considerations of oral history interviews, consider: Valerie Yow, "Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research," *The Oral History Review*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1995): 51-66.

¹¹⁵ Leopold von Ranke, "Vorrede," *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535* (Leipzig: G. Reimer, 1824), vi.

¹¹⁶ For a helpful discussion of the notion of "experience," see: Joan Scott, "Experience," *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), 22-41.

¹¹⁷ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (New York, NY: Albany State University of New York Press, 1991), 50-51. For a similar argument related specifically to "national historical consciousness" in the Balkans, consider: Anastasia N. Karakasidou, "Between Oral Memory and Written History: Re-Membering the Past," *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 31-32, 54.

linguistic lens and presents it within the framework of their research. This research, in turn, is reproduced, consumed, and interpreted by audiences who consider the “individual” experience across a new temporal and intellectual distance.¹¹⁸

Despite their dialogic, subjective, and perhaps even ephemeral nature, the oral history accounts gathered for this dissertation were never conceptualized as self-contained and free-floating. Indeed, throughout the research, analysis, and writing of this dissertation, I searched for extra-textual clues related to these oral history narratives.¹¹⁹ The pursuit was successful. For every interview, I found references in secondary literature, other interviews, the 1930s and 1940s press, or archival sources related to the interviewees’ key narratives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, personal recollections did not always align perfectly with archival or press accounts, and oral history narratives provided by one interviewee occasionally conflicted with those of other interviewees. However, a surprising degree of correlation between oral and archival accounts often did emerge. Such convergences and divergences, too, are highlighted and problematized throughout this dissertation.

Ultimately, and in following current theories on micro history and *Alltagsgeschichte*, the oral history sections, too, are conceptualized with the conviction that the “micro” cannot be (re-) constructed without the “macro.” As historians like Alf Lüdtke and Jacques Revel have indicated, individuals always act within a certain social context, whereby the social—and thus the individual—are constituted and reconstituted through the physical, intellectual, and emotional interaction between individuals.¹²⁰ Both individual and collective experiences are not merely embedded within the cultural or

¹¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 3; Camp, *Other Germans*, 9-18; Rosenthal, “National Socialism and Antisemitism in Intergenerational Dialog,” 240-247; Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, “Personal Narrative Research as Intersubjective Encounter,” *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narrative in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 98-125.

¹¹⁹ In the words of the historians John Horne and Alan Kramer: “The analysis of subjectivity is central to historical inquiry, but that does not make historical inquiry a purely subjective affair for the historian.” John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 4. For a similar pursuit combining oral history and archival research, “between history and anthropology,” see: Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood*, xiv-xvi.

¹²⁰ Alf Lüdtke, “Einleitung: Was ist und wer treibt Alltagsgeschichte?,” *Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion Historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*, edited by Alf Lüdtke (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1995), 11-12; Jacques Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” *Jeux D’échelles: La Micro-analyse à L’expérience*, edited by Jacques Revel (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 1996), 21; Belinda Davis, Thomas Lindenberger, and Michael Wildt, “Introduction,” *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn: Historisch-anthropologische Erkundungen* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), 12.

symbolic spheres; they are also centered on *praxis*, whereby action and agency define the individual, constitute the social, and ultimately become the driving force of “history” as such.¹²¹

As historians like Revel have claimed, furthermore, particularly the modern state is constituted not merely of “micro” and “macro” levels of analysis, but also of various intermediary levels that “should be identified experimentally” and with an eye to the plasticity and artificiality of any analytic level constructed.¹²² By engaging in “multiscopic” “*jeux d’échelles*” (“games of scales”), in which various scales of analysis are implemented and continuously reformulated, historians not only gain novel insights; they also “de-center” conventional historiographies more focused on grand narratives and causal explanations.¹²³ Historical writing that engages in a play with, and juxtaposition of, various scales of analysis thus opens a dynamic field, in which individual actors are both constituted by, and constitute, their social realities and cultural contexts; in which the “from above” and the “from below” are mutually constitutive and responsive; in which individual agency and experience gives rise to “plural” and “plastic” “social identities”; and in which attention is also paid to those things perhaps deemed inane by conventional historiographies today.¹²⁴

The plasticity and mutual responsiveness of “micro” and “macro,” as Angelika Epple has shown, further has distinctive repercussions for conceptualizations of transnational, and particularly colonial, enterprises and spaces. Building on the theories of postcolonial historians like Arjun Appadurai and Partha Chatterjee, Epple argues that the “local” and the “global” are constructed spatial categories. Just as the local is not to be taken as “the last refuge for authenticity, autochtony or traditional identity,” so, too, should the “global” not be severed analytically from its many “local” contexts. “Global history,” she writes, “is linked to local affairs, [and] local affairs, ordinary people and singular actors have an impact on global structures.” Epple thus advocates for historiographies that highlight multiscalar, cross-border entanglements, and which

¹²¹ Davis, Lindenberger, and Wildt, “Introduction,” 13-14; Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” 21.

¹²² Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” 30.

¹²³ Paul-André Rosental, “Construire le ‘macro’ par le ‘micro’: Fredrik Barth et la microstoria,” *Jeux D’échelles: La Micro-analyse à L’expérience*, edited by Jacques Revel (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 1996), 141-142; Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” 16-20; Lüdtke, “Einleitung,” 14-18.

¹²⁴ Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” 24.

implement an “actor-centered approach on a local level.”¹²⁵ This dissertation heeds such calls in its comparison between the Batschka and the Western Banat under different conditions of Axis occupation between 1941 and 1944. Analyzing in particular “meso” and “micro”-level sources, it explores the many complex ways in which different forms of “from above,” “colonial” authority affected, and responded to, what had previously been construed as the same ethnic minority. New geographic borders and divergences in political, social, and military conditions influenced even individual children’s experiences and later adulthood recollections, as we shall see. However, the two regions’ *Donauschwaben* populations remained in continuous contact even during the war years, saw similar social developments, and became complicit to, and the victims of, the same wartime and postwar atrocities. Ultimately, it is this balance of similarity and difference, as well as these populations’ continuous interactions and cross-border entanglements, that allow for a fruitful comparison.

5. Chapter Overview

This dissertation is divided into three geographically and chronologically delineated parts, each of which is subdivided into two thematic chapters. Part One is dedicated entirely to the interwar period, from the 1918 dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the integration of the Batschka and the Western Banat into the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to the 1941 Axis invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia. Its two chapters investigate the emergence and proliferation of childhood and youth activism among the *Donauschwaben* in two arenas: the school and the extra-curricular youth group. Exploring first the (heavily Church-influenced) Hungarian legacy of the *Donauschwaben*’s schools, the first chapter shows how Yugoslavia’s mass nationalization of schools in 1920, conflicts over the maintenance of Treaty of St. Germain-stipulated minority language classrooms, and skirmishes between various national and ecclesiastical educational actors spurred a first politicization of childhood and youth among the Batschka’s and the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben*. Frustrations over minority education, this chapter shows, were quickly framed as

¹²⁵ Angelika Eppe, “The Global, the Transnational and the Subaltern,” *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies*, edited by Anna Amelina, Thomas Faist, and Devrim D. Nergiz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 168-170.

“national” grievances, causing *Donauschwaben* leaders and Germany’s Foreign Office, local Protestant and Catholic authorities and the *Reich*’s ecclesiastical offices alike to intervene in the *Donauschwaben*’s affairs.

Chapter Two presents the previously unexplored history of interwar *Donauschwaben* extra-curricular youth mobilization in the Batschka and the Western Banat. Highlighting how frustrations in the formal curricular sphere gave rise to increasingly elaborate extra-curricular programs, this chapter traces the many specifically “German” youth organizations that emerged as activists of various ilk attempted to attract the youngest *Donauschwaben*’s loyalty. By the mid-1930s, explicitly cultural and political organizations, such as the “*Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*” (SDKB, or “*Kulturbund*”), local pro-*Reich* “*Erneuerer*” (“renewers”), Third Reich teachers, *Hitler-Jugend* agents, sports groups, and the Yugoslav state all had entered the youth mobilization race. However, the Catholic and Protestant Churches, too, developed elaborate youth programs and literatures. Even *reichsdeutsche* Catholic and Evangelical (Lutheran) agencies became involved, ironically promoting an image of Christian-National Socialist cooperation while *Reich* authorities were undermining religious associations within Germany. All of these organizations, as we shall see, aimed at “awakening” diverse iterations of “Germanness,” each of which would entail very different “host state” loyalties, religious sentiments, and political proclivities. Through a series of events explained throughout this chapter, the 1930s’ plurality of extra-curricular activities largely dwindled by 1940: over ninety percent of Yugoslavia’s young *Donauschwaben*, by then, had joined the pro-Nazi “*Deutsche Jugend*” (“German Youth”), causing a formidable army of potential home and battle front recruits ready and willing to fight for Hitler’s *Reich*.

Part Two is dedicated to the Western Banat during the period of Axis occupation (1941-1944). After providing a brief overview of the April 1941 Axis occupation and dissolution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the creation of a semi-autonomous, *Reich*-occupied, and ethnic German (“*Volksgruppe*”) administered Western Banat, the section’s first chapter explores the creation of the region’s pro-Nazi *Deutsche Jugend*. Upon investigating the legal measures implemented to ensure the complete mobilization of the region’s ethnic German youth into (the now mandatory) Nazi formations, this chapter uses contemporaneous press and propaganda materials to illustrate the activities, structures, and ideological content of the Western Banat’s *Deutsche Jugend*. Finally, and most significantly, this chapter explores the memories of *Donauschwaben* who had spent

parts of their childhood and/or youth in the German-occupied region. While individual experiences and memories varied tremendously, as we shall see, involvement in Nazi projects became almost unavoidable for children and youth deemed “German.” Participating in programs ranging from Nazi housewife schooling to *Hitler-Jugend* sniper training in the *Reich*, *Wehrmacht* barrack upkeep to local propaganda festivities, and German language instruction for the “*Volkstum*’s maintenance” to athletic drills, the individuals interviewed occasionally saw such activities not only as an onerous burden or as largely insignificant events. Rather, such undertakings, even decades later, were appreciated by some as a key “nationalizing” experience and an avenue of great personal accomplishment.

The dissertation’s fourth chapter further explores the near complete monopoly that National Socialism developed over the Western Banat’s ethnic German organizations after 1941. Looking first at the reformulation of the local German-language school system, this chapter shows how school teachers from the *Reich* and local Nazi educators and administrators initiated a *Gleichschaltung* of the Western Banat’s German-language education. School properties were confiscated from (Yugoslav) state, Jewish, and other minorities’ assets; National Socialist school books and methods entered even the most provincial classrooms; and *Deutsche Jugend* membership became mandatory for these schools’ pupils and dormitory inhabitants. The Catholic and Protestant Churches, as we shall see, did little to counteract such measures. Unlike in the Batschka— where significant national and religious alternatives were maintained— ethnic German youth schemes that were not aligned with the National Socialist cause almost completely disappeared from the archival record, and from individuals’ memories. At least at an official level, “German” became equated with “National Socialist,” a formulation that would bring thousands of youth, voluntarily and coercively, into the arms of *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS* recruiters. However, not all *Donauschwaben* youth accepted such definitions of their “Germanness” during the early 1940s, giving rise to a plurality of opinions, reactions, and recollections.

Part Three of this dissertation is dedicated to the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* between 1941 and 1944. After offering an introduction to the Batschka’s fraught (re-) incorporation into the Hungarian state and a brief overview of Hungary’s interwar ethnic German organizations, the section’s first chapter illustrates the troubled integration of the Batschka’s ethnic German organization (the *Kulturbund*) into Hungary’s main ethnic German umbrella association (the *Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn*). Focusing

especially on the Batschka's *Deutsche Jugend*'s incorporation into its Hungarian-German equivalent, this chapter shows how interwar radicalization had left its mark especially on Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben*, as the Batschka's youth quickly established themselves as a National Socialist vanguard of Hungarian-German associations. Unlike in the Western Banat, however, ethnic German youth in the Batschka were forced to contend with a range of alternate, non-*Deutsche Jugend* organizations. As new Hungarian citizens, they became subject to training in the Hungarian nationalist youth organization (the *levente*); they found themselves as the continuous target of both National Socialist and Catholic youth mobilization schemes; and they were confronted by their own "otherness," as thousands of *reichsdeutsche* youth flocked to the region as part of Germany's "*Kinderlandverschickung*" (wartime child evacuation program). Mass mobilization into the pro-Nazi *Deutsche Jugend*, however, also continued here: even after 1941, over ninety percent of *Donauschwaben* youth were at least officially enrolled in the organization, eliciting conflicting notions of "Germanness" that vacillated, even on an individual level, between fascination for the *Reich*, attraction to the National Socialist project, scepticism (or appreciation) towards the Hungarian "host state," continued involvement with the Church, and a reluctance to abandon previous *Donauschwaben*-specific traditions.

Continuing to employ archival, press, and oral history sources, the dissertation's final chapter explores how the persistent plurality of "German" (youth) organizations in the Hungarian-administered Batschka affected children's and young people's lives even outside their extra-curricular youth groups. Turning first to the formal curricular arena, this chapter shows how the Hungarian and German nation-building projects collided in the classroom, as Hungarian teachers and *Donauschwaben* pupils, private Nazi academies and public Hungarian German minority classrooms, and diverse curricular stipulations clashed over the nature of the Batschka's German-language education. Despite such contestations, the Batschka's German minority succeeded, with the *Reich*'s help, in establishing a formidable network of National Socialist educational institutions during the early 1940s. In these, *Deutsche Jugend* membership again became mandatory. Unlike in the Western Banat, however, the Catholic Church in particular actively countered National Socialist visions of "Germanness," providing Catholic youth with German-specific youth literature, organizations, and activities. *Donauschwaben* children and youth hence became party to the larger bifurcation between pro-Church, pro-Hungarian "*Schwarze*" ("blacks") and pro-Nazi "*Braune*" ("browns") that tore through their

communities. Enrolled in a variety of schools and youth institutions, and with the backing of different Church, family, and peer environments, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* youth themselves engaged in heated debates and physical altercations to defend their own definitions of "Germanness." Such activism, however, was ultimately of little avail. With the *Reich's* occupation of Hungary in March 1944, even individuals who had previously been ostracized for their reluctance towards Nazism were forced to join units like the *Waffen-SS*, causing violence, destruction, and animosities within the *Donauschwaben* communities that reverberate to the current day.

PART I

THE INTERWAR PERIOD, 1918-1941

Chapter 1

Deutsche bilden, Schwaben sein: National Education and Yugoslavia's Donauschwaben Minority Schools, 1918-1941

A. Introduction

On July 20th, 1942, a thirteen-year-old boy traveled to his local photo studio to pose for a portrait. His hair freshly cut and combed, his expression stern, his body upright, he gazed into the camera with a fearful determination. This boy— Peter Reinhardt from Szilberek/Bački Brestovac/Ulmenau¹— had not ventured into the studio to commemorate a communion, wedding, entry into military service, or any other kind of event now frequently captured by these formal photographs in his native Batschka. Rather, he had been summoned by Szilberek's "*Volksdeutsche*" propaganda office to document a crime. In his portrait, Peter was only partially clothed. Clad merely in the trousers, belt, and belt buckle of his Nazi "*Jungvolk*" uniform, it was not his face or uniform which formed the

¹ Geographical names within this region are highly complex, and reflect the multilingual and fluctuating nature of this borderland. Almost all towns had names in multiple languages, reflecting both the languages spoken in the region (particularly within the town in question) and, on a more official level, the language(s) of administration. These town names— even the streets and squares within them— however, also changed over time to reflect geopolitical changes. One of the main archives I have researched in so far, for instance, is located in current-day Zrenjanin (Banat). However, Medieval sources list the city as "Beckerek"; under Habsburg administration, the city was then officially known as Grossbetschkerek or Großbetschkerek (German), Veliki Bečkerek (Serbo-Croatian), and Nagybeckerek (Hungarian). In 1935, the city was renamed "Petrovgrad" after Yugoslav king Peter I. During this time, however, even administrative documents used the previous German, Serbo-Croatian, and/or Hungarian names (largely depending on the language of the document). During the German occupation of the Banat between 1941 and 1944, German documents referred to the city as "Betschkerek," "Gross-Betschkerek," or "Grossbetschkerek," while Serbian correspondence usually maintained the official "Petrovgrad" (Cyrillic Петровград) (although, as in other cases, authorities frequently also could not catch up to the new city names on their pre-printed stationery, so that most documents reflect multiple city names across time). In 1946, the city was named Zrenjanin by the socialist authorities, after Žarko Zrenjanin, an early Partisan victim of the Gestapo. In 1992, the citizens of Zrenjanin voted to maintain this name— the 1946 name therefore still applies. In this dissertation, city names will be given in their three main linguistic variations (German, Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian) of 1918-1944 at their first naming. The city name used within a particular document will be given first. The name used in the document will be given alone in all other namings of the city in subsequent passages, though additional names and/or information may be added for clarification.



Fig. 1.1 Photo of Peter Reinhardt (Szilberek) by Local *Volksbund Propagandaamt*.
Source: AMV/KB 584. “Das Hackenkreuz auf die Brust eingebrandt” [sic] (20.7.1942).

centerpiece of this portrait; it was his chest, which now harbored a striking wound in swastika form.

According to the brief, frequently misspelled German-language memorandum enclosed with this portrait, Peter Reinhardt, a “*volksdeutsche* boy” from Szilberek, had been peacefully herding the cows of his Hungarian “*Dienstgeber*,”² Futo Illés, in the fields between Vepröd/Veprovac/Weprowatz and Szilberek when a “stranger who spoke Serbian” approached him. As the boy attempted to run away in fear, the stranger tripped Peter up, pinned him down with his foot, and pressed a hot, sharp object into the right side of Peter’s chest, which “severely hurt him.” Removing the object, the stranger stood up, pulled out a dagger, looked around, and ran away. As Peter “recovered from his fright,” he realized that he now had a swastika burned into the right side of his chest. The incident was immediately reported to the (Hungarian) gendarmerie.³

² Presumably Illés was Reinhardt’s *Landdienst*-related employee. For more on the *Landdienst*, consider: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 168. As Böhm illustrates, the *Landdienst* became a mandatory component of the *Deutsche Jugend* in regions like Croatia, Serbia, and the Banat after 1941. Required to serve on farms especially around the harvest season, all boys and girls were to learn the agricultural and domestic tasks of “true” Germans in bucolic settings, while also contributing to the war economy. The same Peter Reinhardt appears with his date of birth, family information, and wartime address in the appendix of Szilberek’s postwar *Heimatbuch*. See: Paul Schmidt, *Licht und Schatten über Brestowatz in der Batschka (Bački Brestovac- Szilberek- Ulmenau)* (Königsbach: Heimatausschuss Batsch-Brestovac, 2006).

³ AMV/KB 584, “Das Hackenkreuz auf die Brust eingebrandt” (20.7.1942). Spelling errors in original. Hereupon, “AMV” will denote “Archive of the Museum of Vojvodina” (Novi Sad), and KB will refer to the “Kulturbund” fond therein (the archive’s document numbers, including the original “KB,” will be given for each source).

While it is impossible to verify the veracity of this report— indeed, one could perhaps even surmise that the swastika originated from some kind of boyish dare or prank between “*volksdeutsche*” youth themselves— it is interesting to consider why, in the midst of military conflict and chaos and the very busy agricultural harvest season, the local *Volksbund* propaganda office expended the time and effort to circulate an elaborate story of unprovoked violence against a German boy. The questions this story raises hence form a starting point for the following dissertation sections, which will explore the emergence of youth as a focal point of mobilizations, propaganda, and ethnic, social, political, and religious conflicts within the Batschka and the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* communities.

In order to shed light on these issues, this chapter traces the conflicts and activities surrounding German-language educational institutions and pedagogies within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Between 1918 and 1941, children’s mother-tongue education became not merely a hotbed of national contestation— both on the state and minority levels— but also the very issue around which a *Donauschwaben* “national” identity crystallized. Facing novel conditions in a new nationalizing “host state,” as well as restrictive minority policies that ranged from the nationalization of church properties to the ethnic assignation of school children, both secular and religious *Donauschwaben* actors and agencies began pressing for the cultural and educational autonomy of Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans during the 1920s. Demands for German minority education reverberated from the provincial schoolyard to Gustav Stresemann’s offices, and from local priests to *reichsdeutsche* religious agencies. In their increasingly converging requests, both secular and ecclesiastical actors then became successful especially from the 1930s onwards, as Germany met their pleas with measures ranging from international political pressure to student exchange programs, and from the import of German-language literature to *Reich* funding for specifically “German” educational programs.

As this chapter indicates, the educational struggles of the 1920s and 1930s would become the breeding ground for increasingly “nationalized” and politically ideologized *Donauschwaben* children’s and youth groups in interwar Yugoslavia. It was through activism in the educational sphere that “national” demands first crystallized, both in secular and ecclesiastical programs; it was in activities related to the formal curricular arena that Germany initially became involved, on a cultural, social, and political level, in the affairs of the “average” *Donauschwabe*; it was in the *Donauschwaben* teacher’s academies and associations that later National Socialist youth leaders first met and

developed their programs; and it was through continuous bureaucratic and legal frustrations in the establishment of official minority classrooms that support was fostered for the (more unofficial) extra-curricular mobilization of the next generation. Ultimately, this chapter provides a first glimpse into the mechanisms by which *Donauschwaben* youth became one of the main targets of mounting national, political, and ideological conflicts during the interwar and early World War II periods, as various *Reich*, *Donauschwaben*, religious, and state actors scrambled to win for themselves the sympathies and loyalty of the next generation.

B. The Post-World War I Rise of “National” Projects and the Establishment of the *Kulturbund* in Yugoslavia

The *Donauschwaben* never formed a unified “ethnicity,” let alone “nation,” *per se*. Before the interwar period, any claims to a singular “*Donauschwaben*” population occurred only in the more elite political realm of official group petitions to the Habsburg monarchy. As Thomas Casagrande has shown, one of the first times in which Hungary’s *Donauschwaben* spoke of themselves as such was in 1849, when German-speaking leaders in Vojvodina petitioned the monarchy for local administrative autonomy on the basis of their “German national” membership.⁴ For the most part, however, the *Donauschwaben* remained diversified and split between various dialects, local (town-based, or even Batschka or Banat-based) patriotisms, religious confessions, and folkloric traditions built upon local (usually town-based) interpretations of the cultural heritage of the initial German-speaking settlers in the region.⁵

Particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, certain nation-based formations began prospering among Vojvodina’s German-speaking population. Feeding off a general rise in nation-building rhetoric and activism in post-*Ausgleich* Hungary, the *Ungarländische Deutsche Volkspartei* (“German People’s Party of the Hungarian Lands,” UDV) was founded in Werschetz/Vršac/Versec (Banat) in 1907 as one of the first German-based Hungarian political parties.⁶ Such elite and politically-

⁴ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 112-114.

⁵ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 102-106, 115.

⁶ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 118-119. In a sense, such activities reflect the “corporate-based alliances” of “local elites” common to nineteenth-century monarchies, many of which,

based formations, from the late nineteenth century, were increasingly supplemented by more “popular,” German-based associations in the region. As *Donauschwaben* historians themselves explain, during this time, Vojvodina’s *Donauschwaben* became organized into Church-based, vocational, guild, agricultural, and worker’s formations— including separate youth chapters.⁷ These groups were not necessarily restricted to German speakers. Nevertheless, in a perceived attempt to salvage local cultural and linguistic traditions in the face of Hungary’s mounting late-nineteenth century “Magyarization” policies, more nationally-defined organizations, like local German sports and singing clubs, also arose.⁸ These, however, were generally decentralized, and few and far between.⁹

In the histories penned by former *Donauschwaben* leaders themselves from the early 1960s until the late 1980s, World War I is presented as a watershed moment for the large-scale organization of the *Donauschwaben* and their youth from a “national” perspective. As echoed even in later writings by non-*Donauschwaben* historians, World War I became a point of origins for the *Donauschwaben*’s “national consciousness,” as many of them had come into contact with “*Reichsdeutsche*” for the first time in their lives through joint military service.¹⁰ As one unidentified author of the early 1940s wrote, it

especially towards the turn of the twentieth century, then became a seed for claims to a larger “national” identity. Consider: Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German’ in Habsburg Central Europe,” 110-113.

⁷ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208. Josef Senz was born in Apatin (Batschka) in 1912 and became a minister of German education in Budapest between 1941 and 1944. As described in the dissertation’s introduction, the historiography penned by former *Donauschwaben* themselves can be highly problematic, as they are skewed by a postwar lens stressing the innocence and unknowingness of the *Donauschwaben* on all topics related to National Socialism, World War II, and the Holocaust, as well as an emphasis on German narratives of expulsion, trauma, and victimhood. Furthermore, some of these authors, like Sepp Janko, for instance, were some of the main National Socialist *Donauschwaben* leaders and SS officers in the region— any history written by them therefore is certainly riddled with biases, evasions, and exculpatory explanations. Even individuals who were too young to be leaders during World War II— ie. former *Donauschwaben* children and youth— frequently replicated such reasoning and evasions as put forth by this canon of *Donauschwaben* historiography, including on the “apolitical” nature of youth mobilization within the region. However, as the only literature that has been written on the issues presented in this thesis frequently stems from such *Donauschwaben* authors, a (critical) use of their writings cannot be avoided. For a discussion of historiographical evasion, especially in relation to the *Donauschwaben*’s political organizations and youth mobilization, consider, for instance: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 277-278.

⁸ These “Magyarization” policies are described in more detail later in this chapter.

⁹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208.

¹⁰ Schüller, *Für Glaube, Führer, Volk, Vater- oder Mutterland?*, 35; Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 43-44; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 108-109. Such interpretations must, undoubtedly, be viewed with a critical eye. World War I and a shared front experience as the birthplace of a widespread, popular national consciousness among the *Donauschwaben* had thus been used as an argument by nationalists and, later, National Socialists themselves in an attempt to rally for and justify

was only when “*südostdeutsche*” soldiers came into contact with the “German grandeur and German spirit” of “*Reichsdeutsche*” that they realized “that one is actually German.”¹¹ This “Germanness,” however, seemingly had withered (“*verkümmert*”) under Habsburg rule and intensive Magyarization policies. In comparison to their “*reichsdeutsche*” counterparts, the *Donauschwaben*’s German “pride,” language, customs, and “Germandom” had declined. In 1918, as the “Magyar ruler was replaced by the Slavic one,” the *Donauschwaben*— at least according to their nationalists’ own conceptualizations— thus rose to the occasion and decided to preserve and strengthen their “German consciousness” and “German ways.”¹²

The concept of an immediate and burgeoning *Donauschwaben* “national consciousness” during World War I is a fallacious construct of contemporaneous nationalists and later *Donauschwaben* historians. Indeed, as we shall see, it was only the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, the re-allocation of its territories to various successor states, and the concerted efforts of nationalist activists that spurred a more widespread concern for “national” matters. Suddenly within the framework of a new (nationalizing) state, *Donauschwaben* leaders sought to maintain, if not ameliorate, their status and rights to political and cultural autonomy. After 1918, the League of Nations-dominated international diplomatic sphere offered them a convenient framework within which to express their grievances: that of the national minority.¹³ The Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye— signed between the Allies and the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1919— in particular stipulated that the Yugoslav government safeguard the country’s minorities’ right to establish independent religious, cultural, and educational institutions. By 1920, Yugoslavia’s *Donauschwaben* had seized the opportunity: they founded their first cultural organization, the *Schwäbisch-Deutscher*

their causes. For more on historians’ problematic adoption of nationalist frameworks, see: Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German’ in Habsburg Central Europe,” 113, 122.

¹¹ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 3. Detailed report on *Donauschwaben* activities after World War I, no signatura, author unknown, date unknown (presumably mid-1943 to early 1944). Historical Archive of Zrenjanin, Fond 131, Box 2 (“Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien, Gross-Betschkerek, 1941-1944”). Hereafter, the Historical Archive of Zrenjanin will be denoted as “IAZ” (from “Istorijски Arhiv Zrenjanin,” or “Историјски архив Зрењанин”).

¹² “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 1- 4.

¹³ For more on the manner in which post-Habsburg German-speaking minorities framed themselves as “national” minorities after World War I to navigate new constructs of statehood and citizenship, consider: Judson, “When is a Diaspora not a Diaspora?,” 219-247.

Kulturbund (the SDKB, or *Kulturbund*), opening its headquarters in Novi Sad/Neusatz/Újvidék (Batschka).¹⁴

The precise composition and aims of the *Kulturbund* were variegated and shifted considerably from “old guard,” pro-“host state”, pro-German “national,” and clerical concerns towards the radical right and National Socialism over the course of the 1930s. However, at least according to its founding statutes, the goals of the *Kulturbund* spanned the buttressing of the “material, spiritual, aesthetic, and cultural” “needs” of Yugoslavia’s “German nationality,” including through the distribution of books, art, music, and film; the creation of libraries and educational institutions (also for teachers); the organization of cultural events; and the financing of social works and scientific projects. In addition to Yugoslavia’s Germans more generally, youth especially were to be supported in their “*Erziehung*” (roughly translated: “education”) through the financing and administration of German-language schools and classrooms, teachers, and stipends.¹⁵ The aim of such activities, at least according to a later 1931 formulation of the SDKB statutes, was not merely the “national” education of Yugoslavia’s Germans. Rather, *Donauschwaben* children and youth were also to be raised “in the spirit of a religious-moral life attitude and according to the “loyal fulfillment of the duties towards the [Yugoslav] state.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 210. The Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, signed by the new “Serb-Croat-Slovene State” and the “Principal Allied and Associated Powers” on September 10th, 1919, helped found the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as an autonomous state. It contained multiple provisions that stipulated the Yugoslav state guarantee its minorities’ rights to found independent cultural, religious, and educational institutions (see articles 8 and 9 in particular). “Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, Signed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, September 10, 1919,” *Treaty Series 1919*, No. 17 (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1919), 88-96.

¹⁵ “Satzungen des Schwäbisch-deutschen Kulturbundes” (Novi Sad: Verlag des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes, 1920), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 1; Anton Scherer, Oskar Feldtänzer, Georg Wildmann, et al., *Die Donauschwaben in der Zwischenkriegszeit und ihr Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna: Felix Ermacora Institut, Forschungsstätte für die Völker der Donaumonarchie, 2003), 163-164.

¹⁶ “... im Geist religiös-sittlicher Lebensauffassung ... getreuliche Erfüllung der Pflichten gegenüber dem Staat.” Indeed, the SDKB’s official slogan was “*staatstreu, volkstreu*” (“loyal to the state, loyal to the Volk”). Quoted in: Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 281. As described in a later section of this chapter, the *Kulturbund* was disbanded in 1929 and only re-instituted, according to slightly revised statutes, in 1931. The focus on youth becomes even more apparent with the *Kulturbund*’s 1931 Yugoslav authority-approved statutes. Within these statutes, for instance, the first article (on “how the *Bund* will attempt to fulfill these goals”) singles out the education of youth as a foundation for the attainment of the *Kulturbund*’s greater cultural and educational ambitions. For the complete SDKB statutes, as approved in 1931, see: Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 391-407. Furthermore, it must be stated that especially in questions of the “loyal fulfillment of the duties towards the state,” the *Kulturbund*’s stance became increasingly ambiguous—more on this in later sections on the rise of the right-wing “*Erneuerer*.”

The *Kulturbund*, however, was legally restricted from its inception to purely “cultural” activities. As such, it was not allowed to participate in the political arena.¹⁷ In 1922, *Donauschwaben* leaders founded the *Partei der Deutschen* (PdD). By March 1923, the PdD had brought eight ethnic German representatives into the Yugoslav parliament.¹⁸ Yugoslavia’s German “national” minority had hence established both cultural and political channels through which one of the *Donauschwaben*’s main priorities could be addressed: the education of Yugoslavia’s German-speaking youth.

C. Building the *Donauschwaben* School, 1918-1941

The question of minority schooling— primarily focused on the securing of mother-tongue instruction, classrooms, and schools as a curricular means of safeguarding a minority’s cultural autonomy— was an issue that was neither new nor unique to the ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia.¹⁹ Indeed, minority schools had already become a bone of contention in Vojvodina during the Habsburg period. However, it was only following Austria-Hungary’s dissolution in 1918 that German-language schools became one of the main sites of entanglement between the region’s national, political, social, and clerical actors, German efforts of expansion into the region, and local youth.

This section does not aim at presenting a comprehensive history of the establishment of German-language educational institutions in interwar Yugoslavia.²⁰ Rather, the following passages highlight the manner in which the issue of education became one of the main political and social mobilizers of Yugoslavia’s German minority during the interwar period. Especially following the *Donauschwaben*’s perceived post-

¹⁷ § 3, “Satzungen des Schwäbisch-deutschen Kulturbundes [1920].”

¹⁸ Benedikt Helmlinger, *Bukiner Heimatbuch: Werdegang, Aufstieg und Untergang der deutschen Gemeinde Bukin in der Batschka/Jugoslawien* (Magstadt: Helmlinger, 1974), 208; “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 5. There were 312 parliamentary seats in the Yugoslav parliament in 1923— the *Deutsche Partei*’s proportion of seats in parliament thus represented the just over 2% of voters who had voted for the *Deutsche Partei* and its representatives in March 1923.

¹⁹ As Bethke has shown, for instance, Hungarians in Vojvodina faced similar struggles in their establishment of Hungarian-language schools. Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 211 ff.

²⁰ To a degree, this has already been done by former *Donauschwaben* teachers and more recent historians of Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans. Consider: Josef Volkmar Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben im Königreich Jugoslawien* (Munich: Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerkes, 1969); Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*.

1918 “displacement” into a novel host state, German-language education became a chief rallying ground for larger questions of cultural autonomy, minorities’ legal rights, and the formation of an individual “national” identity. These discussions, however, took place not merely within the the local school district, *Donauschwaben* leaders’ pedagogical essays, or Yugoslavia’s parliament. Rather, the “educational plight” of Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans, even from the early 1920s, became an avenue through which Germany— via diplomatic efforts, funding, exchange programs, and educational materials— became firmly and irrevocably entrenched in the *Donauschwaben*’s (“national”) affairs. As such, it was also within the school system that some of the *Donauschwaben*’s most radical leaders were born, and in which, by the late 1930s, National Socialist aims and tactics had come to dominate the experiences of the Batschka’s and the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* youth.

1. *The Habsburg Legacy*

Education had already been a key concern during the Habsburg era. As early as 1774, Empress Maria Theresia introduced legislation that made schooling for youngsters mandatory. The new laws structured schools according to various educational levels and trajectories, and— at least theoretically— placed them under the monarch’s direct jurisdiction.²¹ A majority of schools within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, however, remained in Church hands: even in 1868, some 95.4% of schools were maintained by the (primarily Catholic) Church. Within these schools, both the language of instruction and much of the curriculum was largely decided on by the local congregation. However, some difficulties arose for the non-Hungarian minorities in Hungary, as teachers and clergy received most of their training in Hungarian, and not in the other requested mother tongues.²²

Following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the relative plurality and autonomy of the Hungarian school system was maintained, at least officially, by new

²¹ Christian Ludwig Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen und Lehrerausbildung in der Vergangenheit,” *Durch Selbsthilfe zur Selbstverwaltung: Beiträge zur donauschwäbischen Schulgeschichte*, edited by Christian Ludwig Brücker (Munich: AG Donauschwäbischer Lehrer im Südostdeutschen Kulturwerk e.V., 1981), 17.

²² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 19; Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 17-19; Moritz Csáky, “Kirche und Schule,” *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918. Band IV: Die Konfessionen*, edited by Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995), 276-281.

school legislation that enabled communities to open two types of school: either community-based and financed schools (to be opened when more than thirty children of school age resided in one district), or state, Church, or private schools according to earlier models. Church schools, within this scheme, maintained a certain autonomy. While, theoretically, their curriculum was to be held in line with that of state schools, the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education only had limited decision-making or monitoring power, and could not, for instance, prescribe or ban certain school books within a religious school. The school system across Hungary, furthermore, was organized comprehensively into optional Kindergartens, the mandatory “*Volksschule*” (for six- to fifteen-year-olds), and ensuing (and optional) “*Bürgerschulen*” (which provided secondary education geared towards practical vocations) or “*Mittelschulen*” (“middle schools”). These “*Mittelschulen*,” in turn, were split into three tracks leading to potential post-secondary education: the humanities-based “*Gymnasium*,” the language-based “*Realgymnasium*,” or the natural science-based “*Realschule*.” Besides various vocational, agricultural, and trade schools, teacher training colleges (“*Lehrerbildungsanstalten*”) further educated youth after their middle school years. A small number of individuals, too, received a university education in larger Hungarian cities such as Budapest, Szeged, or Pécs.²³

Bound to nationalities protection laws after 1867, the Hungarian government had to safeguard mother-tongue education primarily in the earlier years of a child’s educational trajectory.²⁴ Such aspirations, however, soon fell prey to Hungary’s mounting Magyarization policies, measures which— for decades to come— would provide a specter of social demotion and a political platform central to the grievances, activities, and nationalist memories of the Batschka and the Banat’s *Donauschwaben*. The policies, which aimed at the national unification of Hungary’s lands, targeted the school system almost immediately after the Compromise.²⁵ One 1879 law, for instance, required fluency in the Hungarian language of all graduates of non-Hungarian teacher’s training colleges

²³ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 23-24.

²⁴ Consider: Gerald Stourzh, “Die Gleichberechtigung der Volksstämme als Verfassungsprinzip 1848-1918,” *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Band III: Die Völker des Reiches*, edited by Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 1124-1146.

²⁵ Ludwig Gogolák, “Ungarns Nationalitätengesetze und das Problem des magyarischen National- und Zentralstaates,” *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Band III: Die Völker des Reiches*, edited by Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 1223-1234, 1288-1299.

(*Lehrerbildungsanstalten*). In 1883, Hungarian language and literature became a mandatory component of all seventh and eighth-grade classes, while in 1893, the salary of teachers employed in non-state schools was settled at such a low rate that all non-Hungarian teachers were forced to learn the Hungarian language to receive state monetary supplements.²⁶ In 1907, the Apponyi School Laws further dealt a blow to Hungary's non-Hungarian schools. Henceforth, all teachers were to be educated in Hungarian only, promotions became dependent on a teacher's grasp and teaching of the Hungarian language, minority-language lessons in school were reduced to a minimum, and non-Hungarian textbooks were monitored closely and reformulated according to the "Hungarian national spirit." Furthermore, state educational funding was largely reserved for Hungarian state schools. Communities without the means to finance their own schools were forced to hand these over to the government.²⁷ Such measures had a tangible effect: while in 1855 there were approximately 2,400 German *Volksschulen* in Hungary, this number dwindled to 1,262 in 1880, to 867 in 1917, and to 417 by 1918. Two hundred fifty-four of these German-language schools belonged to the Transylvania Saxon Lutheran school system.²⁸ Even in the institutions that had been maintained as German schools, teachers themselves often only spoke a broken German. Moreover, by 1918, Hungary's German minority no longer had a German *Bürgerschule*, *Gymnasium*, *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*, or higher vocational school.²⁹

2. Political Skirmishes Over an Autonomous School System

a. German Minority Schools, 1918-1929

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 was viewed by *Donauschwaben* administrators, activists, and politicians both with trepidation and with a sense of opportunity. Even immediately preceding the complete collapse of the

²⁶ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 25.

²⁷ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 25-27; Friedrich Gottas, "Die Deutschen in Ungarn," *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Band III: Die Völker des Reiches. 1. Teilband*, edited by Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 380-384.

²⁸ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 25-27; Wigant Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege: Schulen—Erziehungsheime und Erziehungsanstalten des Volksbundes der Deutschen in Ungarn—1940-1944* (Rothenburg ob der Tauber: Schneider, 2005), 9-10.

²⁹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 26.

Habsburg Empire, school administrators began “undoing” Magyarization measures in Vojvodina. In territories occupied by Serbian troops, many schools in communities with a German-speaking majority simply switched to (an occasionally broken) German-language tuition.³⁰ From November 1918, *Donauschwaben* leaders then mobilized the educational lobbies and foundations that had already arisen in the pre-War period—including the “*Deutschungarische Schulstiftung*” (the German-Hungarian School Foundation, established in Vienna in 1911)—to demand German cultural autonomy for all German speakers from the newly established (Serbian-controlled) National Council in Novi Sad.³¹ Germans were officially excluded from Novi Sad’s newly established School Council. Nevertheless, German-language classrooms became a guaranteed fact in communities with a German-speaking majority (and, to a degree, with a German-speaking minority) from the 1918/1919 school year. Hungarian was abolished as the main school language in most schools across Vojvodina. Pre-existing *Bürgerschulen*, like the ones in Apatin, Hodschag/Odžaci/Hódság, Palanka, and Vrbas/Werbass/Verbász, further switched to full-time mother-tongue (in this case, mainly German) tuition relatively “seamlessly.” German-language secondary schools that had been closed under Hungarian administration re-opened, like the German *Gymnasium* in Novi Sad, while German-speaking school sections were opened in other towns’ secondary schools, as in Werschetz (Banat) in 1919 and in Novi Vrbas (Batschka) in 1920.³²

In a sentiment that is echoed by *Donauschwaben* historians of the topic, the immediate post-Habsburg era represented a kind of “liberation” from the Magyarization policies perceived as so onerous by contemporaries.³³ As one lengthy school report from 1929/1930— assembled by local school officials under Germany’s tutelage and interest— explains, it was indeed only after the “*Umsturz*” (“toppling”) of Hungary’s reign in the region that (especially non-religious) German classrooms and schools could open again across Vojvodina.³⁴ One letter, sent to the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* in May

³⁰ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 36; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 112.

³¹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 28, 36-37. For more on the pre-World War I establishment of Hungarian German political parties, clubs, and interest groups within the Habsburg monarchy, especially as related to minority (educational) rights issues, and their early ties to Germany’s Foreign Office, see: Gottas, “Die Deutschen in Ungarn,” 387-405.

³² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 36-39.

³³ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 36-38; Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 27-28.

³⁴ Consider, for example, the description on Werschetz’s *Gymnasium* in: “Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/1930,” pp. 27-29, 94-95, PA AA, R 62409. See

1938 by a Johann Jujon from Hetin/Hetény/Hettin (Banat) illustrates this claim fervently. As he describes, everyone in his village was “very happy, that we belong to Yugoslavia today.” Yugoslavia had “given” their town a German elementary school; previously, there was only a Hungarian one. The prior lack of German-language education, for Jujon, was a clear sign of the Hungarian “de-nationalization [*Entnationalisierung*] rafinesse”; indeed, if “during the time of Hungary a German visited a school beyond elementary school, he would turn into the biggest Hungarian, even [into] our enemy.” According to Jujon, especially the town’s elderly German teachers were still rather shaky due to their Hungarian training. Nevertheless he hoped to God “that we will never come to Hungary again ... as that would be our downfall.”³⁵

However, this apparent sense of accomplishment and amelioration on the school front for the *Donauschwaben* would not last long. Indeed, immediately following the signing of the Trianon Treaty on June 4th, 1920— and the settlement of Vojvodina’s borders— the Ministry of Education extended Serbian school law over the region, replacing Habsburg legal remnants and novel minority exceptionalisms.³⁶ On June 6th, 1920, Belgrade’s Ministry of Education nationalized and placed under its purview all schools— whether previously communal, state, private, or religious— across Yugoslavia.³⁷ Beginning with the new school year on September 1st, 1920, all schools were to coordinate their curriculum according to a centralized plan. The main language of instruction was to be Serbo-Croatian (or, in the Slovene lands, Slovenian), and all teachers became state employees who had to prove their proficiency in the state language. The properties (lands, school buildings, libraries, and endowments) of all previous educational institutions— even churches— were confiscated by the state.³⁸

As some historians have indicated, these measures were not intended solely as a way to subjugate Yugoslavia’s minorities; rather, they also represented an attempt to

also: Letter from Belgrade’s *Deutsche Gesandtschaft* with enclosed report, “Das deutsche Schulwesen in Südslawien” (20.2.1922), p. 2, PA AA, R 62408.

³⁵ Letter from Johann Jujon to the DAI (5.5.1938), pp. 3-4, BArch R57/neu/1070 Bd. 40.

³⁶ For interesting studies on Yugoslavia’s interwar educational policies, especially as they related to the country’s ongoing nation-building project, see: Pieter Troch, “Between Tribes and Nation: The Definition of Yugoslav National Identity in Interwar Yugoslav Elementary School Curricula,” *Südost-Forschungen*, vol. 69, no. 70 (2010/2011): 152-181; Pieter Troch, “Between Yugoslavism and Serbianism: Reshaping Collective Identity in Serbian Textbooks between the World Wars,” *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2012): 175-194.

³⁷ Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 28; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 50.

³⁸ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 53-55. For a complete German-language translation of this law, consider: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 189-191.

replace the “Anglo-Saxon pluralistic” educational (minority) practices with a French-influenced, centralized and secularized school system.³⁹ Such initiatives, however, became almost impossible to coordinate with Yugoslavia’s minority rights stipulations, as enforced (at least in theory) by the Treaty of St. Germain.⁴⁰ Under requirements to provide all minority children with mother-tongue instruction, the Ministry of Education established German-language “*Schulabteilungen*” (school sections) and “*Parallelklassen*” (parallel classes) in (now effectively state-run, Serbian) schools. In order to obtain a minority language classroom in a *Volksschule*, however, minority communities had to prove that at least sixty students in the vicinity were mother-tongue speakers of this language. In general middle schools, thirty students were necessary; in *Gymnasien*, twenty.⁴¹ Even within these parallel classes, several hours per week of Serbo-Croatian lessons were mandatory. “National history” and geography, furthermore, were only taught in Serbo-Croatian (or Slovenian), regardless of children’s ability to understand the language.⁴²

Unfazed by these new conditions, the *Kulturbund* launched campaigns to motivate Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans to sign up for German school sections. One flyer from 1921, printed on red paper and distributed to households around Novi Sad, thus urged all “German-feeling parents” (“*deutschführenden Eltern*”) to sign up their children for the German parallel class at Novi Sad’s *Staatsgymnasium*. Only with the appropriate number of students would the German “wish” of a German school section—which had been abolished during the previous year through Yugoslavia’s nationalization policy—come true.⁴³ In many cases, such parallel classes were indeed established. In the case of Novi Vrbas’ *Obergymnasium*, for instance, some 321 German-speaking students were enrolled in German parallel classes by the 1920/1921 school year alone.⁴⁴ In many other cases, however, attempts at maintaining German-language instruction were frustrated by both official and unofficial obstacles.

Granted opportunities to maintain German-language classes at least in theory, Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans nevertheless faced hurdles in the realization of their

³⁹ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 211.

⁴⁰ For more on these international treaties, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 35-36. Also see: “Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (September 10th, 1919),” articles 8 and 9.

⁴¹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 55-56; Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 28-29.

⁴² Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 28-29.

⁴³ Flyer, “Deutsche Parallelklassen am Staatsgymnasium in Neusatz,” BArch R57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 1; Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 29.

⁴⁴ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 60.

educational rights. As one February 1922 report by the German legation in Belgrade to Berlin's Foreign Office explained, Yugoslavia's minority school situation was not only legally complex and frequently vague; these laws' implementation, too, vacillated very much depending on the local (Yugoslav) administrators.⁴⁵ Some administrators had employed a range of tactics to prevent the establishment of German parallel classes in the first place. In Werschetz, for instance, the secondary school's German section (established in 1919) closed again in 1922. The school's director purportedly had systematically bullied and failed his German-speaking students in the previous years, so that parents became reluctant to consider sending their children to school. Any German-speaking parents still interested in the German parallel sections by the fall of 1922 then simply missed the enrollment date, as the school's director held the enrollments a day before the date that he had announced in the German-speaking press. Now lacking the necessary number of German students, all parallel classes were simply disbanded.⁴⁶

One of the most disputed practices in the realm of minority education, from the early 1920s, included the so-called "name analysis" ("*Namensanalyse*"). In order to open minority educational classrooms and institutions, it was necessary to determine how many children belonged to which minority. Rather than allowing individuals to declare their own ethnicity (or in this case, to allow parents to state their children's ethnicity and, related herewith, mother tongue), Yugoslav officials examined the name of any student who wished to enroll in a minority school section. If the student— or, in particularly contentious cases, any of the student's parents and grandparents— had a name that sounded even vaguely Slavic, the student was automatically enrolled in a regular Serbo-Croatian school or school section.⁴⁷ Precise statistics for the early 1920s are difficult to come across. Nevertheless, according to a 1928/1929 school report, at least one thousand German-speaking children in Vojvodina had been deprived of mother-tongue instruction in the first-year enrollments for that academic year alone. By 1929, between ten thousand and twelve thousand German-speaking children across Yugoslavia had never set foot in a German-language classroom due to name analysis measures alone.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Report, "Das deutsche Schulwesen in Südslawien" (20.2.1922), p. 2, PA AA, R 62408.

⁴⁶ Letter from Belgrade's *Deutsche Gesandtschaft* (6.10.1922), PA AA, R 73197.

⁴⁷ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 56-57; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 215-216; "Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/30," pp. 25-27, PA AA, R 62409.

⁴⁸ "Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/30," 27; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 115.

However, even when Vojvodina's German minority managed to maintain some German-language classrooms, such challenges did not abate. One of the main issues faced by the German minority included a lack of qualified German-speaking teachers. Already in April 1920, a report sent to Berlin's Foreign Office expressed concerns that "Swabian" schools in Vojvodina mainly offered Hungarian tuition, as most qualified teachers (even if they had originally declared themselves as "Germans") had been trained in Hungarian.⁴⁹ Teachers with sufficient German skills were, furthermore, Yugoslav state employees after 1920. As such, they were required to prove their proficiency in Serbo-Croatian in order to maintain their license. German-speaking teachers who managed to re-qualify nevertheless could then be placed into any school district, even into a district that was entirely Serbo-Croatian speaking.⁵⁰ As a result of such policies, it is estimated that by the 1928/1929 academic year, only 412 qualified German-speaking teachers remained in all of Yugoslavia. Out of a total 584 German school sections, only 378 were actually taught by a German-speaking teacher. German-language classrooms, furthermore, were filled with at least twice as many students as Serbo-Croatian ones: in the Banat, German one-teacher *Volksschule* classrooms contained an average of 53.2 students, while in the Batschka, this average hovered around 65.6 pupils.⁵¹

Such impossible conditions were compounded by curricular difficulties. Following additional school laws issued by the Ministry of Education in 1925 and 1926—partially in an attempt to centralize and regulate Yugoslavia's school system, as well as to more explicitly address minority school issues—a centralized curriculum became mandatory.⁵² This curriculum prescribed at least four weekly hours of Serbo-Croatian lessons in minority classrooms, as well as several weekly lessons (in Serbo-Croatian or Slovenian) in history and geography.⁵³ In Vojvodina's German minority classrooms, this essentially meant that in the first grade, pupils learned the German Gothic and Latin scripts. From the second grade, they then added the Serbo-Croatian Latin and Serbian Cyrillic scripts to their repertoire. Within the span of two years, pupils were hence confronted by not merely at least two foreign languages (to the degree that "*Hochdeutsch*"— "high

⁴⁹ Letter from German Embassy in Vienna to Berlin's Foreign Office (3.4.1920), PA AA, R 62408.

⁵⁰ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 61-62.

⁵¹ "Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/30," 42-44, 46.

⁵² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 60; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 216.

⁵³ "Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/30," 30-37; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 70-71.

German”— was also foreign to many); they also attempted to acquire literacy in four alphabets, in print and in cursive.⁵⁴ Furthermore, school books— especially in German— were lacking. Initially, German grammar books generally were restricted to German-language textbooks for Serbo-Croatian speakers; other German books represented a makeshift (and frequently linguistically flawed) translation of Serbo-Croatian texts. As a result, teachers employed (generally covert) channels to acquire at least some German-language books, usually from Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia.⁵⁵

Considering these obstacles, one of the German minority’s most urgent cultural and political platforms quickly became the securing and reform of German-language education in Yugoslavia. The *Kulturbund*, established in June 1920, already made its first demands to the Yugoslav Ministry of Education in July 1920 under the leadership of Georg Grassl. Submitting an official “School Program of the *Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*” to the education minister in Belgrade that month, the *Kulturbund*’s demands included guarantees for the maintenance of German-language Kindergartens, primary, middle, and secondary schools, teachers’ training colleges, and vocational institutes, as well as the inclusion of German-language materials (from Germany or Austria if necessary) in German-language tuition.⁵⁶ Lacking any political clout (as discussed above, the SDKB was restricted to cultural activities only), the *Kulturbund* turned increasingly to the *Partei der Deutschen* to petition the Yugoslav government from within parliament.⁵⁷ The effects of such activities, however, were negligible. Indeed, from the Party’s founding until the dissolution of the Yugoslav parliament in 1929, the PdD could not pass a single law or amendment through parliament.⁵⁸

Frustrated by their inability to enact reform from within Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia’s German organizations increasingly turned to Germany instead to support their educational and cultural “needs.” Germany had nurtured an interest in Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans at least since the establishment of Yugoslavia. From the 1920s, the education of ethnic Germans abroad, too, became an explicit priority. According to a German Foreign Office memorandum from November 1922, it was Germany’s responsibility to support and “strengthen” German culture abroad, especially through a

⁵⁴ “Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/30,” 38, 43.

⁵⁵ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 45.

⁵⁶ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 47-48, 183-184.

⁵⁷ Consider: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 66-67, 76-77.

⁵⁸ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 52-53. The events of 1929 are further explained later in this chapter.

close “tying” of the thirty to forty million “*Auslandsdeutsche*” to the “*Heimat*.” One of the pillars of such work would be youth. As the memorandum states, especially youth would have to be steered away from the now globally prevalent “passionate hatred towards Germandom.” Their education through German-speaking institutions, German literature, and German-speaking extra-curricular (even religious) activities would form a cornerstone to the maintenance of German influence abroad.⁵⁹

In the case of Yugoslavia’s “*Auslandsdeutsche*,” Weimar Germany remained true to its word. In April 1920, Germany’s Foreign Office already discussed the possibility of sending German school books and other literature to Yugoslavia to help support the “*schwäbische Volksschulen*” there, and to “make good propaganda” and provide the local German-speaking population with “good German *Kost*” (“nourishment”) once again. Considering reports they had received on the dire lack of German teachers in Yugoslavia, furthermore, the Foreign Office even considered sending to the region some of the “now superfluous teachers in Germany,” who had emigrated to Germany from its pre-World War I, annexed territories.⁶⁰ Very little about these particular activities can be found in the archival record of the early 1920s. Nevertheless, as one letter from October 1922 indicates, Germany did begin to pour funding into *Donauschwaben* organizations and press during this time. Following inquiries by *Kulturbund* leader Dr. Stefan Kraft, for instance, the German government agreed to provide the *Deutsches Volksblatt*—the *Kulturbund*’s newly established newspaper— with printing presses and subsidies. This gift, at least according to the ministry representative in charge, would not only provide Germany with a direct channel to “most solidly support the German standpoint” in the region; rather, through the placement of German articles and advertisements in the *Kulturbund* press, the German economy itself might benefit.⁶¹

While direct support for Yugoslavia’s German-language education, for the first years of the 1920s, cannot be ascertained based on the archival record, it is nevertheless apparent that the German “school problem” in Yugoslavia was monitored closely by Weimar German officials.⁶² Dozens of reports dedicated to the closing of German-

⁵⁹ “Aufzeichnung für den Herrn Reichsminister” (29.11.1922), PA AA, R 28554, fol. D 684428-D684430.

⁶⁰ Letter (3.4.1920), p. 2, PA AA, R 62408.

⁶¹ Letter from Keller to German Foreign Office (5.10.1922), PA AA, R 73189.

⁶² As throughout the dissertation, the “archival record” here refers to all archives cited within the thesis, as well as additional libraries and archives checked with no results (such as the Historical Archive of Novi Sad or the Historical Archive of Sombor).

language schools and classrooms, novel educational restrictions, and similar concerns circulated in the German Foreign Office from 1920 onwards. Many of these resulted from inquiries to and from the German legation in Belgrade. Others surrounded personal visits by *Kulturbund* leaders like Grassl and Kraft in Berlin, or by German officials and academics in Yugoslavia.⁶³

According to the Foreign Office even in 1922, while it was necessary to support German cultural concerns and education abroad, any such activities would have to be carried out with utmost prudence to not disturb Germany's diplomatic relations with other countries.⁶⁴ It is therefore perhaps not surprising that at least initially, support for German minority projects in Yugoslavia remained limited, or under the radar. However, at least some of this caution was thrown to the wind in 1924, when, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the *Kulturbund* was shut down for three years and all of its assets were distributed to the Yugoslav state.⁶⁵ By 1925, Foreign Office reports confirmed Germany's sending of German materials, such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, and books, to support Yugoslavia's German minority, especially in educational matters.⁶⁶ Even smaller organizations, like the *Sächsische Jungenschaft*, began sending German language books to Yugoslavia.⁶⁷ By January 1928, an annual budget had been established within the German Foreign Office to help support German-language teachers, writers, extra-curricular schooling (such as winter courses, agricultural training, or classes for the illiterate), and youth projects in Yugoslavia. That year, over 41,000 *Reichsmark* flowed to the *Kulturbund* alone for such purposes.⁶⁸ By 1929, the *Verein für das Deutschtum im*

⁶³ Consider: Letters (27.6.1923 and 5.1.1924), PA AA, R 73201; letter (6.10.1922), PA AA, R 73197; letters (3.4.1920, 6.1920, 14.10.1921, and 6.10.1922), PA AA, R 62408.

⁶⁴ "Aufzeichnung für den Herrn Reichsminister" (29.11.1922).

⁶⁵ The reasons for the SDKB's shutting down on 11.4.1924 are not entirely clear. Officially, its activities were suspended by the Yugoslav government for pursuing activities outside of the realm of its officially sanctioned statutes. However, as at least German historians have claimed, this may have also been an act of retaliation for the "poor treatment" of Carinthia's Slovenian minority, as well as for the PdD's behavior in the previous parliamentary elections. Georg Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte. Band III. Die Tragödie der Selbstbehauptung im Wirkfeld des Nationalismus der Nachfolgestaaten 1918-1944* (München: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 2010), 496-497; Helmlinger, *Bukiner Heimatbuch*, 209; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 118.

⁶⁶ Letter to *Deutsche Mittelstelle für Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung*, Leipzig (3.5.1925), PA AA, R 62408.

⁶⁷ Letter from *Sächsische Jungenschaft* to German Foreign Office (30.7.1926), PA AA, R 62408.

⁶⁸ Letter from Keks to DAI (16.1.1928), BArch R 8043/1554, fol. 121-125. In Germany, a mine, steel, or railway industry worker in 1929 earned an average wage of one *Reichsmark* per hour. *Die große Chronik-Weltgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Band 15: Der Erste Weltkrieg und seine Folgen*, edited by Detlef Wienecke-Janz et al. (Munich: Wissen Media Verlag GmbH, 2008), 368.

Ausland (VDA) was further sending crates of German books to Yugoslavia. By 1932, such freight— now shipped via German embassies, consulates, and delegations directly to various German-language schools and classrooms— included equipment necessary for science and zoology classes by a technical company in Göttingen, maps, charts, and globes from a Leipzig company, as well as educational materials directly from the VDA.⁶⁹

By the mid- to late 1920s, Germany was therefore firmly involved in the educational affairs of Yugoslavia's German minority. However, its activities— as perceived by contemporaries— represented a mere metaphorical drop in the ocean. Worse yet, they also operated on the fringes of illegality. As discussed above, the control of educational materials was in the hands of the Yugoslav state; educators, furthermore, had to be state employees. Any even temporary dispatching of “*reichsdeutsche*” educators to Yugoslavia was therefore tricky. Initiatives started during the mid-1920s, whereby Yugoslav German teachers were to be sent to Germany over the summer holidays for training, for instance, were further frequently hindered by Yugoslav officials' refusal to issue passports and visas to Yugoslav German teachers for such purposes.⁷⁰ Germany hence realized fairly quickly that, in order to support Yugoslavia's German minority, it would need to turn to diplomacy.

In the post-World War I, League of Nations-dominated diplomatic landscape, Germany held little clout. Initially a non-member of the League of Nations, there was not much that Germany could do in the international arena to pressure Yugoslavia to maintain its minority rights obligations in the educational sphere. This seems to have become such a concern for Germany that, by January 1925, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann circulated a confidential memorandum requesting more information on the possible implications and utility of Germany's accession to the League in order to “ensure the cultural autonomy” of the German minorities abroad.⁷¹ By September 1926, Germany had joined the League of Nations. Discussions of Yugoslavia's German minority— held mainly within and between the *Kulturbund* and Germany's Foreign Office— ensued soon thereafter. As a series of letters by the Foreign Office explained in the spring of 1929, any initiative to submit a complaint to the League of Nations would need to arise from Yugoslavia's German minority itself; this move, moreover, would need to be carefully

⁶⁹ Letter (25.6.1929), PA AA, R 73907b; letters (20.9.1932, 13.9.1932, and 8.11.1932), PA AA, R 62409.

⁷⁰ See, for instance: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 76.

⁷¹ Letter by Stresemann (13.1.1925), PA AA, R 28554, fol. D 684447-D 68449.

considered, as Germany did not want to taint its diplomatic ties to Yugoslavia.⁷² Furthermore, the results of previous complaints to the League by Yugoslavia's minorities— such as one filed by Yugoslavia's Macedonian minority in 1928 demanding more cultural autonomy and minority school protection— would need to be considered.⁷³ Finally, as additional correspondence suggested, it might be sensible to submit any complaint concurrently with that of Yugoslavia's Hungarian minority. The Hungarian minority indeed was somewhat better prepared. Furthermore, it had suffered similar discrimination in the educational sphere, experiencing “name analysis” practices, the shutting down of minority schools and classrooms, and the mass firing of Hungarian teachers due to lacking Serbo-Croatian language skills.⁷⁴

Despite these impediments, Stefan Kraft traveled to Geneva to attend the League of Nations meeting in September 1929. According to a German Foreign Office report, Dr. Kraft spent several days there trying to “stir interest” in the “threatening situation of Germandom” in Yugoslavia with the ministers of various countries, especially the German, British, and Yugoslav. Apparently, he was able to speak to Stresemann personally. Stresemann, in turn, expressed his displeasure about Yugoslavia's minority school policies to Yugoslav Foreign Minister Vojislav Marinković over a diplomatic breakfast. Concerned especially about Yugoslavia's economic relations with Germany, Marinković assured Stresemann that Yugoslavia's most restrictive educational laws and policies would be looked into and revised according to the 1919 minority protection laws. As the report concludes, however, no such actions were taken.⁷⁵

b. German Minority Schools, 1929-1941

By the League of Nations' September 1929 meeting, statesmen, *Donauschwaben* leaders, and Yugoslavia's German minority had, in fact, already faced an entirely novel

⁷² Telegram (25.5.1929) and letter (21.5.1929), PA AA, R 73169.

⁷³ The German Foreign Office began collecting many such reports from the mid-1920s. Consider: “Petitions of the ‘Balkan Committee’” (10.7.1928) and “Minorités dans le Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovenes. Petition du ‘Balkan Committee’, de Londres. Note du Secrétaire général” (20.11.1928), PA AA, R 73169.

⁷⁴ Letters (4.1929 and 26.9.1929), PA AA, R 73169. For more on the Hungarian petition to the League of Nations, consider: Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 361-369.

⁷⁵ Report, “Besprechungen in Genf über die Lage deutscher Minderheit in Südslawien” (20.9.1929), PA AA, R 73169.

situation. In June 1928, a shooting had occurred in the Yugoslav parliament. Puniša Račić (from the People's Radical Party) had shot and wounded members of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), killing several, including the HSS' leader, Stjepan Radić. On January 6th, 1929, King Alexander suspended the constitution and proclaimed the newly named "Kingdom of Yugoslavia" a royal dictatorship. All parties and organizations based on national, ethnic, or religious principles became illegal within the new state. The *Kulturbund*, the *Partei der Deutschen*, and all other German-based organizations— as well as their counterparts for Yugoslavia's other minorities— were shut down, and their properties confiscated. Even minority-based theater performances, dances, lectures, and all similar cultural activities were outlawed to help promote an "integral Yugoslavism."⁷⁶

One of the most crucial agendas during this period became the complete unification of Yugoslavia's school system— an aim that, according to Carl Bethke, had formed a potential "prestige project" for some time, but had been largely unrealizable prior to the dictatorship.⁷⁷ A first new law regarding middle school education was introduced on August 31st, 1929, which placed all middle schools under the Yugoslav government's direct control. Private middle schools would no longer be tolerated. Furthermore, any private middle schools that had already existed would only be able to continue their tuition after passing a series of government-coordinated inspections, which tested everything from the quality of instruction to the school buildings' hygienic conditions. Private middle school-level tutoring even outside the classroom deemed contrary to "the interests of the school or the state" and against the now compulsory "national education," moreover, would be illegal.⁷⁸ Additional laws introduced on September 27th, 1929, further deemed any non-state, private, and/or minority-based teacher training colleges (such as the *Lehrerbildungsanstalten* that the German minority had hoped for) illegal. Finally, only school materials (including textbooks) issued by the state were to be used within

⁷⁶ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 341-342; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 141-142. For more on interwar Yugoslavism, consider: Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Connie Robinson, "Yugoslavism in the Early Twentieth Century: The Politics of the Yugoslav Committee," *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia: Key Issues and Controversies*, edited by Dejan Djokic and James Ker-Lindsay (London: Routledge, 2011), 10-26; *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, edited by Dejan Djokic (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003).

⁷⁷ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 342.

⁷⁸ For a full German-language translation of this law, see: "Amtsblatt des Königreichs der Serben, Kroaten und Slovenen. Das Gesetz über die Mittelschulen" (17.9.1929), PA AA, R 73197.

Yugoslavia's schools. Minorities, however, could produce their own school materials with the Ministry of Education's explicit permission.⁷⁹

On December 5th, 1929, these laws were followed by a Yugoslav-wide "*Grundschulgesetz*" (primary school law). Henceforth, a unified, compulsory, eight-grade school system was introduced. The curriculum taught in all Yugoslav schools was to raise children according to the spirit of "national unity." As such, all minority children would have to attend "preparatory classes" ("*Vorbereitungsklassen*") from the age of five to learn Serbo-Croatian (or Slovenian) before their formal entry into school.⁸⁰ At least officially, the first four primary school years were to be conducted in a child's mother tongue. Nevertheless, Serbo-Croatian (or Slovenian) was to be taught from the first year, and parallel sections "in the language of the foreigners" (in the law's phrasing) could—again—only be opened if at least thirty children with the same minority mother tongue lived in the same school district. Teachers had two years to prove their fluency in Serbo-Croatian; otherwise, they would be fired. Furthermore, mandatory subjects now included not only the "national language" and "national history" (taught in Serbo-Croatian or Slovenian), science, health, religion (in the mother tongue, if possible), math, and music; rather, sports according to the "Sokol system" also became mandatory.⁸¹

This new array of legislation dealt Yugoslavia's minority schools quite a blow: between 1929 and 1930 alone, 131 Hungarian *Bürgerschulen* were closed, and the number of Hungarian-language classrooms shrank from 812 to 528. The numbers for

⁷⁹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 210-211. Such provisions were also included into the middle school laws of 1929 (see citation above).

⁸⁰ These "*Vorbereitungsklassen*" became especially unpopular among the German minority. As the "Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/1930" report claims (on page 22), these preparatory classes were regarded mainly as a forum for "Slavicization," driven by "fanatic Slavicization apostles" ("*fanatische Slawisierungsapostel*"). PA AA, R 62409.

⁸¹ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 342-343; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 87-90. For an almost complete translation of this school law, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 211-216. The Sokol was created in 1862 in Prague as a pan-Slavic sports organization and was introduced to Serbia in 1891. Nominally dedicated to physical training, the Sokol was instrumentalized to spread a Yugoslavist identity even prior to World War I; after 1929, it became a centralized, state-controlled organization. In 1934, Sokol membership became required of all Yugoslav citizens (male and female) up to the age of twenty. For an overview of the Sokol's rise, decline, and ideological connections to interwar Yugoslavism, consider: Aleksandar Jakir, "Die Sokol-Bruderschaft zwischen den Weltkriegen in Dalmatien," *Brüderlichkeit und Bruderzwist: Mediale Inszenierungen des Aufbaus und des Niedergangs politischer Gemeinschaften in Ost- und Südosteuropa*, edited by Tanja Zimmermann (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2014), 99-114. The Sokol will also be described in more detail in the following chapters.

German-language schools and classes were similar.⁸² However, it was particularly Yugoslavia's German minority that launched an offensive against such policies. In place of the now dissolved *Kulturbund*, minority leaders like Grassl, Kraft, and Bishop Philipp Popp (of whom we will hear more in the sections on religious organizations) formed the *Liga der Deutschen für Völkerbund und Völkerverständigung* (the "League of Germans for the League of Nations and National Cooperation") in Belgrade in May 1929.⁸³ With this organization, *Donauschwaben* leaders were able to create sufficient diplomatic pressure through the League of Nations— Kraft's September 1929 visit to Geneva here was just one example—that the Yugoslav government eventually backed down on certain policies and practices to help avoid another official suit with the League.⁸⁴

In September 1930, the Yugoslav Ministry of Education began offering concessions to the German minority. Enrollment into German-language classes was henceforth officially to occur not by "name analysis," but by a parental declaration of ethnicity. Six years of primary education in German would be guaranteed wherever thirty German-speaking children lived. Private Kindergartens could be established, Serbo-Croatian lessons would only begin in the third grade, and German teachers could give extra-curricular German lessons to the (very few) German-speaking illiterate.⁸⁵ By November 1930, the Yugoslav Ministry of Education further notified Georg Grassl that the establishment of a German *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* would now become legal.⁸⁶ On April 14th, 1931, the *Kulturbund* was officially re-instituted. Two months later, the *Schulstiftung der Deutschen des Königreichs Jugoslawien* (the "School Foundation for the Germans of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia") was established, creating an organization through which Yugoslavia's Germans could independently (and eventually through *Reich* aid) finance their own educational institutions.⁸⁷

As a result of these concessions, German minority schooling saw a considerable upswing over the following years. In January 1931, at least fifty new German parallel school sections were authorized.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the German minority accomplished one

⁸² Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 343.

⁸³ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 80.

⁸⁴ Consider: Report, "Besprechungen in Genf über die Lage deutscher Minderheit in Südslawien" (20.9.1929), p. 5, PA AA, R 73169.

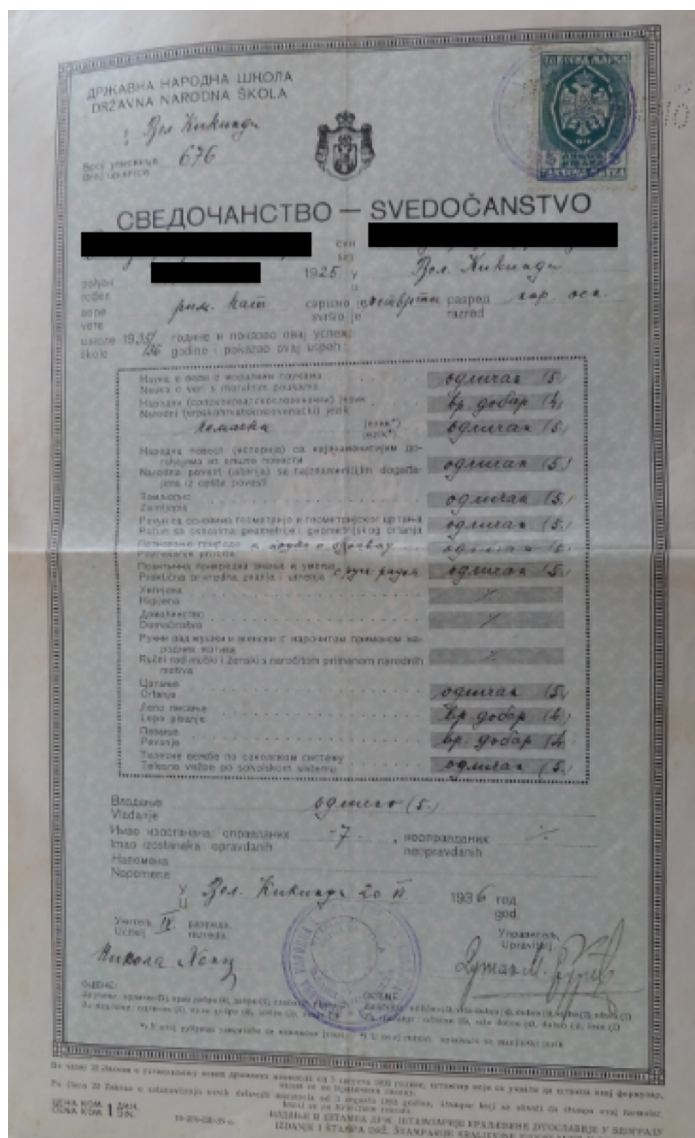
⁸⁵ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 95-96.

⁸⁶ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 97.

⁸⁷ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 347.

⁸⁸ Letter including "Verzeichnis der vom Unterrichtsministerium bisher genehmigten neuen deutschen Schulabteilungen" (23.1.1931), PA AA, R 62409.

Fig. 1.2 German Student's Report Card from Yugoslav State School, 1936.
 Source: Private collection, Max Becker*.
 Censored by author as per agreement signed by interviewer and interviewee.



of its most important goals: the establishment of a German-language teacher training academy, the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* (LBA). Opened in October 1931 in Gross Betschkerek/Veliki Bečkerek/Nagybecskerek (today's Zrenjanin, Banat) on the premises of a former monastery, the LBA provided Yugoslavia's German minority with a possibility that it had sought for years: to educate German-speaking teachers, in German, for service in German-speaking schools.⁸⁹ Seizing the opportunity to help Yugoslavia's Germans take advantage of their “first rights ... since their affiliation with the Yugoslav state,” the German Foreign Office began channeling funds into the LBA months before

⁸⁹ The LBA was moved to Novi Vrbas/Neu Werbass/Ujverbasz (Batschka) in 1933. Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 347. For the original negotiations and rental contract for the LBA premises, see: Letters (2.5.1931, 8.6.1931) and “Übereinkommen” (7.1932), PA AA, R 62409.

its gates even officially opened. In addition to the 75,000 *Reichsmark* Germany put towards the construction of new German-language *Bürgerschulen*, some 30,000 also went to the construction of the LBA that year alone.⁹⁰ Furthermore, despite the legal restriction that all educators in Yugoslavia had to be Yugoslav citizens, Germany further sent (sometimes with permission by Education Minister Božidar Maksimović) fully VDA-funded instructors to train teachers at the LBA from 1932.⁹¹ Finally, Germany's Foreign Office regularly dispatched educational materials to the LBA, despite a legal moratorium on all non-state issued school books.⁹²

Literature related to the education of Yugoslavia's German minority increasingly circulated among the *Donauschwaben* not only in the form of German texts for children and youth. Rather, starting in the late 1920s, *Donauschwaben* children and youth themselves became the focus of pedagogical texts, partially provided—once again—by Germany. On September 1st, 1928, the *Kulturbund* launched *Unsere Schule* ("Our School"), a pedagogical periodical that, after 1932, formed a supplement to the *Kulturbund*'s tri-monthly *Volkswart* ("Volk's Caretaker") journal. According to *Unsere Schule*'s first issue, the publication's aim was to educate "all concerned friends of our offspring" (including teachers, professors, and parents) on the curricular and educational "Erziehung" of Yugoslavia's Germans. As such, it framed itself as "an advocate of the cultural and material needs of our schools and teachers, a mediator and discussant of rules, reforms, and other necessities related to the school system, and an advisor in all school and educational questions."⁹³ As becomes apparent from the German Foreign

⁹⁰ Letter (12.3.1931), pp. 1-2. PA AA, R 62409.

⁹¹ Letter from *Deutsche Gesandtschaft* (11.4.1931), PA AA, R 62409. One such *Reichsdeutsche* teacher, Dr. Richard LeMang, became the LBA's "Oberstudienleiter" (director of studies)—see: letters (19.10.1931, 26.7.1932, and 25.8.1932), PA AA, R 62409. According to the LBA's first annual report, Dr. LeMang also began teaching German language, geography, and history that year. "Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt mit Öffentlichkeitsrecht in Veliki Bečkerek: Bericht über das Schuljahr 1931-1932," PA AA, R 62409. For more on LeMang's biography, consider: Brücker, "Deutsche Schulen," 214-215. During this time, Germany also sent pedagogical experts to Yugoslavia more casually, as in 1932 when the teacher Wilhelm Becker traveled throughout Vojvodina to present Germany's newest pedagogical methods. Report, "Pädagogische Kurse des Lehrers Wilhelm Becker aus Hornbach im Odenwald, veranstaltet vom Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbunde in der Zeit v. 15. bis 25. August 1932," BArch R57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 1.

⁹² Letters (20.9.1932, 13.9.1932, and 8.11.1932), PA AA, R 62409.

⁹³ "Als besorgte Freundin unseres Nachwuchses, als Fürsprecherin der kulturellen und materiellen Bedürfnisse unserer Schulen und Lehrer, als Vermittlerin und Besprecherin von Verordnungen, Neuerungen und sonstigen Notwendigkeiten auf dem Gebiete des Schulwesens, als Ratgeberin in allen Schul- und Erziehungsfragen will 'Unsere Schule' ihre Aufgabe erfüllen." Quoted in: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 76.

Office's annual *Kulturbund* budget, *Unsere Schule* was financed by Germany from the very beginning.⁹⁴ As such, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the publication, from the start, became an advocate not only for local "Germandom," but also for Germany and, ultimately, for the *Reich*.

Most of the *Unsere Schule* issues are dedicated to questions and events specific to the *Donauschwaben*, such as the LBA's relocation to Novi Vrbas in 1933, the LBA's choral repertoire, or curricular challenges at Belgrade's German school.⁹⁵ However, *Unsere Schule* also became a platform for larger debates by both *Donauschwaben* and *Reichsdeutsche* authors and educators. Local German teachers, such as Philipp Hilkené or Thomas Menrath—both instructors at the LBA from its inception—published articles on issues such as the importance of teaching German and *Donauschwaben* history and culture in schools, or the centrality of physical training to the "*Erziehung*" of the next generation.⁹⁶ *Kulturbund* leader Keks wrote about German academic institutions, such as the *Institut für Völkerpädagogik* in Mainz. *Reichsdeutsche* authors themselves distributed illustrations of the pedagogical state of the art in Germany, as ranging from reforms in writing instruction, to the qualities of the perfect *Reichsdeutsche* teacher, to the German differentiation between "smart" and "dumb" students.⁹⁷ The aim of publications like *Unsere Schule*, according to one 1933 article, was clear: all "Swabian" teachers were to gain an understanding of the spiritual and economic peril ("*Notlage*") of Yugoslavia's German population and employ all of their "strength and abilities to remove these." Only on the cornerstone of well-educated teachers, and hence youth, would Yugoslavia's

⁹⁴ Consider: letter with annual budget (2.4.1930), PA AA, R 73201.

⁹⁵ *Unsere Schule*, vol. 5, no. 5 (10.-12.1933); *Unsere Schule*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1.-3.1933); *Unsere Schule*, vol. 4, no. 3 (4.-6.1933).

⁹⁶ Consider: Thomas Menrath, "Unser Lehrernachwuchs und die Leibesübungen," *Unsere Schule*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1.-3.1933), 4-6; Thomas Menrath, "Unsere Dorfschule und Dorfjugend in Leibesübungen vereint. Ein Zukunftsbild," *Unsere Schule*, vol. 6, no. 4 (7.-8.1934), 2-3; Philipp Hilkené, "Unsere Ziele," *Volkswart: Vierteljahrschrift für deutsche Volkstumspflege in Südslawien*, vol. 1, no. 1 (10.-12.1932), 2-7. For their positions in the LBA, see: "Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt mit Öffentlichkeitsrecht in Veliki Bečkerek: Bericht über das Schuljahr 1931-1932," PA AA, R 62409.

⁹⁷ Johann Keks, "Das Institut für Völkerpädagogik in Mainz," *Unsere Schule*, vol. 5, no. 3 (4.-6.1933), 2-10; Friedrich Melchior, "Der moderne Schreibununterricht in Deutschland," *Unsere Schule*, vol. 5, no. 4 (7.-8.1933), 8-12; no author, "Der Volksschullehrer in Deutschland," *Unsere Schule*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1.-3.1935), 10-12; Ferdinand Hörner, "'Gescheite' und 'Dumme' Schüler," *Unsere Schule*, vol. 7, no. 1 (10.-12.1934), 7-9.

Germans realize their “God-given” task of becoming “the living embodiment of the highest *völkisch* goods: *Volkstum* and [religious] faith.”⁹⁸

Despite such lofty ambitions— as well as the early 1930s legal and institutional concessions to Yugoslavia’s German minority— all did not run smoothly for the *Donauschwaben* in educational terms during the early to mid-1930s. Even in October 1931, Education Minister Maksimović did not sign all necessary legislation for the LBA’s opening, as he was purportedly preoccupied with his impending re-election. Nevertheless, instruction began with 103 boys and girls that month.⁹⁹ In December 1931, new legislation was enacted that forced all *Bürgerschulen* to adopt Serbo-Croatian as the main language of instruction. During the following year, the *Bürgerschulen*’s German parallel classrooms in Apatin, Palanka, Hodschag, Novi Sad, Novi Vrbas (all in the Batschka), and Weisskirchen/Bela Crkva/Fehértemplom (Banat) were hence shut down.¹⁰⁰ Name analysis was still practiced across Yugoslavia, while the growing body of German-language teachers was still not systematically placed into German-language classrooms.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless— and largely due to mounting diplomatic pressures— some progress was made: the LBA continuously educated a student body of over one hundred students per year, some new minority sections were opened, private minority Kindergartens were permitted, and, in 1933, a private German-language *Bürgerschule* (under the *Schulstiftung*’s leadership) was established in Novi Vrbas.¹⁰² As Senz describes, the period from 1929 until 1938 did not see all of the improvements the German minority had hoped for. Nonetheless, a certain amelioration of their “school situation” could be observed.¹⁰³ It was also during this time that Yugoslavia’s Germans realized the truly effective strategy for achieving their aims: the inclusion of the German *Reich* into their projects.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Friedrich Reinlein, “Der Lehrer und die gegenwärtige Notlage unseres Volkes,” *Unsere Schule*, vol. 5, no. 4 (7.-9.1933), 5-7.

⁹⁹ Letter from *Deutsche Gesandtschaft* in Belgrade, “Die Eröffnung des deutschen Lehrerseminars in Gross-Betschkerek” (19.10.1931), pp. 1-3, PA AA, R 62409.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram (11.12.1931), PA AA, R 62409; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 171-179.

¹⁰² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 100-101, 230-234; Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen,” 130-133.

¹⁰³ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 114.

¹⁰⁴ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 349.

By 1939, the situation of Yugoslavia's ethnic Germans had once again changed. As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on extra-curricular youth mobilization, between late 1938 and early 1939, the *Kulturbund* came firmly under the control of pro-*Reich*, right-wing “*Erneuerer*” (“renewers”) who ousted the *Kulturbund*'s previous elite (including Kraft, Grassl, Keks, and others) with the help of the VDA and the VoMi (the “*Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*,” a *Reich* organization responsible for realizing “*Volksdeutsche*”-related policies). As such, the *Kulturbund* not only became more radical and open to National Socialism; in their pursuits, they were also backed by the increasingly “*gleichgeschaltet*” *Reich*.¹⁰⁵ In light of its growing economic dependency on Germany, as well as the Axis' recent victories over much of Europe, including Poland and Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia further increasingly pandered to German interests during this time.¹⁰⁶ From the late 1930s, therefore, Yugoslavia's German minority— now under a new leadership and backed by increasing diplomatic, economic, and military pressures from Germany— was able to negotiate a number of previously unattainable concessions.

Many of the leading *Erneuerer* seem to have first met as teachers at the LBA during the early 1930s. It is also there that most of them initially came into contact with *Reich* teachers, tactics, and policies. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the local German leadership's main priorities even during the late 1930s remained the securing of (pro-*Reich*) German-language education.¹⁰⁷ Most of the concessions that the Yugoslav government granted its German minority throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s indeed revolved around education. In May 1940, Maksimović legally re-affirmed ethnic Germans' right to declare their own ethnicity upon enrollment for a parallel school section. Similarly, teachers who taught in minority language classrooms were now required to be proficient not only in Serbo-Croatian (or Slovenian), but in the appropriate minority language, too.¹⁰⁸ Legal proceedings were initiated to help re-institute (or compensate for) school properties nationalized in 1920.¹⁰⁹ And, in the summer of 1940,

¹⁰⁵ Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 197-203, 277-300; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 558-572.

¹⁰⁶ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ According to the LBA's first annual report, for instance, Thomas Menrath and Peter Seifert— both instructors that would become crucial around the *Erneuerer*-led sports programs— began their teaching careers there simultaneously that year. “Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt mit Öffentlichkeitsrecht in Veliki Bečkerek: Bericht über das Schuljahr 1931-1932,” PA AA, R 62409.

¹⁰⁸ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 119, 236-237.

¹⁰⁹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 121-122.

the Yugoslav Ministry of Education enacted a range of legislation allowing for the establishment of independent, private German-language schools across Yugoslavia. As a result, the German *Schulstiftung* opened a German *Gymnasium*— with a guaranteed right of existence for ninety-nine years— in Novi Vrbas in September 1940. Some 468 students (of whom 386 were male and 82 female) enrolled that year. Apatin’s German *Gymnasium*, similarly, opened on October 1st, 1940 with 124 students (76 male and 48 female).¹¹⁰

According to these institutions’ government-approved statutes, German minority schools would still be bound to the state curriculum and laws, but with certain allowances. The main language of instruction would be German, and at least as many German-language lessons would be held as Serbo-Croatian ones (with additional options of learning French, English, or Italian after the third grade). “National history,” “national geography,” and the state language would still need to be taught in Serbo-Croatian. Furthermore, teachers would still be required to possess Yugoslav citizenship; however, exceptions could be made by the Ministry. Students had to be either Yugoslav citizens of “German *Volkszugehörigkeit*” (belonging to the German *Volk*), or the children of *Reichsdeutsche* with residency in Yugoslavia. Any diplomas obtained within these institutions, finally, would be counted as equal to those obtained at Yugoslav state schools.¹¹¹

The *Schulstiftung*, however, opened not only more traditional (academic) secondary schools. In September 1940, it also established a private German agricultural school in Futok/Futog/Futak (Batschka).¹¹² According to the *Deutsches Volksblatt*, the founding of the *Private Deutsche Landwirtschaftliche Schule* represented a realization “of a still desire that all true friends of our *schwäbisches Bauernvolk* [‘agricultural folk’] had had for years.” Built on a formerly aristocratic property and connected to a dormitory, the school would provide students both with the “schooling in *Weltanschauung*” and practical “*Ertüchtigung*” (roughly translated: training) necessary for today’s agricultural youth. Through its two-year training courses, the *Landwirtschaftliche Schule* was to produce

¹¹⁰ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 122-123.

¹¹¹ For the full statutes, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 238-240; “Deutsches Gymnasium Neu-Werbaß 1940-1941,” re-print from *Deutsches Volksblatt* from 10.9.1940, BArch R57/neu/1071 Bd. 91; “Deutsches Untergymnasium Apatin, 1940-41,” reprint from *Deutsches Volksblatt* from 24.9.1940, and “Die Verordnung über das Deutsche Realgymnasium in Apatin,” BArch R57/neu/1071 Bd. 90.

¹¹² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 123.

“well-rounded students [in terms of] a *völkisch* worldview.” Ultimately, its graduates were to become “aware of their *Volk*, ready for service, willing to make sacrifices, and competently hard-working,” and to act as the “*völkisch*” and skilled “carriers and pioneers” of their communities and economy.¹¹³

In addition to German-language educational institutions, the *Kulturbund*, during the post-1938 era, also experienced a “renewal” of its pedagogical literature. Following the *Kulturbund*’s pro-*Reich* exchange of elites, *Unsere Schule* was disbanded. In its place, the *Schulstiftung* released the tri-monthly *Schwäbischer Volkserzieher: Zeitschrift für deutsche Lehrer und Eltern im königreiche Jugoslawien* under the leadership of Josef Trischler, Adalbert Gauss, and several other LBA teachers (*Unsere Schule*’s editor, Adam Maurus, in the meantime was kicked out of both the LBA and the *Schulstiftung*).¹¹⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *Donauschwaben*’s pedagogical literature changed considerably in its character, moving away from *Unsere Schule*’s previous emphasis on *Donauschwaben* peculiarities and the importance of religious faith to a “*Blut-und-Boden*” tone more in tune with a National Socialist worldview.

In the *Donauschwaben* teachers’ writings— including those of the later *Donauschwaben* historian Josef Volkmar Senz— the *Volk* became a “naturally developed, blood-bound *Gemeinschaft*,” an “organism” and “masterpiece” that every single person would be responsible for maintaining in their life’s work. Only through the correct teachers, school books, curriculum, and pedagogy could youth be raised with the requisite “love for the own *Volk* and blood, love for the ... *Heimat*, that feeds and protects it,” and “power of will, readiness for duty, loyalty, and sacrifice” for the “*Volksgemeinschaft* and *Staatsgemeinschaft*.”¹¹⁵ A German-speaking child’s entire curriculum was to be organized according to such aims. History, for instance, primarily became a means for instilling a *völkisch* “awareness” in the next generation, an

¹¹³ “Diese Schule wird in zwei Jahren eine abgerundete *völkisch-weltanschauliche, theoretische und praktische Ausbildung für zukünftige Bauern geben ... An dieser Schule wollen wir volksbewusste, einsatzbereite, opferfreudige und fachlich tüchtige Bauern erziehen, die ihren Betrieb mal selbst mustergültig leiten werden und für ihre Umgebung *völkisch* und fachlich als Vorbild dienen, in inderen [sic] *völkischen, bäuerlichen Berufs- und Wirtschaftsorganisationen aber als Träger und Vorkämpfer wirken sollen*.” “Private Deutsche Landwirtschaftliche Schule bewilligt,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* from 29.9.1940, BArch R57/neu/1071, Bd. 93.*

¹¹⁴ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 125.

¹¹⁵ Roughly translated, “*Staatsgemeinschaft*” denotes “community of citizens,” as opposed to the “*Volksgemeinschaft*’s” “community of nation/ethnicity/blood.” “*Willenskraft ... Einsatzbereitschaft ... Treue ... Opferwilligkeit ...*” Senz, “Unsere Jugenderziehung,” *Schwäbischer Volkserzieher: Zeitschrift für deutsche Lehrer und Eltern im Königreiche Jugoslawien*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1938), 5-11.

“awareness” that would encompass not merely these young people’s “organic” origins, but also a sense that all of their actions would directly affect “the [future] flourishing or failure of their *Volk*’s ancestral *Gemeinschaft*.”¹¹⁶ Song, furthermore, would similarly not merely be taught out of musical interest; rather, “*Volks-* and fighting songs” would help “give voice” to “the German blood” around the world, creating one growing, unified chorus in expression of both nation and *Volk*.¹¹⁷

By the late 1930s, therefore, certain fundamental changes had occurred in the *Donauschwaben*’s educational sphere. Feeding off of a decades-long struggle over the creation and maintenance of German-language educational institutions— and with that, the perceived preservation of an individual linguistic and cultural heritage regardless of current host state— Yugoslavia’s *Donauschwaben*, especially after 1920, developed an array of tactics in the educational realm. These included more home-grown initiatives, such as the launching of flyer and press campaigns or the establishment of local pressure groups (like the *Kulturbund*). These also included the very apparent mobilizing of the German “motherland,” as through diplomatic actions by the League of Nations and the German Foreign Office. However, these tactics also included a combination of both, wherein— as with the establishment of pedagogical journals, the *Schulstiftung*, or the opening of German-language schools— local actions and interests flowed together with *Reich* money and concerns into one opaque pool of “national” activities. The stage had thus been set by the 1930s for a future radicalization of Yugoslavia’s ethnic German population.

However, it was not merely within the secularized curricular arena that conflicts flared over German minority education. Rather, the *Donauschwaben*’s churches, too, became active in an increasingly nationalized battle over youth education during the interwar period. These battles were carried out not only between the various religious confessions, emergent *Donauschwaben* cultural and political organizations, and state functionaries; rather, ecclesiastical concerns, too, became an avenue of entry for *Reich* propaganda, agents, and agendas into the *Donauschwaben*’s affairs.

¹¹⁶ “Erst durch die Geschichte bekommt der einzelne das Bewußtsein vermittelt, daß er eingegliedert ist in einen lebendigen Organismus, in den ewigen Strom, der aus der grauen Vergangenheit, über die lebendige Gegenwart in die fernste Zukunft reicht, und daß sein Tun und Lassen, Leben, Gedeih und Verderb der Gemeinschaft seines angestammten Volkes mitbestimmt.” Josef Senz, “Heimatgeschichte in unseren Schulen,” *Schwäbischer Volkserzieher*, vol.1, no. 2 (1938), 25.

¹¹⁷ Nikolaus Britz, “Zur Frage des Volks- und Kampfliedes,” *Schwäbischer Volkserzieher*, no. 1 (1939-1940), 40-41.

D. Battles over *Donauschwaben* Religious Schools, 1918-1941

1. *The Pre-1920 Religious Monopoly on Education*

Education had primarily been in the hands of the churches during the Habsburg period. Even after Maria Theresa's famed 1777 *ratio educationis*—designed to expand and unify Hungary's educational system—most schools remained under church control. Predominantly, these schools belonged to the (state majority) Catholic Church. However, following a 1791 law based on Joseph II's prior toleration edict, Hungary's Protestants, too, received the right to maintain their own schools.¹¹⁸

The *Donauschwaben*'s schools, generally established during the eighteenth century and soon after the foundation of each new *Donauschwaben* settlement, were also nearly exclusively church-based from their inception. Almost all schools were opened in conjunction with the local parish, on church-owned soil, using communally-gathered (frequently church-based) taxes, funds, and bishopric subsidies. They were generally under the supervision and instruction of the local priest or pastor. The towns' confessional majority determined the school's confession; as such, the majority of *Donauschwaben* village schools, up to the late nineteenth century, remained under the purview of the Catholic Church. These schools' language of instruction always included German, and almost always incorporated Hungarian language instruction.¹¹⁹ Until the late nineteenth century, the curricular aims and means especially of village schools remained modest, being centered on the acquisition of basic literacy and religious knowledge, and (in more

¹¹⁸ Joachim von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn: Slowaken, Rumänen und Siebenbürger Sachsen in der Auseinandersetzung mit der ungarischen Staatsidee 1867-1914* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), 70-71; Josef Berauer, *Geschichte des Volksschulwesens der Erzdiözese Kalotscha-Batsch* (Kalocsa: 1896), translated into German by Nikolaus Hartmann and Anton Selgrad (Munich: AG Donauschwäbischer Lehrer-Arbeitskreis für donauschwäbische Heimat- und Volksforschung, 1983), 15-17.

¹¹⁹ In terms of the Catholic schools, consider Berauer's brief histories of the *Donauschwaben* village towns of, for instance, Apatin (pp. 66-67), Bács-Brestovác/Ulmenau (pp. 84-85), Bukin/Buchenau (pp. 96-97), Filipova/Filipsdorf (pp. 115-116), Futtak (pp. 121-122), Gákova (pp. 125-126), Kernei (pp. 153-154), and others (Berauer, *Geschichte des Volksschulwesens*). For more on the protestant schools, consider: von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn*, 77-85. For a general overview of the *Donauschwaben* (church) schools during this period, consider: *Donauschwäbische Geschichte: Wirtschaftliche Autarkie und politische Entfremdung 1806-1918*, edited by Ingomar Senz (Munich: Universitas Verlag, 1997), 57-72.

rural settings) frequently convening in a one-room schoolhouse setting.¹²⁰ Only rarely, and in more urban settings, would children (usually boys) acquire secondary and post-secondary training in Hungary's larger towns and cities.¹²¹

The late nineteenth, early twentieth-century drive towards Magyarization affected the religious school setting, too. Between 1848 and 1860, the Batschka and the Banat specifically had actually experienced an increase in German-language education, as the two regions were unified under direct Austrian rule in the Voivodeship of Serbia and Banat of Temeschwar.¹²² However, especially after the 1867 *Ausgleich*, Hungary's educational system began to diverge significantly from its Austrian counterpart. On the one hand, schools still remained more heavily under religious supervision than in the monarchy's Austrian lands. On the other hand, schools (even confessional schools) increasingly became the focus of Hungarian nationalization efforts.¹²³ The Hungarian Law of Primary Instruction of 1868, which extended mandatory daily school attendance to six years and prescribed another three years of Sunday "revision schools," thereby also increased— at least theoretically— the church schools' teaching requirements.¹²⁴ However, the following decades' school legislation— including the pro-Hungarian school laws of 1879, 1883, and 1893¹²⁵— slowly eroded the churches' autonomy in settling educational affairs. The new decrees, for instance, prescribed curricular elements, increased Hungarian language requirements, and settled teachers' wages at levels that small rural church schools could not afford. According to historians like Ágoston Berecz, these laws represented a conscious attempt by the Hungarian government to "harness confessional schools to their nation-building agenda."¹²⁶

By 1907, with the *Lex Apponyi*'s passing, this trend congealed. The new, centralized curriculum forced all non-Hungarian schools to dedicate at least half of their

¹²⁰ This resonates with the larger Hungarian context of the time. Consider: Ágoston Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching: Hungarian in the Primary Schools of the Late Dual Monarchy* (Budapest: Pasts, Inc., Central European University, 2013), 67-71.

¹²¹ I. Senz, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 139-144.

¹²² I. Senz, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 200-201. This included, significantly, the establishment of the Catholic-German *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werschetz in 1852. Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 28-29.

¹²³ von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn*, 100-101; "Katholisches Kaisertum und multikonfessionelles Reich," *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Band IV*, 284-289.

¹²⁴ Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching*, 108-110.

¹²⁵ See this dissertation's preceding sections. Also consider: I. Senz, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 390-391.

¹²⁶ Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching*, 127.

time to Hungarian language learning, and state inspectors monitored everything from schools' hygienic conditions, to teachers' Hungarian skills, to the application of patriotic Hungarian symbols in primary school classrooms.¹²⁷ Due to the state-mandated increase in teachers' salaries at non-state schools, furthermore, an increasing number of parishes simply could not afford to maintain their own teachers (many of whom, traditionally, had also been paid in kind).¹²⁸ Local schools thus became increasingly dependent on state subsidies, and thereby became more directly vulnerable to state intervention. As Joachim von Puttkamer has estimated, between 1906/7 and 1910/11, state funding for confessional schools trebled. Over the same period, the number of purely confessional schools in Hungary decreased by 6.1%, from 12,705 institutions to 11,927, ultimately making 18.3% of Hungary's schools official state schools by 1912.¹²⁹

However, it was not merely the confessional nature of Hungary's schools that came under pressure during this time. Rather, through these Magyarization measures, minority education in the mother tongue also suffered. Following Hungary's 1868 Law of Nationalities, which theoretically guaranteed mother-tongue primary-level education to all minorities, no programs were set in place to begin with to guarantee such linguistic diversity. Schools set up by the state thereafter, furthermore, were purely Hungarian-language based.¹³⁰ After 1907, moreover, the Hungarian Minister of Education had the right to turn Hungarian into the main language of instruction in any confessional school with Hungarian-speaking children. Where at least twenty percent of a village's children were Hungarian speakers, Hungarian was automatically (and irreversibly) introduced as the main language.¹³¹

The precise effects of these policies on the *Donauschwaben's* confessional schools is understudied. Certainly, the post-1868 "degradation" of German-language classrooms (also on the confessional level) through Hungary's Magyarization policies formed not only a frequent lament in contemporaneous *Donauschwaben* literature, but also a

¹²⁷ Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching*, 125-127; von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn*, 131-138.

¹²⁸ von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn*, 133-134; I. Senz, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 141.

¹²⁹ von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn*, 131.

¹³⁰ Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching*, 133.

¹³¹ Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching*, 126.

cornerstone of much *Donauschwaben* historiography of the twentieth century.¹³² Precise statistics, however, are difficult to come across. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that statistics related to the *Donauschwaben*'s confessional schools reflected those of Hungary more generally. While some 95.8% of schools prior to 1868 remained under control of the various churches, by 1913, this number hovered closer to 80%.¹³³ Even in those schools that remained specifically under church control, German-language instruction was increasingly hindered over this period. Most teachers and clergy obtained their education in Hungarian, Hungarian-language instruction became mandatory, and confessional school curricula and books became dominated by Hungarian national teachings.¹³⁴ Even the German-language school books circulated in religious schools by the Hungarian state contained translated verses by Hungarian national poets (such as Petőfi Sándor), the Hungarian national anthem, and odes to the “fatherland.”¹³⁵ By 1918, the *Donauschwaben* educational system— especially on the primary school level— was thus still overwhelmingly in the hands of the Catholic, and partially the Lutheran and Calvinist, churches. However, even within these schools, Magyarization policies had had their impact, laying the groundwork for many nationalized ecclesiastical concerns to come.

2. *The 1920 (Yugoslav) Nationalization of Church and School Properties*

The development of a fully autonomous, German language-based curriculum under church authority had, by the turn of the twentieth century, already become largely illusory. However, while previous Magyarization policies had already rung the death knell of the *Donauschwaben* confessional school's independence, the foundation of the

¹³² Consider: Ingomar Senz, *Die Donauschwaben*, vol. 5 of *Studienbuchreihe der Stiftung Ostdeutscher Kulturrat* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1994), 55-59; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*; Brücker, “Deutsche Schulen.”

¹³³ I. Senz, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 388-390.

¹³⁴ I. Senz, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 390-393.

¹³⁵ *Deutsches Lesebuch für die II. Klasse der Volksschulen mit deutscher Unterrichtssprache* (Budapest: Royal Hungarian University Publisher- *A Király Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda Kiadása*, no publication date). This book is located in the archive of the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* in Apatin, Serbia (henceforth shortened to “ABV”), which houses those church documents that survived the various post-1944 instances of vandalism against Vojvodina's German churches. It is evident that the book was used in conjunction with the local churches. Furthermore, it seems to have remained in active use even during the interwar period, as one of this dissertation's interviewees remembered a poem from this book that he had learned and performed as a child (more on this in Chapter VI).

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes became its undertaker. Following Education Minister Svetozar Pribičević's suggestions, all schools in Vojvodina were nationalized between June and August 1920.¹³⁶ All previously ecclesiastical school properties— from Kindergarten buildings, to primary school books, to church school gardens— were confiscated by the state, generally without compensation and without provisions for future rental or other payments for the use of originally ecclesiastical properties.¹³⁷ In the Batschka alone, the Catholic Church alone lost some 125 million dinars through these measures.¹³⁸

At least theoretically, these former confessional schools could have been converted to private schools under the interwar minority protection stipulations. Over the following years, however— and largely due to the measures discussed above— all teachers now became state employees, subject to state language tests and inspections, and required to teach a state curriculum (partially) in the state language. Even convent schools were nationalized, and the nuns working therein declared Yugoslav state employees; those nuns who could not immediately fulfill the state requirements for educators (as in Filipowa/Szentfülp/Filipovo, today's Bački Gračac, Batschka), were blocked from their educational service.¹³⁹ As historians like Senz have indicated, it is surprising how little resistance Vojvodina's churches initially exhibited against these policies. At least in part, this was probably due to the fact that, following the drawing of new borders and the establishment of new state authorities, leadership and structural issues within the churches themselves had not yet been settled during this time.¹⁴⁰ However, certain instances of protest did arise quite quickly. In August 1920, for instance, the Batschka's Lutheran authorities ("*evangelisches Seniorat*"), under the leadership of a Slovak pastor, sent a petition to Yugoslavia's education ministry protesting the confiscation of their properties. The letter allegedly remained unanswered. In December 1920, several Lutheran village schools, such as from Altker/Ókér/Stari Ker and Jarek/Tiszaistvánfalva/Jarak, sent applications (including proof of teachers' Serbian

¹³⁶ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 50-56; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 112-113.

¹³⁷ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 212; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 144; Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 511-512.

¹³⁸ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 54.

¹³⁹ Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 512-513. Filipowa's convent of "Die Armen Schulschwestern Unserer Lieben Frau" had maintained an important girls' elementary school since 1905; their story is one which will arise again in the oral history-based sections of Chapter VI.

¹⁴⁰ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 55.

language skills, hygienic inspection results, and reformed syllabi) to the Yugoslav educational ministry. Their applications to receive private school status, too, were never considered, rendering all of the Batschka's Lutheran educational institutions state schools.¹⁴¹

By the end of 1920, therefore, the *Donauschwaben*'s independent primary and secondary confessional schools had been almost entirely eradicated.¹⁴² Thereafter, most struggles in the educational arena continued in the now secularized spheres of the state school and minority classroom. The Catholic and Protestant Churches, however, became increasingly reluctant to relinquish their educational function in the *Donauschwaben* communities. Over the course of the interwar period, all major *Donauschwaben* confessions thus launched educational initiatives designed not only to further childrens' religious education, but— increasingly— also to foster the “German” national character of their charges. Just as within the secular domain, these measures— which ranged from Sunday schools, to religion classes in state schools, to community confessional libraries— did not appear as the projects of isolated *Donauschwaben* activists and clerics. Rather, as the interwar period progressed, Germany once again formed an increasingly important source of support for *Donauschwaben* childhood and youth concerns.

3. Interwar Nationalization Struggles and the Preservation of German-Language Catholic Instruction

According to the *Kulturbund*'s own (inflated) statistics, approximately 86%, or some 600,000, of Yugoslavia's German-speaking minority were Catholics by 1931, out of a total Yugoslav Catholic population of over 5.6 million.¹⁴³ As such, the Catholic

¹⁴¹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 55. For an original report on these, see: Wack, “Batscher Senioratskonvent gegen die Verstaatlichung der evangelischen Schulen,” *Neues Leben: Evangelische Kirchenzeitung für Jugoslawien*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1.1.1922), 2-3, reproduced in Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 186-187.

¹⁴² Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 153-154.

¹⁴³ Reproduction of *Deutsche Zeitung* article (13.3.1932), appendix 1 of letter “Kirchliche Lage der deutschen Minderheit katholischer Konfession” from Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrade to Auswärtiges Amt Berlin (4.4.1932), PA AA, R 73196; “Statistik der deutschen Bevölkerung Jugoslawiens,” appendix 2 to letter “Kirchliche Lage der deutschen Minderheit katholischer Konfession,” PA AA, R 73196. According to Bethke, eighty percent of the *Donauschwaben* were Catholic (Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 507). According to the 1931 census, there were some 500,000 ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia, and not over 685,000, as reported by ethnic German organizations of the time. See: Paul F. Myers and Arthur A. Campbell, *The Population of Yugoslavia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), 21.

Church held enormous clout with the *Donauschwaben* communities. Prior to 1918, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* had been under the authority of the Hungarian Archbishopric seat in Kalocsa/Kaloča/Kollotschau. After 1920, the Batschka's Catholics came under the administration of the newly elected Apostolic Administrator for the Batschka, Lajčo Budanović, in Subotica/Szabadka/Maria-Theresiopel.¹⁴⁴ The Western Banat's Catholics were under the authority of the Bishop of Temesvar before 1918. Thereafter, they were placed under the authority of the Apostolic Administrator for the Yugoslav Banat (and later Archbishop of Belgrade), Ivan Rodić, in Zrenjanin. For much of the mid-1920s, the Batschka and the Banat's Catholics—the majority of whom were German-speaking—had lobbied for their own diocese, with a center in Novi Sad. Such plans, however, never came into fruition, and both regions were incorporated into the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Belgrade with its foundation in 1924.¹⁴⁵

While the nationalization of Catholic school properties, as far as the (scant) extant archival record shows, had not elicited an immediate and strong response from the Catholic Church as such in 1920, German-speaking clergymen did become active in securing educational rights for the *Donauschwaben* soon thereafter. Many of these activities, as we have seen, occurred through the arena of the *Kulturbund*, as some of its first and most prominent actors were priests and as, even in the SDKB's founding statutes, one of the organization's main aims officially became the religious and explicitly "German" education of youth.¹⁴⁶ Increasingly, however, priests also actively contested the new restrictions, which—through the post-1920 requirement that even part-time "religion teachers" ("*Religionsprofessoren*") be state-tested and state-employed—effectively had banished most of them from the formal classroom setting.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ For more on Budanović's appointment, and the controversies that this would cause among the Batschka's non-Serbo-Croatian-speaking minorities, see: Zoran Janjetović, "Zwischen ungarischem Staatsbewusstsein und südslawischer Loyalität: Der katholische Klerus und die Donauschwaben der Batschka und des Banats zwischen 1918 und 1933," *Kirche und Gruppenbildungsprozesse deutscher Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1918-1933*, edited by Rainer Bendel, Robert Pech, and Norbert Spannenberger (Berlin: LIT Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2015), 218-219.

¹⁴⁵ "Anlage zum Bericht vom 15. Januar 1934- Deutsche Wünsche zu einem südslawischen Konkordate," letter from *Deutsche Gesandtschaft* Belgrade to German Foreign Office (15.1.1934), pp. 2-3, PA AA, R 72167; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 66-67.

¹⁴⁶ § 1 and 2, "Hausordnung der Jugendabteilung der Ortsgruppe des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes," BArch R 57/neu/1070, Bd. 71, Tl. 1.

¹⁴⁷ See: "Verordnung über die Verstaatlichung vom 27. August 1920," reproduced in Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 189-191.

Already in February 1921, reports from the ethnic German representatives in Yugoslavia reached Berlin's Foreign Office, which lamented the new Yugoslav school policies. Joining their plight to that of the country's other Catholics (especially Croats), these reports underlined the Holy See's agreement that the confiscation of Yugoslav Catholic (school) properties was to be contested. According to the report, the new school policies, furthermore, had aimed at the complete secularization of the educational landscape, as even "religion classes in the state schools were transferred from the hands of the clergy to those of the laity," many of whom did not understand basic religious doctrine or youth education practices. In order to address this dire situation, it would be necessary to prepare for a concordat between the Yugoslav state and the Holy See.¹⁴⁸

By 1925— as preparations for a potential concordat ran high among Yugoslavia's bishops— correspondence between the Vatican's German Embassy and Germany's Foreign Office further enumerated the Yugoslav clergy's demands to the Yugoslav state. On the one hand, they requested that at least religion classes ("*Religionsunterricht*") become a mandatory component of the new school curricula within the state schools. These classes, furthermore, were to be taught with a curriculum and by teachers (in the form of clerics) selected by the Church. Additionally, the Catholic Church was to receive the right to maintain its own confessional schools. "The aim of a school," one such report stated, "must be the consolidation of religious truths [*religiösen Glaubenswahrheiten*'] in closest connection to moral life principles [*sittlichen Lebensgrundsätze*']"¹⁴⁹ As such, it was only the Catholic Church— here, regardless of nationality— which could help ensure the proper raising of Yugoslavia's Catholic children.

Negotiations between Yugoslavia's Catholic clergy, the Holy See, and the Yugoslav state continued on a diplomatic level for several years. A Concordat between the Holy See and the Yugoslav state finally was signed in 1935, and temporarily ratified by the Yugoslav National Assembly in 1937, only to be overthrown and abandoned several days later through pressures by the Serbian Orthodox Church on the parliament's Serbian Orthodox majority.¹⁵⁰ However, and perhaps with some premonition of the

¹⁴⁸ Letter, signed Keller, to German Foreign Office (19.2.1921), PA AA, R 73196.

¹⁴⁹ Letter "Konkordatsverhandlungen Jugoslawiens," from German Embassy to the Holy See, to German Foreign Office (4.5.1925), PA AA, R 103373.

¹⁵⁰ Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941 – 1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 512. For a contemporaneous German report on the Yugoslav Concordat, see: "Das jugoslawische Konkordat: Erhebliche Erfolge des Vatikans," copy from *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung* (30.7.1935), PA AA, R 72167.

doomed nature of these official channels— which, as we have seen, had already largely failed the secular sphere of minority rights during this period— the *Donauschwaben*'s Catholic authorities had become increasingly creative in their initiatives during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Especially by the late 1920s, it seems that Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben* clergy— like the *Donauschwaben* laity— began basing their grievances and programs on questions of nationality. As such, their fight for educational rights no longer only occurred within the larger (multinational) Yugoslav Catholic framework; it also began using a “German” national framework to appeal for aid from Germany.

One striking example of this “nationalization” of Catholic grievances among the *Donauschwaben* is supplied by a secret report from Belgrade's German legation to Berlin's Foreign Office. According to this April 1927 letter, a delegation of “*reichsdeutsche* Catholic personalities” had already traveled around Yugoslavia in October 1926 to report on the situation of the country's ethnic German Catholics. During their journey, they had established a connection to Abbot Jakob Egerth from Apatin, the apparent leader of the Batschka's Catholic clergy, and a personality with hopes of becoming General Vicar in Subotica under a (never realized) Batschka-Banat diocese.¹⁵¹ His direct connection to *reichsdeutsche* offices, according to the report, was to be kept secret, as it might cause difficulties with the local Croatian clergy, such as with Auxiliary Bishop Budanović. Nonetheless, Egerth had been instrumental in assembling a report— hereby presented— on the region's German Catholic “lamentations.”¹⁵²

According to Egerth's report, the Batschka and the Banat's Catholic Church had, for some time, suffered under the “Slavicization aims” (“*Slavisierungsbestrebungen*”) of Budanović and his fellow Croatian clergy. Budanović's goal— together with that of the Yugoslav government— purportedly had been the “denationalization” (“*Entnationalisierung*”) of the local German and Hungarian congregations, even though in the Batschka alone, some 128,000 Catholics were German, some 262,000 were Hungarian, and only were 83,800 “Slavic.”¹⁵³ Most priests in the Batschka and the Banat had now introduced the old Slavic liturgy, which most *Donauschwaben* could neither understand, nor identify with. Due to the restrictive Yugoslav educational policies and

¹⁵¹ This Dr. Jakob Egerth is also a crucial character in this dissertation's section on the Batschka between 1941 and 1944. He became Abbot in Apatin in September 1922. Jurg, *Apatin: Heimatbuch der größten donau-deutschen Gemeinde*, 255.

¹⁵² Secret report from German legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, “Klagen der deutschen Katholiken in Jugoslawien” (30.4.1927), PA AA, R 72166.

¹⁵³ Letter, “Klagen der deutschen Katholiken in Jugoslawien,” 2-3.

the confiscation of all Church school properties, furthermore, half of the region's German children received no German-language instruction. Therefore, they could not read "one syllable" of their mother tongue or follow German hymns and prayers. Any ethnic Germans who nonetheless qualified for higher education and trained as future priests, furthermore, were now only being educated in the "Slavic" spirit. In order to rectify this situation, several measures would be necessary. On the one hand, pressure was to be exerted on the Yugoslav authorities to re-open confessional schools, and to allow for mother-tongue religion classes in the state schools. On the other hand, German educational programs were to be established to train future German-speaking clergy. This might occur both through the establishment of a local German religious order with affiliated educational institutions, and through the expansion of ecclesiastical scholarships and educational exchange programs to Germany.¹⁵⁴

By the mid-1920s, such Church-based demands by ethnic Germans in fact began to fall on fertile ground in Germany. Even within Weimar Germany, Catholic publications began raising awareness about the approximately two-thirds of the world's "32 million *Auslandsdeutsche*" who were Catholic, in "foreign" lands, and thus a supposed bastion of German language, culture, and "blood-based relations" ("*gemeinsamen Blutsverwandtschaft*") abroad.¹⁵⁵ Particularly crucial here was the *Reichsverband für die katholischen Auslanddeutschen* (the "*Reichsverband*," or RKA), an organization established in its most rudimentary form in October 1918 as a way to reach out "propagandistically" to the millions of Catholic Germans who, post-Versailles Treaty, suddenly lived outside of Germany's borders.¹⁵⁶ Establishing connections to the Caritas, the *Deutsche Schutzbund*, various German refugee organizations, and the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA), the *Reichsverband* became an officially ratified organization with a headquarters in Berlin in 1920. According to its statutes, the *Reichsverband's* main aim was the joint representation of all Catholic *Auslandsdeutsche* associations and cooperatives, and the carrying out of projects that would "sustain their

¹⁵⁴ Letter, "Klagen der deutschen Katholiken in Jugoslawien."

¹⁵⁵ Angsar Sinnigen and Ludwig Schade (eds.), *Jahrbuch des Reichsverbandes für die Katholischen Auslanddeutschen 1926* (Münster: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), 5-6. A copy is currently available in the archive of the *Deutsche Bürgerverein "Adam Berenz"* in Apatin.

¹⁵⁶ *Jahrbuch des Reichsverbandes*, 6-8.

beliefs and *Volkstum*” and “culturally and economically support the Catholic *Auslanddeutsche*.”¹⁵⁷

Over the following years, the *Reichsverband* established a seat for itself on the directorial board of the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* (DAI) in Stuttgart, a lobbying network within the German parliament, direct connections to the German Foreign Office, ties to the St. Raphaelsverein in Hamburg and the Catholic Association of Teachers (“*Katholischer Lehrerverband*”), and links to various ethnic German organizations abroad.¹⁵⁸ According to its 1926 annual report, the *Reichsverband*’s main projects included not only a more general “cultural propaganda” in support of the millions of “rootless German minorities ... ripped from the German motherland ... who taste the full bitterness of their fight for their *Volkstum*’s survival.”¹⁵⁹ Rather, it also entailed the support of ethnic German Catholic educational projects. Catholic *Auslandsdeutsche* schools, for the *Reichsverband*, would be crucial for the maintenance of the “German spirit” and for the reconstruction of unity within the larger German “*Volksstamm*” (“tribe/ethnic line”). It would also only be through the maintenance of German education abroad that the *Auslandsdeutsche* would preserve their ability to pray and worship in their mother tongue, which would connect the world’s ethnic Germans not only to Germany, but— more significantly— to the “depths of their souls” and to the “echoes of their families’ teachings.”¹⁶⁰

A direct connection between the activities of organizations like the RKA and the *Donauschwaben*’s educational efforts is difficult to establish for the 1920s. Nonetheless, it was during this period that Germany began to send delegations of “*reichsdeutsche* Catholic personalities” to research the Catholic *Donauschwaben*’s circumstances.¹⁶¹ Some of these researchers reportedly had been so poorly prepared and trained for their

¹⁵⁷ *Jahrbuch des Reichsverbandes*, 8. According to paragraph 2: “*Der Reichsverband hat den Zweck: a) die an der Arbeit für die katholischen Auslanddeutschen beteiligten Vereinigungen und religiösen Genossenschaften gemeinsam zu vertreten; b) eine einheitliche und planmäßige Aufnahme und Durchführung jener Arbeiten zu ermöglichen, welche die katholischen Auslanddeutschen in ihrem Glauben und ihrem Volkstum erhalten und kulturell und wirtschaftlich fördern sollen.*”

¹⁵⁸ *Jahrbuch des Reichsverbandes*, 12-19.

¹⁵⁹ *Jahrbuch des Reichsverbandes*, 42, 62. “... diese entwurzelten deutschen Minderheiten in den neugebildeten Nachkriegstaaten haben die ganze Bitterkeit des Kampfes um Erhaltung ihres Volkstums und ihres Glaubens auszukosten” (42).

¹⁶⁰ *Jahrbuch des Reichsverbandes*, 62, 79-86. “... in der Muttersprache erteilt werden, da sie allein imstande ist, bis auf den Grund der Seele zu dringen, und dort den Wiederhall der in der Familie empfangenen Lehren zu wecken” (62).

¹⁶¹ Letter, “Klagen der deutschen Katholiken in Jugoslawien,” 1.

mission that they elicited only the bewilderment of the local ethnic Germans and the censure of Belgrade's German legation.¹⁶² Furthermore, it was also during this time that Berlin's Foreign Office began to directly finance both *Donauschwaben* teachers and priests through the *Kulturbund*'s budget.¹⁶³ Based on what has been saved of the Batschka's Catholic Church libraries at the *Deutsche Bürgerverein* "Adam Berenz" in Apatin, moreover, it was also during this period that the region's priests' libraries became stocked with literature on the "Catholic *Auslandsdeutsche* missions" from Germany. By 1936, this literature even included photos of bishops blessing the swastika flag and portraits of Adolf Hitler.¹⁶⁴

The *Donauschwaben* Catholics' demands— now framed nationally and directed increasingly towards Germany— began to show some effect during the 1930s. The *Donauschwaben* and *Reich* German Catholic authorities thus watched with some satisfaction as the educational law of December 1929 promised not only expanded German-language education, but also mandatory religion classes in all state schools and German minority classrooms.¹⁶⁵ Even the German Foreign Office closely monitored the precise educational legal provisions and Yugoslav bishops' conferences of the time, presumably ready to intervene with supportive measures (in education, school materials, and personnel) if necessary.¹⁶⁶ However, even by late 1930— after some minor reforms were made to the 1929 legislation— it became clear that these measures would not solve all Catholic educational woes. Due to remaining restrictions in teachers' licensing, for example, *Donauschwaben* priests were frequently blocked from teaching religious lessons in schools, so that Serbo-Croatian speaking, even Serbian Orthodox, teachers would take over what should have been a Catholic lesson taught in German. State school pupils were prohibited from reading Catholic journals and missionary magazines, and

¹⁶² Letter from German legation in Belgrade, "Schlecht vorbereitete Reisen reichsdeutscher Gruppen nach Jugoslawien" (22.10.1929), PA AA, R 73169.

¹⁶³ Consider: Letter with proposed annual *Kulturbund* budget (16.1.1928), BArch R 8043/978, fol. 121-125. Some 10,000 *Reichsmark* were requested by the *Kulturbund* for priests' and teachers' salaries that year.

¹⁶⁴ Consider: *Katholische Auslandsdeutsche Mission*, edited by Georg Wagner and Emil Clemens Scherer (Düsseldorf: Druck und Verlag L. Schwann, 1936), 24, 109.

¹⁶⁵ For the 1929 law, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 211-216.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Nachgeben der Regierung gegenüber den katholischen Wünschen auf Abänderung des letzten Volksschulgesetzes" (16.1.1930), PA AA, R 72167; letter from German legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Das neue Bürgerschulgesetz und die deutsche Minderheit" (16.12.1931), PA AA, R 73196; letter from German Embassy to Holy See, to German Foreign Office, "Uebermittlung von Beschlüssen des jugoslawischen Episkopats an den Heiligen Stuhl" (3.12.1932), PA AA, R 72167.

only state-prescribed books were allowed. In those cases where Catholic educational institutions had received a permit to resume their tuition, the diplomas that students received were sometimes simply no longer accredited by the state, and graduates seeking further education were allegedly discriminated against in favor of graduates of Serbian Orthodox institutions.¹⁶⁷

Combined with the state school system's name analysis and similar practices, these struggles in the ecclesiastical sphere gave rise to mounting concerns that the new Yugoslav state was not only dangerously "liberal" and secular (in its promotion of courthouse weddings or the Sokol movement, for example), but also explicitly anti-minority and pro-"Slavisization."¹⁶⁸ Frustrated in their attempts to pursue minority-based projects within Yugoslavia's nationalizing state structure, the *Donauschwaben* Catholics began to appeal to two international networks instead: "imperial" Germany and the Catholic Church. Following the failed Yugoslav-Vatican Concordat of 1935, the *Donauschwaben*'s Catholic authorities seem to have set their hopes primarily on Germany. Requests for scholarships for *Donauschwaben* students to study theology in Germany and Austria (especially Vienna)—already formulated in the late 1920s and early 1930s—thus became common in correspondence to Berlin's Foreign Office by the mid-1930s.¹⁶⁹ By 1935, the RKA was only too happy to respond to these appeals. Concerned both by the apparently lingering Hungarian legacy and the "restricted" "Slavic" nature of the training that Yugoslavia's future *Donauschwaben* theologians were receiving (mainly in Djakovo, Zagreb, and Sarajevo), the RKA sent ten young ethnic German theologians from the Banat to Freiburg, Bamberg, Passau, Frankfurt, and Fulda in 1935 alone.¹⁷⁰ Together with the VDA, the *Reichsverband* henceforth financed scholarships of some 5,000 *Reichsmark* per student per year. The aim of this funding was to train future *Donauschwaben* priests for their impending "volks-political tasks"

¹⁶⁷ "Kulturkampf in Jugoslawien," transcription from *Katholische Korrespondenz*, vol. 6, no. 127 (6.11.1930), PA AA, R 72167; letter from German Embassy to the Holy See, to the German Foreign Office, "Der jugoslawische Episkopat hat seine Forderungen an die Regierung in Belgrad dem Heiligen Stuhl übersandt" (3.12.1932), PA AA, R 72167.

¹⁶⁸ Confidential letter from German Consulate in Zagreb to German Foreign Office, "Bezugnahme auf dem Erlaß an Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Belgrad" (4.4.1932), pp. 1-7, PA AA, R 73196; letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Die Regierung gegen Trennung von Kirche und Staat" (14.2.1933), PA AA, R 73196.

¹⁶⁹ Letter (4.4.1932), 7.

¹⁷⁰ This occurred in conjunction with the Archbishop of Belgrade.

(“*volkspolitischen Aufgaben*”) in the maintenance of both Catholic and German traditions among Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans.¹⁷¹

Formally excluded from the public classroom setting, the *Reichsverband*, the VDA, and the German Foreign Office further began financing dorms and educational materials in Yugoslavia instead. The St. Raphaels-Heim in Belgrade— a dorm largely reserved for Catholic ethnic Germans, but effectively a multi-confessional *Donauschwaben* institution for children from smaller towns attending Belgrade’s German-language state schools— thus became financed almost exclusively through Belgrade’s German legation during the mid-1930s.¹⁷² In 1934, the dorm was privatized and taken over by the *Reichsverband*. Thereafter, all of the dorm’s properties belonged to the RKA, *reichsdeutsche* nuns worked therein, and permanent apartments were established for priests visiting from the *Reich*.¹⁷³ By 1935, furthermore, the German Foreign Office sponsored— under the title of “*Deutschtumsarbeit*” (“work for Germandom”)— a Catholic private school in Bosnia, as well as Catholic “pastoral care” (“*Seelsorge*”) in Belgrade and smaller *Donauschwaben* towns.¹⁷⁴ In an attempt to support the German “*Volkstum*” in the Batschka, moreover, the *Reichsverband* sponsored a German Catholic prayer and hymn book. It was endorsed by Subotica’s Catholic authority, printed by a company in Leipzig, and distributed by the thousands to the Batschka’s Catholic *Donauschwaben*.¹⁷⁵ In 1936, the *Reichsverband* further invested 10,000 *Reichsmark* in the compilation of a German Catholic school book

¹⁷¹ Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office, Abt. VI W, “Beihilfe von 1.500.- RM zur Förderung deutsch-katholischer Kulturinteressen im jugoslavischen Banat (Priester-nachwuchs)” (14.3.1935), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁷² Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office, Abt. VI W, “Beihilfe von RM 2.000.- für den Ausbau des St. Raphaels-Heimes in Belgrad” (17.12.1934), PA AA, R 62220; letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (31.1.1935), PA AA, R 62220; letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (21.3.1935), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁷³ Transcription of letter to German Legation in Belgrade (20.10.1934), PA AA, R 62220; letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (21.3.1935), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (27.3.1935), p. 4, PA AA, R 62220; report by German Foreign Office (16.5.1936), PA AA, R 62220; letter from German Legation in Belgrade, “Bewilligung für kirchliche kulturelle Deutschtumsarbeit im Ausland” (27.6.1938), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office, “Beihilfe von 1.800.- RM zur Beschaffung eines deutschen Gebet- und Gesangbuches für die Batschka (Jugoslawien)” (20.2.1935), PA AA, R 62220. Previously, most religious (school) books had been imported either from Austria or Hungary, as the extant religious school books at the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* in Apatin suggest. Consider: *Katholisches Religionsbüchlein für die unteren Klassen der Volksschule*, edited by Katechetische Sektion der Österreichischen Leo-Gesellschaft (Vienna: Österreichischer Schulbuchverlag, 1922); *Römisch-Katholischer Elementarkatechismus mit den Grundzügen der Bibel für die zweite Klasse der Elementarvolksschulen mit dem Lehrstoff der Ersten Klasse* (Budapest: Verlag des Sankt-Stephans-Vereines, 1914).

for the Banat diocese to support mother-tongue religion classes among the *Donauschwaben*.¹⁷⁶ According to the book's introduction, its main audience was to be youth and young couples preparing for marriage. Its purpose was no less than the "renewal [*Erneuerung*] of religious and ecclesiastical life in our dear *Volk* of the Archdiocese and of the Banat."¹⁷⁷

However, it was not merely German diplomats in Berlin and clerics in Belgrade who closely monitored the ecclesiastical educational sector. Indeed, even the (by the late 1930s) predominantly *Reich*-critical *Donauschwaben* Catholic press engaged in discussions on the importance of a Catholic German education for the future generations. The explicitly anti-National Socialist press—centered around Adam Berenz's *Die Donau*—thus emphasized how important it was for the *Donauschwaben* to "confidently and honestly confess [their] allegiance to their inherited Germandom."¹⁷⁸ This Germandom, for Berenz and his followers, was centered on Catholicism, and to be propagated also through the formal educational sphere. However, between restrictions in the minority school system and the concurrent growth in secular youth organizations, it would be primarily parents' duty to raise their children in a Catholic, German home, and to make a concerted effort to enroll their children in the appropriate religious institutions.¹⁷⁹ Announcements were made in the *Donauschwaben* Catholic press over the following years not only celebrating general gains in the minority education system (such as through the opening of the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*), but also urging parents to enroll their sons in the diocesan boys' seminary and dorm in Werschetz (Banat); to relinquish their daughters to the religious life in the German convent of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth

¹⁷⁶ This book was based largely on the Bavarian Catholic school book for primary schools ("*Katholische Religionsbüchlein für die Grundschule*"). Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office, "Beihilfe von 10.000.- RM zur Beschaffung eines deutschen Religionsbuches für das Bistum Banat" (4.11.1936), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁷⁷ "Zum Geleite," *Christliche Glaubenslehre: Katholisches Religionsbuch für Volk und Jugend zum Gebrauch im Erzbistum Beograd und der Apostolischen Administratur Banat* (Belgrade: Sankt Bonifatius-Werk, 1936), no page number. A copy of the book is available today in the Serbian National Library in Belgrade.

¹⁷⁸ Adam Berenz, his activities, and his publication will be discussed in more detail in most of the chapters to come. "*Wir stehen in felsenfester Treue auf dem Fundamente unserer katholischen Weltanschauung, dabei sind u. bleiben wir aber auch selbstbewusste und ehrliche Bekenner unseres angestammten deutschen Volkstumes.*" "Durch und durch deutsch?," *Die Donau: Wochenblatt für das katholische Deutschtum Jugoslaviens*, vol. 2, no. 5. (1.2.1936), 1. Bold in original.

¹⁷⁹ "Unsere Jugenderziehung" and "Schule u. Jugendgemeinschaft," *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 38 (19.9.1936), 1-2; *Der Familienfreund: Katholische Zeitschrift für religiöses Leben*, vol. 12, no. 23 (1.12.1938), 340.

in Breslau (Silesia); and to, regardless of particular educational situation, send their children to Sunday school.¹⁸⁰

By the late 1930s, the Catholic Church had therefore also not been able to make major progress in the formal educational sphere. The nationalization of Church properties in 1920 and ensuing educational legislation had dealt an irreversible blow to the Batschka and the Banat's Catholic educational institutions. Despite a mounting emphasis on childhood and youth education within the *Donauschwaben's* Catholic circles during the interwar period, the Catholic Church therefore never again came near to attaining the power that they had wielded in educational matters during the Habsburg period. In an attempt to counteract such measures, Yugoslavia's ethnic German Catholic authorities henceforth turned to Germany and its various Catholic organizations for support, in appeals framed increasingly in terms of "national" grievances. From the late 1920s, it was the German government and organizations like the *Reichsverband für die katholischen Auslandsdeutschen* who— along with more traditional sources of parishioners', Vatican, state, and other funding— began to finance German Catholic literature and prayer books, theological scholarships to the *Reich*, religion teachers, and ethnic German dormitories. However, as in the secularized educational sphere, legal limitations remained. Especially from the mid-1930s, the Catholic Church thus began mobilizing its children and youth in extra-curricular youth organizations and activities, some of which would eventually be directly supported by the *Reich*. Particularly in the extra-curricular sphere, however, the Catholic Church's resistance to *Reich*-German and pro-National Socialist meddling flared. This would create severe ruptures within the *Donauschwaben* communities, as we shall see.

¹⁸⁰ "Aufnahme in das Wrschatzer Bischöfliche Knabenseminar und Schülerheim," *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 29 (18.7.1936), 3; "Aufnahme in das Vrschacer Bischöfliche Knabenseminar und Schülerheim," *Die Donau*, vol. 3, no. 29 (17.7.1937), 4; "Aufnahme in das Vršacer Schülerheim," *Die Donau*, vol. 4, no. 25 (24.6.1938), 6; "Aufnahme in das Vršacer Schülerheim," *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 29 (22.7.1939), 3; "Deutsche Mädchen die ins Kloster wollen!," *Die Donau*, vol. 4, no. 37 (10.9.1938), 6; "Katholische Eltern!," *Der Familienfreund*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1.1.1940), 16. Variations in spelling in originals.

4. Interwar Educational Battles and Yugoslavia's Protestant Churches

a. The Lutheran (Evangelical) Church

The great majority of the *Donauschwaben* were Roman Catholics. However, following Joseph II's 1781 Patent of Toleration, several German-speaking Protestant *Donauschwaben* villages were settled on the Habsburg Empire's Southeastern fringe, including Torschau/Torža/Torzsa (Batschka, 1784), Tscherwenka/Cservenka/Crvenka (Batschka, 1785), Neu-Schowe/Újsóvé/Nova Sove (Batschka, 1786), Liebling (Romanian Banat, 1786), and Franzfeld/Francföld/Kraljevićevo (today's Kačarevo, Western Banat, 1792).¹⁸¹ According to the Yugoslav census of 1921, only approximately 1.8% of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's population belonged to a Protestant denomination. Of this fraction, 18,000 individuals were Hungarian and 8,000 were Wends (Protestant Slavs centered in Slovenia).¹⁸² According to statistics reported by the German legation in Belgrade, furthermore, Yugoslavia's Protestants by 1926 numbered 237,000. Of these, 60,000 belonged to the Calvinist (Reformed) Church, and another 177,000 to the Lutheran (Evangelical) Church. Within the latter confession, 44,500 identified themselves as German in the Batschka, as did 18,500 in the Western Banat.¹⁸³ Furthermore, an almost negligible number of Methodists had settled in the Batschka around the year 1900, landing first in Neu-Werbass, and then extending their (mostly private-home and German language-based) activities and meetings to Feketitsch/Feketić/Bácsfeketehegy and Sekitsch/Szeghegy/Sekić over the following two decades.¹⁸⁴

After the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church was the most significant religious institution among the *Donauschwaben*. According to both 1930s and 1940s-based studies and very recent histories on the *Donauschwaben*, it was also actually the Lutherans who had been most active "nationally" from the start.¹⁸⁵ On the one hand, the Lutheran clergy had apparently not been as exposed to Magyarization policies as the Catholic clergy, since

¹⁸¹ Hans Walther Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1940), 7-8, 20.

¹⁸² Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 150.

¹⁸³ Letter, "Anlage 1" (7.10.1926), PA AA, R 62408-4.

¹⁸⁴ *Werbass 1785-1975. Zur Geschichte der Doppelgemeinde Alt- und Neuwerbaß* (Stuttgart: Werbasser Heimatausschuß, 1975), 118.

¹⁸⁵ Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 20-22; Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 158, 170-171; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 516.

their education had generally not taken place in Hungarian-language seminaries, and, more generally speaking, Protestant schools were not as closely monitored in the Kingdom of Hungary as the Catholic ones.¹⁸⁶ Sources of financial support for German-speaking Lutherans had further been established in the region since the mid-nineteenth century. These prominently included scholarships and community-based Church projects from the Leipzig-based Gustav-Adolf-Verein (GAV, sometimes also referred to in primary sources as the “Gustav-Adolf-Stiftung”).¹⁸⁷ The Batschka and the Banat’s *Donauschwaben*, furthermore, had also published Lutheran German-specific newspapers since at least the turn of the century.¹⁸⁸ According to existing histories, it was thus hardly surprising that the strongest support for nationally-based agitation, including through the *Kulturbund* (and later the *Erneuerer*), came from towns and cities with large Lutheran communities, including Novi Sad, Pantschowa/Pančevo/Pancsova, Tscherwenka, Weißkirchen, and Neu-Schowe.¹⁸⁹

Prior to 1918, the Batschka and the Banat’s Lutheran communities had fallen under the constitution and authority of Hungary’s Lutheran Church (“*Ungarländisch-Evangelische Kirche A.B.- Augsburgischer Bekenntnisses*”). Thereafter, the regions’ Lutheran Churches joined the Lutheran authority centered in Belgrade. Adopting most of the previous Hungarian Lutheran constitution, the new “German Lutheran Christian Church A.B. in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia” (“*Deutsch-Evangelische Christliche Kirche A.B. im Königreich Jugoslawien*”) re-negotiated much of their relationship to the Yugoslav state and its other confessions and minorities over the following years. Yugoslavia’s Lutheran Church, by 1920, had already established some autonomy, with its own (ecclesiastical) courts of law (“*Senioratsgerichte*” and “*Landeskirchengerichte*”), and administrative structures based largely on the individual “*Gemeinden*” (Church communities). These bodies trickled upwards to higher sources of authority, like the Batschka and Banat- based “*Seniorate*,” and finally the state-level Lutheran “*Landeskirche*.” By June 1921, furthermore, a break with the Slovak Lutherans occurred,

¹⁸⁶ von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn*, 77-85; Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 17-19.

¹⁸⁷ Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 24-25, 38-39, 45-47. For a description of the GAV, especially its mid-nineteenth-century activities in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Empire, consider: “Der Gustav-Adolf-Verein,” *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Band IV*, 572-574.

¹⁸⁸ Consider: *Wrbaser Zeitung: Wochenblatt für das protestantische Deutschtum Jugoslawiens* (established 1901).

¹⁸⁹ Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 20.

whereby the Slovaks formed a Lutheran “district” separate from the German (and partially Hungarian and Wend) Lutheran Church.¹⁹⁰ At least according to interwar German sources, by the 1920s, the Yugoslav state had thus officially recognized the Lutheran Church as “German.” Nevertheless, many Hungarians and other minorities decided to join the confession as they believed it would “protect” them from the state’s “Slavicization” campaigns.¹⁹¹

These concessions to Yugoslavia’s German-speaking Lutherans, however, did not spare them from the large-scale nationalization of Church properties and schools in 1920. As described above, even those Lutheran schools that had petitioned to re-open as state-supervised private institutions in 1920 did not manage to maintain themselves.¹⁹² Unsurprisingly, these nationalization measures caused much consternation among Yugoslavia’s Lutherans. In 1922, Yugoslavia’s German Lutheran press— now also followed closely by Germany’s Foreign Office— still lamented the “fate of the Batschka’s Lutheran schools,” which— despite fulfilling all legal requirements— had not been able to re-open their doors.¹⁹³ Such complaints, however, remained not merely within the journalistic arena. By 1926, the situation of Yugoslavia’s Lutheran schools also became a topic of negotiation between the *Kulturbund*’s leadership (especially by Kraft and Grassl), the Yugoslav parliament, and the German Foreign Office. In that context, a representative of the Gustav-Adolf-Stiftung had spoken to Kraft and Grassl about the Lutherans’ educational plight. Although Catholic themselves, both men agreed that Yugoslavia’s Lutheran projects were in need of (foreign) assistance. According to Kraft and Grassl, unlike the *Donauschwaben*’s Catholics, the Lutherans were fortunate enough to have a German-based and fairly autonomous Church structure through which “effective protection against the suppression or absorption aims of the state could be established.”¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, even here it would be necessary to “save the German

¹⁹⁰ Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 77-78.

¹⁹¹ Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 78.

¹⁹² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 55. For an original report on these, see: Wack, “Batscher Senioratskonvent gegen die Verstaatlichung der evangelischen Schulen,” *Neues Leben: Evangelische Kirchenzeitung für Jugoslawien*, vol. 2, no. 1, (1.1.1922), 2-3, reproduced in Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 186-187.

¹⁹³ “Das Schicksal der Batscher evang. Schulen,” *Neues Leben: Evangelische Kirchenzeitung für Jugoslawien*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1.1.1922), 2, from PA AA, R 62408-2.

¹⁹⁴ “Beide Herren wiesen dabei betont darauf hin, dass die deutschen Evangelischen in Jugoslawien vor den katholischen Landsleuten den Vorzug hätten, sich in einer deutschen Kirchenorganisation sammeln zu können und in solchem zugleich konfessionellen und nationalen Zusammenschluss sich einen dauernd wirksamen Schutz gegenüber den Unterdrückungs- oder Aufsaugungsbestrebungen des Staates zu

educational system from the state's stranglehold," preferably through money from the German "*Reich*."¹⁹⁵

As in the Catholic case, the Lutheran Church, by the mid-1920s, actually had established a range of legal entities and channels of support within Germany for the backing of Europe's *Auslandsdeutsche*. As Doris Bergen has shown, the "*Volksdeutsche*" played a crucial ideological role for Germany's Protestant churches: to them, ethnic Germans presented "examples for the perfect fusion of faith and ethnicity" with their traditional synthesis of religious piety and "German identity." This imagined "harmonious" union of religion and national identity, for many *Reichsdeutsche*, was worthy of emulation, a paragon of non-sectarian but ultimately Christian "Germanness."¹⁹⁶ Considering their symbolic importance, it is hardly surprising that Germany initiated a range of Protestant-specific projects among the *Auslandsdeutsche*. In 1925, the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund*— an umbrella organization for Germany's Lutheran churches established in 1922— ratified statutes in Berlin for its "foreign work." The *Kirchenbund*'s aims— which included the unification and support of all German Lutheran institutions and the maintenance of the "religious-moral worldview of the German Reformation"— were henceforth also to be extended abroad through support for education and social projects.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Gustav-Adolf-Verein, which had already sponsored Banat Swabian Lutheran projects and scholarships from at least 1868, continued its support for German Lutherans in Yugoslavia during the interwar period. As correspondence archived at the German Foreign Office suggests, the GAV increasingly tied its initiatives to the projects of the Foreign Office and the VDA.¹⁹⁸

schaffen." Letter from Centralvorstand des evangelischen Vereins der Gustav-Adolf-Stiftung to German Foreign Office (3.7.1926), p. 1, PA AA, R 62408-4.

¹⁹⁵ "... *um das deutsche Schulwesen von der Würgerhand des Staates zu retten.*" Letter (3.7.1926), 4.

¹⁹⁶ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 51-53. Bergen here primarily refers to the German Christians, but explains that "many other Germans" similarly perceived the ethnic Germans according to such terms.

¹⁹⁷ "... *das Gesamtbewußtsein des deutschen Protestantismus zu pflegen und für die religiös-sittliche Weltanschauung der deutschen Reformation die zusammengefaßten Kräfte der deutschen Reformationskirchen einzusetzen.*" *Rechtliche Grundlagen für die Auslandsarbeit des Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchenbundes* (Berlin: Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenbundsamt, 1925), 5.

¹⁹⁸ Röhrig, *Die Geschichte der deutsch-evangelischen Gemeinden des Banats*, 46. In terms of this correspondence, consider: letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (19.12.1925), PA AA, R 61630; letter (3.7.1926); letter with report from Centralvorstand des evangelischen Vereins der Gustav Adolf Stiftung to German Legation in Belgrade (28.5.1927), PA AA, R 62408-5; letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (10.9.1927), PA AA, R 73196.

It was thus largely through the GAV that Yugoslavia's German Lutherans' grievances and demands reached Berlin's Foreign Office, and the GAV which suggested, for instance, that the German Foreign Office help send Yugoslavia's ethnic German children to "*reichsdeutsche*" educational institutions.¹⁹⁹

The late 1920s hence saw a first flourishing of *Reich*-supported Lutheran educational projects in Yugoslavia. In 1927, Berlin's Foreign Office received budget proposals for the establishment of a Lutheran dormitory in Semlin/Zemun for forty children; the maintenance of a deaconess' home in Werbass; and support for the Lutheran congregation in Banja Luka (Bosnia).²⁰⁰ That same year, Belgrade's Lutheran German school reopened its doors. Only half of the pupils, apparently, were "of German origins" ("*deutscher Abstammung*"). However, the teacher in charge was a "*reichsdeutsche*" woman.²⁰¹ By 1931, furthermore, the Yugoslav Lutheran Church had been able to officially re-open five primary schools, one *Bürgerschule*, and two Kindertagesstätten— none of which, however, were located in Vojvodina.²⁰²

While the late 1920s had seen a first "consolidation" and expansion of German Lutheran (educational) projects in Yugoslavia, it was only after 1930 that such efforts truly flourished under a unified, and increasingly *Reich*-friendly, leadership. On November 30th, 1930, the Yugoslav King ratified the constitution of the German-Lutheran Church of Yugoslavia ("*Deutsch-Evangelische Landeskirche in Jugoslawien*"). Besides settling basic organizational and financial matters, the constitution contained two crucial elements. First, the Lutheran Church was granted the right to conduct religion classes, taught by clergy, in the mother tongue, and to extend its educational programs, including by maintaining its own (state-approved) German-language schools and sending theology students abroad (mainly to Austria, Germany, and Switzerland). If necessary, too, Lutheran instructors could be sent in from abroad to carry out these projects. Second,

¹⁹⁹ Consider: letter (28.5.1927), 2.

²⁰⁰ Letter above (28.5.1927) with budget appendices. Especially interesting is Werbass' deaconess' home. In 1930, it came under the leadership of a *reichsdeutsche* priest; thereafter, it received continuous *Reich* funding See: letter, "Die kulturellen Erfordernisse für die deutsche Arbeit in Jugoslawien" (2.4.1930), PA AA, R 61630; letter from Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenausschuss to German Foreign Office (8.7.1930), PA AA, R 61630.

²⁰¹ Letter, "Eröffnung der wieder zugelassenen deutschen Schule" from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (15.9.1927), R 73169.

²⁰² "Tätigkeitsbericht des Bischöflichen Administrators Dr. Philipp Popp erstattet beim I. Landeskirchentag der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche A.B. im Königreiche Jugoslawien zu Novisad (Neusatz) am 17. Februar 1931," p. 39, PA AA, R 61630.

Yugoslavia's Lutheran synod now obtained the right to elect a bishop.²⁰³ In March 1931, Dr. Philipp Popp, a previous Apostolic Administrator based in Zagreb, was elected the first (and last) Bishop of the German-Lutheran Church of Yugoslavia.²⁰⁴

Born in a village close to Semlin in 1893, Philipp Popp had studied theology, philosophy, and law in Breslau, Berlin, and Zagreb. Following posts within the Lutheran *Seniorat* of Croatia and Yugoslavia's post-1918 episcopal administration, his election in 1931 as Bishop represented not only the apex of his career, but also a step welcomed by both the Yugoslav and the *Reich*-German authorities.²⁰⁵ Popp had been active in the *Kulturbund* almost from its inception. He had also been one of the main activists for German minority education in Yugoslavia, becoming a leading member of the *Liga der Deutschen für Völkerbund und Völkerverständigung* (Yugoslavia's German organization in charge of German minority-League of Nations relations), and supporting the establishment of the *Schulstiftung* and the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*.²⁰⁶ Throughout his early activities, Popp remained both explicitly pro-German minority and pro-Yugoslav state loyalty, urging Yugoslavia's German Lutherans to remain at all times faithful to King Alexander and the Yugoslav state, and leading congregations in the singing of the Yugoslav national anthem at major religious events.²⁰⁷ However, by the mid-1930s, his pro-*Reich* sentiments had become apparent. According to a *Reich* report in 1934, "the youthful Bishop Dr. Popp is a glowing admirer of the *Führer* and a follower of National Socialism." Due to his "inner sympathies with the national uplifting of Germany," Popp in the meantime apparently already had been denounced as "the Nazibishop" in the local Jewish press. However, such "propaganda" had not stopped him from holding mass

²⁰³ Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Bestätigung der Verfassung der Deutsch-evangelischen Landeskirche in Jugoslawien," plus attached newspaper clippings (4.12.1930), PA AA, R 73196; letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Das neue Gesetz über die protestantischen Kirchen in Jugoslawien" (11.6.1930), PA AA, R 61630. For a *reichsdeutsche* study of this constitution, consider: Heinrich Herzog, *Die Verfassung der Deutschen Evangelisch-Christlichen Kirche Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses im Königreiche Jugoslawien* (Leipzig: Leipziger Juristen-Fakultät, Theodor Weicher Verlag, 1933), PA AA, R 61631. In relation to educational matters especially, consider this source's pages 146-147.

²⁰⁴ Letter, "Bestätigung der Verfassung" (4.12.1930); letter from German Consulate Zagreb to German Foreign Office, "Der Protestantismus in Jugoslawien" (29.9.1931), PA AA, R 61630.

²⁰⁵ Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Bischofswahl der deutsch-evangelischen Kirche Jugoslawiens" (11.4.1931), PA AA, R 61630.

²⁰⁶ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 162; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 80-81, 97-99.

²⁰⁷ Consider: Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "400-Jahr-Feier der Augsburgischen Konfession und III. Evangelisches Sängerkfest des Evangelischen Kirchen-Distrikts in Jugoslawien" (10.6.1930), PA AA, R 61630.

Lutheran rallies in Pančevo, Zagreb, and elsewhere under the slogan “Lutheran until . . . , and German beyond, death.”²⁰⁸

In February 1934, Popp traveled to Berlin, met with Hitler, and negotiated a formal agreement with the umbrella organization of the German Lutheran Churches, which had been transformed in 1933 from the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund* into the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK).²⁰⁹ Designed to elevate the status of Yugoslavia’s Lutheran Church from “a pure supply channel” to local Lutherans to a Church “equal in rights and meaning,” respected both in Germany and by the Yugoslav state, the “friendship agreement” was signed that month. According to the agreement’s articles, the DEK would help finance theological scholarships and other projects in Yugoslavia, as long as Yugoslavia’s Lutherans maintained open channels of communication with the *Reich*’s Lutheran authorities and helped disseminate the theology of Luther’s Reformation according to the “motherland’s” spirit. Synodal meetings were to include both *Auslandsdeutsche* and *Reichsdeutsche*, and the DEK would send a *reichsdeutsche* priest to Yugoslavia to oversee the local *reichsdeutsche* residents.²¹⁰

Perhaps unsurprisingly, funding for Lutheran educational initiatives flowed quite copiously from the *Reich* to Yugoslavia during the 1930s. As with the Catholic and secular projects, the Lutheran educational institutions continued to face state-enforced restrictions, both legally and in practice. However, here too, other avenues of influence were sought. By 1931, the Lutheran Church had extended its Bible study sessions, confirmation classes, and language lessons in Yugoslavia, preparations were made for separate Yugoslav German Lutheran school and hymn books, and an official Yugoslav branch of the GAV was inaugurated.²¹¹ The *Kirchenbund* (later the DEK), through the

²⁰⁸ “Die Führung der Kirche liegt in den Händen des jugendlichen Bischofs Dr. Popp. Er ist ein glühender Verehrer des Führers und Anhänger des Nationalsozialismus ... wird er z.Zt. heftig von den Juden angefeindet und gilt als der Nazibischof ... zu machtvollen Demonstrationen zusammenfasste und unter der Parole: Evangelisch bis zum Sterben, deutsch bis in den Tod hinein.” Reproduction of letter from D. Heckel to German Foreign Office (16.2.1934), PA AA, R 61631.

²⁰⁹ Letter from Wahl to German Foreign Office, “Freundschaftliches Uebereinkommen” (19.2.1934), PA AA, R 61631. During the summer of 1933, Germany’s twenty-nine regional Protestant churches were unified into the DEK (the “Protestant Reich church”). Thereafter, the organization was led by “Protestant Reich bishop” Ludwig Müller, formerly a naval chaplain and a member of the (pro-National Socialist) German Christian movement. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 15.

²¹⁰ Letter (19.2.1934).

²¹¹ *Tätigkeitsbericht* (1931), pp. 20-21, 30-31, 35, 40; “Tagung des Landeskirchenrates der Deutschen Evangelisch-Christlichen Kirche A.B. im Königreiche Jugoslawien vom 27.-29. April 1933 in Zagreb”, pp. 31, 35, PA AA, 61630; “Dritter Landeskirchentag der Deutschen Evangelisch-Christlichen Kirche A.B. im Königreiche Jugoslawien am 22. u. 23.I. 1935 in Nova Pazova,” pp. 32-37, PA AA, R 61631; letter from

German Foreign Office, established an annual budget for the “maintenance of the German Lutheran Church in Yugoslavia,” sent hundreds of German Lutheran books and periodicals there, and ultimately founded a Lutheran central library in Zagreb.²¹² Most crucially, however, dozens of theology scholarships to Germany and Austria for young Yugoslav Germans were financed (twenty-three new ones in 1931 alone). One of the *Donauschwaben* who thereby studied in Berlin for the next four years was Gustav Halwax, who— upon his return— became one of the main National Socialist youth activists in the Western Banat.²¹³

By the late 1930s, the Yugoslav Lutheran Church’s leadership had at least partially come under the influence of Germany, and of National Socialism. Bishop Popp— who began sending telegrams to Hitler on his birthday, professing his support for the *Führer*’s “fight for honor, justice, and peace”— received a First Class German Red Cross Decoration for his service to the German nation in 1936, at a ceremony hosted on November 9th and attended by Zagreb’s NSDAP representatives.²¹⁴ Theological Lutheran literature from Germany— such as the journal *Zeitwende*— further reached local pastors’ libraries. Much of this literature professed visions of the unity of Church and *Volk* and the maintenance of “racial” purity, and lauded the Lutheran Church’s support of the “*Volkstumskampf*” among Eastern Europe’s ethnic Germans.²¹⁵ Even calendars distributed to the Lutheran *Donauschwaben* were dotted by articles that explained the necessity of “training a conscientiously Lutheran-Christian leadership in our *Volk*,” and presented ethnographies of the original Protestant German settlers in the region.²¹⁶

DEK to German Foreign Office (28.10.1936), PA AA, R 61631; *Die evangelische Diaspora: Zeitschrift des Gustav Adolf-Vereins*, vol. 8, no. 4 (8.1931), 270-271.

²¹² Letters from president of *Kirchenbundesamt* to German Foreign Office (1.10.1932, 14.12.1932, 22.12.1932, 18.10.1933, 15.10.1934, 25.3.1936), PA AA, R 61630, R 61631.

²¹³ More on Halwax to follow in this dissertation. *Tätigkeitsbericht* (1931); Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 170.

²¹⁴ November 9th was the anniversary of Hitler’s 1923 “Beer Hall Putsch.” In 1938, November 9th would also see the “*Reichskristallnacht*.” Transcript of telegram from Popp (Zagreb) to *Kirchenkanzlei Berlin Bischof*, PA AA, R 61631; letter from DEK to German Foreign Office (19.11.1936), PA AA, R 61631. Popp became a senator to the Yugoslav parliament in 1940. In 1945, he was executed for his wartime collaboration with the Croatian fascist (*Ustaša*) regime.

²¹⁵ Consider: “Eine Diasporakirche im Kreuzfeuer,” *Zeitwende*, vol. 15, no. 11 (8.1939), (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag), 692-694; “Bibel und Gesangbuch im Volkstumskampf,” *Zeitwende*, vol. 15, no. 12 (9.1939), 744-745. Such literature has been salvaged from the remainders of the Batschka’s Lutheran church libraries, now located at the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* archive.

²¹⁶ *Protestanten-Kalender für das Jahr 1937*, edited by Prot. Diakonieverein für das Königreich Jugoslawien, vol. 13 (Novi Vrbas: Werbaßer Buchdruckerei, 1936), 71, 99-105.

The precise degree to which such activities represented an inner conversion to National Socialism on part of Yugoslavia's Lutheran authorities— let alone congregations— is of course debatable. As Bethke has shown, criticism was also launched by Yugoslavia's Lutheran pastors against the anti-Christian and extremely nationalist elements of National Socialism. Furthermore, even during the mid to late 1930s, some traditional sources of international (such as American and Swiss) funding for the Lutheran Church were maintained.²¹⁷ However, by the late 1930s, the stage had been set for German-specific, even pro-National Socialist, interventions on the request or behest of the Lutheran Church, many of which were centered on issues of minority education. As in the case of initiatives that had originated in the secular and Catholic spheres, however, the Lutheran Church did not restrict its educational, and increasingly nationalized and politicized, mission to the classroom. Instead, as we shall see, it also gave rise to a relatively short-lived, German-specific youth movement during this time.

b. The Calvinist (Reformed) Church

The third main confession to which the *Donauschwaben* belonged was the Reformed (Calvinist) Church. By 1929, the Yugoslav Reformed Church counted some 12,134 “souls” in the Banat, 29,123 in the Batschka, and a total of just over 64,000 across Yugoslavia.²¹⁸ The majority of these individuals, however, were not German-speaking and did not identify as *Donauschwaben*.²¹⁹ According to the Church's own reports, for instance, approximately three times as many Calvinist school children were Hungarian native speakers as German native speakers (3,500 versus 1,200) in 1931.²²⁰ In total, only 10,000 Calvinists were German native speakers; 50,000 were identified (by German sources) as Hungarians, and the rest as Croats.²²¹ Most of the *Donauschwaben* Calvinists

²¹⁷ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 516-520. It is interesting to note that in 1938, at least some of this Swiss Lutheran funding was stopped due to the pro-Third Reich attitude of some of the priests it had previously sponsored; apparently, the GAV stepped in to compensate for these missing funds. See: Letter from DEK to German Foreign Office (16.8.1938), PA AA, R 61631.

²¹⁸ “Statistik pes Ref. Seniorates in Königreiche Jugoslawien 1929” [spelling in original], *Protokoll der am 14. November 1929 in Sombor abgehaltenen ordentlichen Jahressitzung und Gerichtssitzung des Reformierten Seniorates im Königreiche Jugoslawien*, ABV.

²¹⁹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 68-69.

²²⁰ “Protokoll der am 13. November 1931 in Subotica abgehaltenen ordentlichen Jahressitzung der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche im Königreiche Jugoslawien,” pp. 8-9, ABV.

²²¹ Letter, “Der Protestantismus in Jugoslawien” (29.9.1931).

further lived in specific towns, including Crvenka, Feketić, Kula, Novi Sad, Sivac, Novi Vrbas, Sombor, Šove, Subotica, and Torža in the Batschka, and Pančevo, Kikinda, and Vršac in the Banat.²²²

Previously part of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Yugoslavia's Reformed Church reorganized itself into eight main, and seven subsidiary, "*Gemeinden*" (parishes) after 1918. In 1930, the "Reformed Christian Church in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia" ("*Reformierte Christliche Kirche im Königreich Jugoslawien*") became an officially recognized church, along with Yugoslavia's Lutheran Church.²²³ In 1933, János Gachal, pastor of Debeljača (Banat), became the Church's *Senior*. Thereafter, three Hungarian districts ("*Seniorate*") were established, as well as one German one (the "Southern" district), centered in Werbass (Batschka). Nevertheless, both before and after the drawing of these administrative boundaries, the Calvinists were divided from each other neither nationally, nor linguistically.²²⁴ Even in the predominantly German-speaking Calvinist congregations, the pastors generally had Hungarian names.²²⁵ All official annual reports by the Yugoslav Reformed Church, moreover, were printed both in Hungarian and in German. According to the Yugoslav-authorized Calvinist constitution of 1930, furthermore, the official language of religious services and instruction was organized according to a particular congregation's mother tongue. By default, most Calvinist services were held in Hungarian.²²⁶

Partially due to such developments in the local Reformed Church, Yugoslavia's ethnic German Calvinists were already described as a lost cause, nationally speaking, in German Foreign Office correspondence during the 1920s. According to one 1926 letter from the GAV, the German Calvinists had traditionally already "stood especially strongly under the Magyarizing influence of Hungary's large Calvinist Church." Unlike their Lutheran, and perhaps even Catholic, counterparts, the Calvinist Germans therefore had not "held onto their Germandom" or unified against "suppressive" state measures.²²⁷ Perhaps also for this reason, it seems that Germany's state and religious authorities did not pay much separate attention to Yugoslavia's ethnic German Calvinists. Only a miniscule amount of correspondence related to the Reformed Church has been preserved

²²² "Statistik pes Ref. Seniorates in Königreiche Jugoslawien 1929."

²²³ Letter, "Bestätigung" (4.12.1930); letter, "Das neue Gesetz" (11.6.1930).

²²⁴ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 68-69.

²²⁵ Statistics attached to "Protokoll" of 1929, 1930, 1931.

²²⁶ Letter from German Legation in Bled to German Foreign Office (15.8.1933), PA AA, R 61630.

²²⁷ Letter, "Das deutsche evang. Schulwesen in Jugoslawien" (3.7.1926).

in Germany's Foreign Office and national archives, and even in what has survived of Vojvodina's Calvinist Church libraries, only very few sources are actually in German or related to Germany.²²⁸

Nevertheless, even this small selection of extant sources points to an interwar concern on part of the Calvinist Church for (mother-tongue) education. As with the Catholics and Lutherans, Yugoslavia's Calvinist authorities lamented the nationalization of their school properties. According to their 1930 annual report, the Reformed Church alone had lost some thirteen million dinars worth of properties in 1920, and at least 600,000 dinars worth of rental payments per annum thereafter. Before 1920, they had operated the confessional schools of some thirty-five *Gemeinden* and employed seventy-four teachers. By 1930, they were only able to maintain six schools, all of which were in Slavonia, and two of which did not even have a Calvinist teacher.²²⁹ Considering these challenges, the Reformed Church, too, began lobbying for minority educational rights, joining forces on occasion with the Yugoslav Lutheran Church, and monitoring very closely any changes to the state's legal stipulations.²³⁰ Like the other confessions, the Reformed authorities further explicitly turned their attention to religious education outside of the classroom. Pastors emphasized the importance of Sunday school, morning religious services, children's services, confirmation classes, and Bible studies.²³¹ An annual budget was established for student scholarships, and religion classes within schools.²³² Efforts were made to import literature from sources like the Sunday School World Congress (*Sonntagsschul-Weltbund*)— much of which was confiscated at the Yugoslav border— and create a state-approved book for religious education.²³³

Such activities, however, did not seem to have the desired effect. In its 1933 annual report, the Yugoslav Reformed Church described its minorities' educational situation as close to catastrophic. Due to the closing of minority-based state and confessional schools, most of the children they attempted to instruct no longer knew their mother tongue. The German minority, through its re-established minority schools and school sections, was

²²⁸ Consider the ABV collection.

²²⁹ "Protokoll der am 20. November 1930 in Stara Moravica abgehaltenen ordentlichen Jahressitzung und Gerichtssitzung der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche im Königreiche Jugoslawien", p. 21, ABV.

²³⁰ *Tätigkeitsbericht* (1931), 34-35.

²³¹ "Protokoll" (14.11.1929), 8-12; "Protokoll" (20.11.1930), 10-14.

²³² "Protokoll" (20.11.1930), 32-33.

²³³ "Protokoll" (14.11.1929), 10; "Protokoll der am 8. Feber 1933 in Sombor abgehaltenen ordentlichen Landeskirchenversammlung u. Gerichtssitzung der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche im Königreiche Jugoslawien" (8.2.1933), 14.

apparently in a privileged position. However, the Hungarian-speaking children's predicament especially was dire: due to their Serbian education, they could "read Serbian excellently, but not understand it, and understand Hungarian well, but not read it." As a result, religious education had begun to "drop to the level of the Middle Ages," when priests attempted to teach the "ignorant populace" on the basis of pictures, an activity which— according to the Heidelberg Catechism— was in fact strictly prohibited.²³⁴

Despite the "privileged" position of German Calvinists, educational and social initiatives continued on their behalf over the following years, some of which were German-specific and nationally framed. To a degree, such projects occurred in tandem with Yugoslavia's Lutheran Church.²³⁵ The deaconess' home in Werbass— which was, as described above, partially financed by the *Reich*, and served in part as an orphanage and girls' school— was a joint enterprise between the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches, and maintained itself through donations from both congregations.²³⁶ The German-language "Protestant Calendar" of Yugoslavia, too, was printed as a combined publication of the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches, and contained joint articles on the German origins of the first *Donauschwaben* settlers.²³⁷ Based on the stamps still located in some of the publications salvaged through the *Deutscher Bürgerverein* "Adam Berenz", furthermore, it seems that some of the Lutheran— politically conservative to right-wing— literature that flowed from the *Reich* into Yugoslavia during the mid to late 1930s actually ended up in Reformed Church libraries.²³⁸ According to the Reformed Church's official budget, moreover, donations gathered through Yugoslavia's GAV also funded the Reformed congregations with at least five thousand dinars per year. In 1933

²³⁴ "... die ungarischen Kinder aber können ... serbisch ausgezeichnet lesen, verstehen aber nicht, ungarisch verstehen sie gut, können aber nicht lesen ... Demzufolge beginnt der Religionsunterricht auf der Stufe des Mittelalters zu sinken, als man das unwissende Volk mit Bildern unterrichtete, was der Heidelberger Katechismus streng verbietet." "Protokoll" (8.2.1933), 14.

²³⁵ In 1937, the Calvinist and Lutheran Churches drafted their own statutes about the friendly collaboration with each other. *Protestanten-Kalender für das Jahr 1937*, 106.

²³⁶ *Protestanten-Kalender für das Jahr 1937*, 68-69, 92-93, 96; "Jahresbericht des Protestantischen Diakonievereins für das Königreich Jugoslawien über das Protestantische Diakonissenhaus in Novi Vrbas (Batschka) für das Jahr 1938," R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 106. It is important to note that even in 1938, only 83% of the individuals (staff, students, etc.) involved were counted as either German or "*Reichsdeutsche*"; the rest were primarily Hungarian.

²³⁷ *Protestanten-Kalender für das Jahr 1937*.

²³⁸ Consider: *Zwischen den Zeiten*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1933) (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag). According to signatures and stamps within this issue, it was received by Werbass' Reformed pastor in 1936. ABV.

alone, the GAV paid the stipends of two Yugoslav German Calvinist students in Germany.²³⁹

Despite these activities, the scant surviving material on the Reformed Church suggests that Yugoslavia's Calvinists remained firmly entrenched (confessionally) in an international context during the 1930s. Hence, the German-language publications that the Reformed Church imported even after 1936 came from Switzerland.²⁴⁰ Additionally, many times more money (at least publicly) flowed from sources like the Reformed Church of the U.S.A. and the Church of Scotland into the coffers of the Yugoslav Calvinist Church than from any German fund.²⁴¹ While not much can be ascertained from these sources regarding the national and political leanings of the *Donauschwaben* Calvinist clergy and congregations, it is therefore perhaps not surprising that at least on the official level, the Calvinist Church did not formulate their interwar educational programs according to particular national grievances. Even in 1935—when pro-German, even pro-National Socialist, tendencies had already become apparent in the other *Donauschwaben* confessions—Calvinist literature related to the problem of mother-tongue instruction remained framed within just that context: the issue, it seems, was not the lack of German-language education in particular, but the absence of mother-tongue education in general.²⁴² Such tendencies, however, were not restricted to the formal educational sphere during this time. As with the other *Donauschwaben* confessions, ideological, even national battles, spilled from the classroom into an array of extra-curricular youth groups.

E. Conclusion

During the interwar period, Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben* communities saw a burgeoning in various organizations' and actors' perceived need to educate, train, and mobilize for their own cause the future generation. Following the dissolution of the

²³⁹ "Jahrbuch der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche des Königreiches Jugoslawien 1938" (Novivrbas: Werbasser Buchdruckerei des Heinrich Pleetz, 1939), 9; "Protokoll" (8.2.1933), 27-28.

²⁴⁰ The Hungarian-language literature came from Romania. *Protestanten-Kalender für das Jahr 1937*, 106.

²⁴¹ Between 1931 and 1932, for instance, the Reformed Church of the U.S.A. donated 50,400 dinars, and the Church of Scotland 11,000. "Protokoll" (13.11.1931), 34.

²⁴² *Jahrbuch der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche des Königreiches Jugoslawien 1935* (Novivrbas: Werbaser Buchdruckerei des Heinrich Pleetz, 1926), 5. ABV.

Habsburg Empire, the *Donauschwaben* stepped up their efforts to secure minority rights and cultural autonomy within the new Yugoslav state. They thereby focused, first and foremost, on education. Hoping not merely to safeguard, but to surpass, the possibilities for German-language education of the Habsburg period, *Donauschwaben* activists mobilized local pamphleteers, teachers, and politicians from the early 1920s onwards. Crucially, they also directly involved the *Reich*, which supported *Donauschwaben* educational pursuits in infrastructure, tuition, school materials, books, manpower, political initiatives, and international diplomatic pressure.

The role of the Church in the battle over German-language education in Yugoslavia has to date remained unexplored. The *Donauschwaben*'s churches, too, became active in the fight for German minority education. Partially spurred by a desire for restitution and the restoration of their previous educational monopoly, both the Catholic and the Protestant churches lobbied for ethnic German educational rights during the interwar period. As with the more secularized (*Kulturbund* and *Partei der Deutschen*) organizations— of which these clergymen were frequently the earliest members and supporters— backing for German-language education was first sought within the framework of the Yugoslav state and its international, post-World War I agreements on minority rights protection. However, as such efforts were frustrated, even the churches turned to alternate networks and sources of potential aid. Especially the Catholic and the Lutheran Churches succeeded in establishing ties to *reichsdeutsche* state and ecclesiastical organizations, which henceforth helped fund *Donauschwaben* educational projects on a confessional and national basis. In order to garner this support, these by nature multinational confessions thereby— at least in the *Donauschwaben* case— increasingly framed their grievances nationally, creating a discussion even within the churches on the nature of “Germandom,” and the *Donauschwaben*'s ties to the “motherland.”

Despite such efforts, progress on the *Donauschwaben*'s “school front” was slow. Bound to vacillating state laws issued by a nationalizing “host state” suspicious of minority movements, and hampered by the occasional arbitrary implementation of such laws and rights by local authorities, the *Donauschwaben* largely failed to establish a comprehensive system of German-language schools, taught in German, by German-speaking teachers prior to the 1940s. Faced by these official restrictions in the curricular sphere, the *Donauschwaben* developed a growing interest in the extra-curricular “national” education of their youth instead. To a degree— as in the case of church

programs— this resulted in more informal educational initiatives, including the importation of German-language literature, the expansion of German-language religion classes and Sunday schools, the establishment of German-language dorms, and the creation of scholarships to Germany. However, especially from the 1930s onwards, both secular and explicitly confessional actors increasingly turned to an alternate avenue of youth education and mobilization: the extra-curricular youth group. It is within the context of such youth groups that battles between the Yugoslav and German states, the various *Donauschwaben* cultural organizations and confessions, and even individual youth raged most heavily, as the *Donauschwaben* navigated fluctuating political and social conditions, and changing definitions of “Germanness,” within their parameters.

Chapter 2

Extra-Curricular *Donauschwaben* Youth Mobilization, 1918-1941

A. Introduction

Considering the large-scale frustrations of Yugoslavia's German minority in securing a curricular German-language education for their youth, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the *Donauschwaben* increasingly turned to the less easily state-controlled extra-curricular sphere instead. Partially in tune with larger international interests in incorporating children and youth into socially, religiously, and politically-defined youth organizations, partially spurred by a desire to "compensate" for a restrictive minority school system, the *Donauschwaben*'s youth, from the 1920s, were not merely to be molded within the classroom or schoolyard; rather, "youth work" ("*Jugendarbeit*") within extra-curricular youth organizations also became an increasingly elaborate enterprise.

To date, there have been no studies of the extra-curricular mobilization of ethnic German youth in Yugoslavia between 1918 and 1941. This absence in historiographic consideration has undoubtedly been created at least in part through lacunae in the historic record. No comprehensive archival collections on the *Donauschwaben*'s extra-curricular youth activities exist. Any traces of such youth organizations, moreover, have been dispersed across various local, regional, and national archives, many of which still have no rhyme or reason to their organization of materials on the *Donauschwaben* during this period. Furthermore, the *Donauschwaben*'s involvement in ethnic German-specific organizations has remained understudied and largely "taboo." Any studies that have breached the various walls of silence surrounding such topics, additionally, have lent little attention to issues of childhood and youth.

As this chapter shows, however, the history of extra-curricular youth groups among the *Donauschwaben* is rich, complex, and highly illustrative of larger issues, such as borderland nation-building, the politicization of minority movements, and the interplay between "macro," "meso," and "micro"-level actors and concerns. Between 1918 and 1941, youth and their preparation for life were placed at the center of various community,

regional, and international disputes. Their mobilization into youth groups became a priority not only for secularized ethnic German, *Reich*, and Yugoslav educators and organizations; even churches— from the largest Catholic congregation to the smallest Protestant sect— developed considerable youth programs to convey their own particular visions of national identity, political affiliation, and spiritual conviction.

As in the curricular sphere, such extra-curricular activities developed in direct competition with one another. Battles were launched between ecclesiastical and secular youth formations, and between the organizations of different confessions and nationalities. However, some of the greatest contention over youth during the interwar period arose from within the *Kulturbund* itself. Over the course of the 1930s, the *Kulturbund* split into two groups: a conservative, “old guard” faction that had been loyal to the Habsburg Empire, and a younger, right-wing radical, pro-*Reich* group of “*Erneuerer*” (“renewers”). By the late 1930s, as we shall see, the *Erneuerer* were largely victorious. Though not all ethnic German youth had come under their control, the pro-Nazi activists were able to successfully define the terms of youth mobilization in the region, requiring other youth organizers (even in the religious sphere) to compete on their terms in form, undertakings, and, occasionally, even content.

Ultimately, all state, church, and minority actors navigated a larger context of political, social, and national conflict. It was precisely within this negotiation of both external challenges and internal mutual antagonisms that the *Donauschwaben*’s interwar youth groups either radicalized in their pro- or anti-*Reich* compartment, or were so marginalized by 1941 that they were replaced by the local “Hitler Youth.” Regardless of individual youth group’s particular development and fate, it would become clear by 1941 that youth mobilization had transformed from a fringe project of smaller ecclesiastical and secular clubs to a mass-tailored norm. Certainly, not all youth were swept up in this youth mobilization frenzy; some would remain fairly apathetic to any organized form of youth activity. Nonetheless, the interwar period established the foundations for the organizational structure, content, and internal conflicts of the *Donauschwaben*’s youth groups for the following occupation years (1941-1944). Equally important, during the interwar period, the very scale and perceived importance of extra-curricular youth mobilization began to ingrain itself into *Donauschwaben* society.

B. The Rise of Secular Extra-Curricular Youth Mobilization

1. Initial Youth Organizations, 1918-1935

Currently, there are virtually no studies on the development of ethnic German youth organizations in Yugoslavia during the early interwar period. Archival materials on the subject are similarly difficult to find. However, based on the histories penned by former *Donauschwaben* leaders themselves, it seems that the immediate interwar period saw a reconstitution of the variegated landscape of youth formations and activities that had developed under Habsburg rule. Ethnic German youth continued to participate in an array of vocational, guild, agricultural, worker's, religious, sports, and singing groups during this time, only some of which were exclusively German-speaking.¹ However, especially Yugoslavia and Romania— more so than Hungary— apparently saw a first flourishing of “*deutschvölkische Jugendarbeit*” (“German *Volk*-based youth work”) in the aftermath of World War I.² Inspired particularly by the concurrent rise of youth movements in Germany, associations across Yugoslavia found impetus for the further expansion and consolidation of their youth work, and began establishing exclusively German youth clubs.³

One such association was the *Kulturbund* (SDKB). At the time of its official establishment in 1920, the *Kulturbund* already distributed a “*Hausordnung der Jugendabteilung des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes*” (“House Rules for the Youth Chapters of the SDKB”). According to these regulations, *Kulturbund* youth groups were to be established in connection with regular SDKB chapters for youth who had outgrown their years of compulsory education (which included four years of primary and four years of secondary school).⁴ The aim of these groups included young people’s “*Erziehung*” in a “religious and German spirit,” their protection from “moral dangers” (“*sittliche Gefahren*”), training in “economical sciences,” and the furnishing of “necessary social animation” (“*notwendige gesellschaftliche Anregung*”). Furthermore, the means would include not merely “exemplary behavior in all life situations” and “conscientious

¹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208.

² Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208; Gerhard Albrich, Hans Christ, and Hans Wolfram Hockl, *Deutsche Jugendbewegung im Südosten* (Bielefeld: Verlag Ernst und Werner Giesecking, 1969).

³ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208-209.

⁴ “Das Schulwesen der deutschen Minderheit in Südslawien im Schuljahr 1929/1930,” 116.

fulfillment of all religious and *völkisch* duties”; rather, German song, music, and literature would be “attended to,” “good German books” would be procured, and “*volkstümliche*” lectures and readings would be held “in all academic disciplines.”⁵

While the *Kulturbund* had, from its inception, envisioned the creation of separate youth chapters, not much can be learned about these earliest formations based on the archival record or contemporaneous press. However, according to *Donauschwaben* historians— many of who participated in and led later, more radicalized youth groups during the 1930s and early 1940s— most of these groups seem to have been active only “on paper” during this time.⁶ While they represented a first attempt at “participating in the *Volksgemeinschaft*” on the local level in their fostering of folk songs, stories, and dances, these groups remained rather disorganized, disjointed from chapter to chapter, and dependent on particular youth leaders, not the organization at large, in terms of their content, spirit,⁷ and operation.⁷

The *Kulturbund*’s youth groups, moreover, represented only one among a plethora of other youth formations during the 1920s. Various Christian youth groups also arose, like the Catholic “*Mädchenkränze*” for girls between twelve and sixteen years of age.⁸ In 1928, the *Donauschwaben* V.H. Fürst and Thomas Menrath (a later LBA instructor) also established the “*Verband der deutschen Turn- und Sportvereine*” (“Association of German Gymnastics and Sports Clubs”). While the *Verband* was not exclusively dedicated to youth work from the start, some “*Jünglingsturnvereine*” (“youth sports organizations”) did become associated with it. They organized sports training and athletic shows (“*Schauturnen*”) in their communities.⁹ As later *Donauschwaben* historians mention, however, these athletic groups also “barely affected youth,” and were restricted to approximately ten branches across Yugoslavia during the late 1920s.¹⁰

Like Germany, Yugoslavia during the 1920s also saw a flourishing German “*Wandervogel*” (“wandering bird”) movement. Formally introduced to Yugoslavia in 1928, the *Wandervögel* were based— like their counterparts in Germany— upon the

⁵ “Hausordnung der Jugendabteilung der Ortsgruppe des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes,” § 1, 2, BArch R 57/neu/1070, Bd. 71, Tl. 1.

⁶ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 28.

⁷ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 27-28.

⁸ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 27.

⁹ “Denkschrift über die Behinderung der Arbeit des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes” (7.3.1930), p. 14, BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 1.

¹⁰ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 28. For more on these sports groups, consider the section on the *Volksdeutsche Sportstelle* later in this chapter.



Fig. 2.1 Scenes from Educational Session with a *Kulturbund Wanderlehrer*, ca. 1936-1937. Source: *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung*. Novi Sad: Druckerei-und Verlags-A.G, 1937. p. 19. Caption: “The *Wanderlehrer* school youth and lead them to gesture in strict discipline.”

ideals of freedom from bourgeois norms, a return to nature, and community service (as in their work camps for the construction of roads, irrigation systems, and forest clearing).¹¹ As a series of correspondence to the German “*Mittelstelle für Jugendgrenzlandarbeit*” (“Center for Youth Borderland Work”) from March 1927 onwards attests, these *Wandervögel* were driven by *Reich* financing, personnel, and aims from the start. Paul Claus, a “*reichsdeutsche*” student from Leipzig, became instrumental to their activities. A *Deutsche Studentenschaft* (“German Student Group”) member in Belgrade, Claus obtained money from the *Reich* with his colleagues to lead *Donauschwaben Wandervogel* groups during this time.¹² By early 1929, Claus received a steady stream of letters from *Wandervogel* leaders in Novi Vrbas, Novi Sad, and other Vojvodina towns asking—frequently in a broken German—for more funding and materials (including guitars, song books, and German literature).¹³ Occasionally, these groups even hosted *Reichsdeutsche* groups, like three leaders of the *Sächsische Jungenschaft* in April 1928.¹⁴

Yugoslavia’s German youth organizations of the 1920s thus initially were rather scattered in their activities, aims, and funding. Even though the extra-curricular training of youth became a priority during this period, the extent of these organizations’ activities and underlying sentiments largely depended on the enthusiasm and vision of individual

¹¹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 210.

¹² Letter from *Mittelstelle für Jugendgrenzlandarbeit* to *Regierungsrat* Krahrmer-Möllenberg (25.3.1927), BArch R 8043/978, fol. 171.

¹³ Letter to “Herrn Regierungsrat Krahrmer-Möllenberg, Berlin” (21.3.1929), BArch R 8043/978, fol. 10-17.

¹⁴ Letter (21.3.1929), BArch R 8043/978, fol. 8.



Fig. 2.2 Photos of “Cheerful Hiking *Kulturbund* Youth” (above) and “*Kulturbund* Youth at Training Camp” (below). Source: *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung*. Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937. p. 34.

youth leaders, as well as upon the community context and aim (religious, athletic, vocational, cultural, or vocational) of a particular youth group.¹⁵ Furthermore, while joint events and meetings between various youth organizations— especially different *Kulturbund* youth chapters— sometimes occurred, these rarely synchronized their events beyond town boundaries.¹⁶ Nonetheless, certain similarities did arise among these organizations: from their inception, none of these formations were particularly concerned with the inculcation of a “national consciousness.”¹⁷ This would change over the course

¹⁵ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 27-28.

¹⁶ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 28; Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 209.

¹⁷ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 28.

of the 1920s, however, as youth projects became increasingly politicized along “national” lines. Partially, this turn to the “national” occurred due to a growing perception that Yugoslavia’s school-based education in German language and culture was insufficient. Partially, this was also due to new *Reich* influences in the region, as Germany began sending youth instructors and groups to Yugoslavia. Significantly, *Donauschwaben* themselves began seeking higher education within Germany, frequently returning to their hometowns thereafter to conduct “practical youth work” according to the “German model” at local schools, *Kulturbund* youth chapters, and other youth organizations.¹⁸

As with the development of German schools, 1929 represented a turning point for the expansion of *Kulturbund*-related youth groups. Since political parties and organizations based on principles of religion and ethnicity were outlawed in Yugoslavia’s newly proclaimed royal dictatorship, the *Kulturbund*, too, was forced to suspend its activities. *Kulturbund*-specific youth groups, theater performances, dance events, and lectures were banned.¹⁹ Any extra-curricular education, such as winter courses for German-speaking agricultural youth, were now only to be conducted in Serbo-Croatian. Any youth chapters and activities that did not comply with such regulations were simply disbanded.²⁰ All athletic organizations, furthermore, were now either dissolved or merged with the Sokol, Yugoslavia’s national sports organization. After 1929, the physical education of youth officially became the state’s prerogative. Centered around the “physically healthy, morally strong, and nationally conscious education of citizens of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,” the Sokol’s chapters became the only officially acceptable form of sports group. By 1934, the Sokol had become a mandatory exercise for all male and female Yugoslav citizens to the age of twenty.²¹

As was the case with German-language schools, it was only in 1931 that some of these policies were relaxed. On April 14th, 1931, the Yugoslav authorities officially sanctioned the *Kulturbund*’s new statutes.²² Thereafter, the large-scale, *Kulturbund*-based

¹⁸ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 209.

¹⁹ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 341-342.

²⁰ “Denkschrift über die Behinderung der Arbeit des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes,” 14-15.

²¹ Letter (29.7.1930), pp. 2-4, BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 72, Tl. 1; letter, “Auflösung von deutschen Turnvereinen im Zusammenhang mit dem Gesetz über den jugoslawischen Sokol” (5.2.1930), PA AA, R 73201; letter, “Gesetz über die Sportpflicht der Jugend in Jugoslawien und Gesetz über die Gründung des Sokolverbandes” (21.12.1931), including full German-language translations of Sokol laws of 5.12.1929, (14.2.1930 and 17.1.1934), PA AA, R 103382. For more on the Sokol, consider: Jakir, “Die Sokol-Bruderschaft zwischen den Weltkriegen in Dalmatien”; Zec, “The Sokol Movement.”

²² Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 347.

training and education of youth truly commenced. While only approximately thirteen *Kulturbund* chapters had existed across different Yugoslav towns in early 1931, the number of local groups expanded rapidly after the *Kulturbund*'s official legal re-institution. By mid-May 1932, the *Kulturbund* boasted 82 local chapters (“*Ortsgruppen*”) with some 6,000 members. Twenty-five of these groups were established in the Western Banat alone, while another 30 were founded in the Batschka. By 1937, the total number of *Kulturbund* chapters across Yugoslavia had skyrocketed to 256.²³ In an attempt to broaden their reach across classes and ages during the mid-1930s, most of these local chapters also established academic groups, sports and singing clubs, and—above all—youth groups.²⁴ As before 1929, the *Kulturbund* youth chapters dedicated most of their efforts to “compensating” for what the SDKB leadership felt was still absent from German-language schools: a “proper” understanding of German language and history, as well as the maintenance of the local “German” cultural traditions (as purportedly found in the language, songs, dances, and stories of the first *Donauschwaben* settlers).²⁵ Precise statistics on *Kulturbund* youth groups are difficult to come across. Nevertheless, according to a 1937 *Kulturbund* report, three youth groups were first established in 1931. These youth groups then mushroomed to 48 local youth branches in 1934, 102 in 1935, 142 in 1936, and 202 in 1937.²⁶

The *Kulturbund*, however, did not have a monopoly over youth groups after 1931. German *Wandervogel* and *Wanderlehrer* (“traveling teacher”) groups, too, reformulated their previous practices in the face of the dictatorship’s new policies, and launched traveling puppet theaters instead. Armed with puppets, photo projectors, and musical instruments, these puppeteers traveled across Vojvodina from 1933 and presented German-language shows. Occasionally, as in March 1934, the Yugoslav authorities banned such performances; however, they continued sporadically over the following years.²⁷ *Kulturbund*-instigated exchanges with *reichsdeutsche* youth groups further

²³ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 347. For a graphic representation of the establishment of these chapters, consider *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung* (Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937), 7. [See: Fig. 2.3]

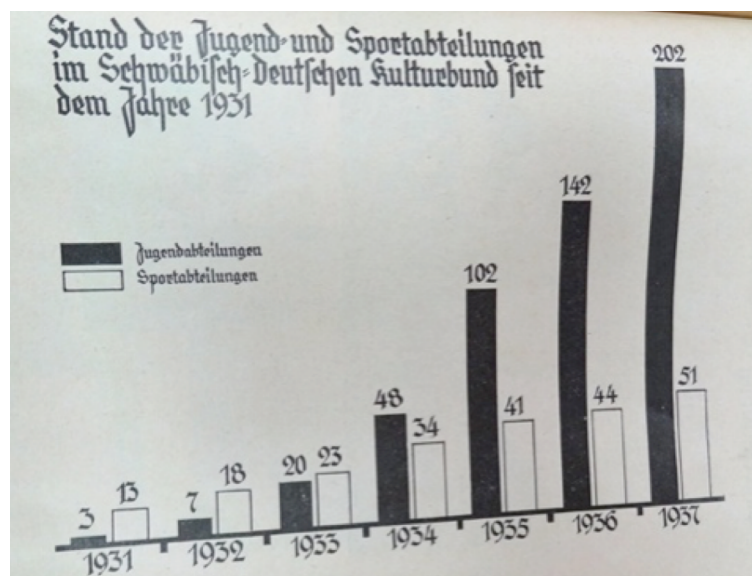
²⁴ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 347.

²⁵ Consider: Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 28-29; Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208-209.

²⁶ *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937*, 7.

²⁷ “Bericht über die Arbeit des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes von der 8. ordentlichen Hauptversammlung in Pantschowa am 15. May 1932, bis zum 1. Juli 1933,” p. 6, BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 1; “Pressedienst des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes. Neusatz, im März 1934,” p. 1, BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 2.

Fig. 2.3 Graph on Establishment of *Kulturbund* Youth and Sports Branches, 1931-1937.
 Source: *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung*. Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937. p. 41.



persisted: during the summer of 1932, for instance, 168 boys from Westphalia spent several days with host families in the Batschka and the Banat. A reciprocal visit of *Donauschwaben* youth to the *Reich* was then planned for the spring of 1934.²⁸

Within this plurality of 1930s *Donauschwaben* youth groups, one of the key contestants quickly arose from within the *Kulturbund* itself, in the form of the “*Erneuerungsbewegung*” (“renewal movement”). Originally driven primarily by young men who had been educated in Germany— and thereby exposed to, enthused by, and frequently part of Germany’s National Socialist student and workers’ groups— the *Erneuerungsbewegung* began to directly rival the *Kulturbund* during the mid 1930s.²⁹ Drawing upon a right-wing activism based on ideals of ethnic identity, the indivisibility of the *Volk*, and similar, pro-Nazi sentiments, the *Erneuerer* (members of the “*Erneuerungsbewegung*,” or “renewers”) generally represented a younger generation of *Donauschwaben* who had not been raised in (and had not become loyal to) the Habsburg state.³⁰ Further inspired by the seemingly ineluctable rise of National Socialism in Germany, the *Erneuerer* expressed an increasing frustration at the “old guard’s” apparent

²⁸ “Bericht über die Arbeit des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes von der 8. ordentlichen Hauptversammlung,” 20; “Pressedienst des Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbundes. Neusatz, im März 1934,” 1.

²⁹ Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 42-43; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 41.

³⁰ Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 119, 28; Helmlinger, *Bukiner Heimatbuch*, 208-209; Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 214-215.

willingness to cooperate with the Yugoslav state. From their perspective, the Yugoslav state had merely contributed to a shackling and decline of the “Germans” in the region.³¹

Self-styled as a “youthful” movement and encouraged by the large-scale mobilization of youth in Germany, the *Erneuerungsbewegung* began targeting youth in their efforts to “consolidate” all *Donauschwaben* organizationally, nationally, and ideologically.³² Proclaimed as an individual organization in 1934 under the leadership of Jakob Awender, a physician from Pančevo/Pantschowa/Pancsova (Banat), the *Erneuerungsbewegung* received support and aid directly from *Reich* student and cultural organizations.³³ Its explicit quest revolved around the realization of the “*Volk*-based, social, and biological demands of National Socialism.”³⁴ As such, youth became a key component of their plan. The *Erneuerer*’s annual journal, *Volk und Arbeit*, illustrates this point clearly. In the 1939 issue, the later *Landesführung* Propaganda Minister Heinrich Reister exclaimed emphatically that the *Donauschwaben* youth had been led astray for too long by organizations which had provided activities that were “lacking education of spirit and character.”³⁵ The *Erneuerer*— guided by the principle of “youth must lead youth!”— would create “a unified, all-encompassing youth organization” and a united youth leadership. Together, these leaders would “enthuse” youth “for the grand ideas of our *Volk* and educate them in a new attitude towards life.” Ultimately, the *Erneuerer*’s activities would prevent the *Donauschwaben* from “continuing with their eternal *völkisch* retrogression.”³⁶

³¹ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 30-35; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 41-42.

³² Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 214-215; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 401-402.

³³ To an extent, the Yugoslav *Erneuerungsbewegung* followed the example of Romania’s previously established ethnic German *Erneuerungsbewegung*. Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 43; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 401-402. For more on *Reich* aid towards pro-Nazi *Donauschwaben* organizations and projects during the mid-1930s, consider: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 42-46.

³⁴ Quoted in: Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 401.

³⁵ “... mangelhafte geistige und charakterliche Erziehung unserer Jugend.” Heinrich Reister, “Jugendarbeit,” *Volk und Arbeit: Jahrweiser für das schaffende Deutschtum in Jugoslawien 1939* (Pančevo: Druckerei- und Verlagsgenossenschaft m.b.H, 1939), 82. It is interesting to note that even this publication was always framed by portraits of, and odes to, the Yugoslav royal family.

³⁶ “... eine einheitliche, allumfassende Jugendorganisation und unzertrennlich damit verbunden eine einheitlich ausgerichtete Jugendführung”; “Sie muss für die grossen Ideen unseres Volkes begeistert und zur neuen Lebenshaltung erzogen werden, soll sie nicht ewig den völkischen Krebsgang gehen.” Reister, “Jugendarbeit,” 82, 85.

In their activities, the *Erneuerer* depended largely on the infiltration of existing *Kulturbund* youth chapters. Following Hitler's ascent to power in 1933, the *Erneuerer* conducted sports events and "*Heimabende*," organized apprenticeships and vocational training, and attempted to "unify" Yugoslavia's German youth into a larger "*Volksgemeinschaft*."³⁷ Ultimately, their tactics were quite effective. By 1935, most *Kulturbund* youth groups were dominated by *Erneuerer*.³⁸ Unsurprisingly, this caused some consternation with the *Kulturbund*'s "old guard." As one October 1937 report by a *Kulturbund* lawyer claimed, the *Kulturbund* should have been doing much more than "songs and dances" in the previous years to help stem the growing tide of *Erneuerer* youth projects. During the past years, the *Kulturbund* had organized folkloric meetings across the Batschka, including in Karawukowo/Karavukovo/Bácsordas, Hodschag/Odžaci/Hódság, and Tscherwenka/Crvenka/Cservenka. Most of these events, however, had turned into a complete embarrassment for the *Kulturbund*. Prior to the youth meeting in Karawukowo, for instance, advertisements had been distributed to twenty-three local *Kulturbund* chapters. Only seven *Kulturbund* youth group members then actually attended the event. Instead, several hundred *Erneuerer* youth came "and made a shining propaganda for the E.B. [*Erneuerungsbewegung*]." As these "and similar failures" indicated, "the most valuable part of youth [was] now with the *Erneuerer*," despite the *Kulturbund*'s efforts.³⁹

The *Erneuerer*'s takeover of *Kulturbund* youth chapters, however, occurred not merely among younger followers. As Janko describes, during the 1930s, the "activated and gradually also politically-minded youth" further "enforced for themselves a *Jugendführung* [youth leadership] within the *Kulturbund* that seemed appropriate for the given necessities"—an "enforcement" that, as Akiko Shimizu has shown, was actually largely orchestrated by the *Reich*.⁴⁰ According to Shimizu, the *Reich* had already supported pro-Nazi efforts within the *Donauschwaben* communities from the early 1930s onwards. Youth, here, became a focus: during the summer of 1934, organizations like the *Deutsche Studentenschaft* in Leipzig already sent students to join with local *Erneuerer*

³⁷ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 27-29.

³⁸ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 402.

³⁹ "Bericht von Dr. Richard Derner, Rechtsanwalt, Neusatz" (10.1937), p. 1, BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 2.

⁴⁰ "Die aktivierte und allmählich auch politisch ausgerichtete Jugend erzwang sich innerhalb des KB eine Jugendführung, die nach ihren Vorstellungen den gegebenen Notwendigkeiten angemessen war." Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 30.

and help “prevent” the formation of traditional *Kulturbund* chapters. Furthermore—supposedly also with the help of *Reichsjugendführung* and *Hitler-Jugend* agents from Germany—the *Erneuerer* attempted to “gain for themselves” the local youth, even sending some to Germany for training. The *Reich* further dispatched delegates from the VDA (*Volkstum für das Deutschtum im Ausland*) and the *Reichsjugendführung* to Yugoslavia in November 1934. There, they helped *Erneuerer* like Jakob Awender, Gustav Halwax, and other “active youth” assume important positions within the SDKB. These efforts were not always successful. However, through *Reich* pressure, the *Erneuerer* eventually did manage to install a new official “*Jugendleiter*” (“youth leader”) within the *Kulturbund*: Jakob Lichtenberger.⁴¹

The *Reich*-supported “enforcement” of a (pro-*Erneuerer*) youth leadership within the *Kulturbund* had dramatic consequences. On December 3rd, 1934, the SDKB appointed Jakob Lichtenberger as *Jugendleiter*. A mere two months later (in February 1935), Lichtenberger openly proclaimed his adherence to the *Erneuerungsbewegung* and refused to take orders from the *Kulturbund* chief, Johann Keks (one of the original founding members of the SDKB).⁴² Keks hence called for a youth meeting (“*Jugendtagung*”) to fire Lichtenberger from his position, and to replace the current youth leadership with the group “*Deutscher Aufbau*,” an ethnic German movement based around the Catholic *Donauschwaben* centers in Slovenia, the Western Batschka, and Dakovstina (Croatia).⁴³ The *Erneuerer* youth leaders responded by storming this July 28th, 1935 meeting at the Habag-Haus in Novi Sad in the company of their loyal youth followers. Despite this dramatic interruption, Lichtenberger and Helly Schenk, the female youth leader, were released from their duties.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 44-45.

⁴² As Bethke describes, this occurred right after Awender and his fellow leading *Erneuerer*, who had tried to take over the SDKB leadership, were officially banned from the *Kulturbund*. Bethke thus sees this conflict over youth as an avenue in which such conflicts were displaced/continued. Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 402.

⁴³ It must be emphasized that some of the first *Kulturbund* leaders during the 1920s were deeply tied to the Church, sometimes even being clerics themselves. However, as will become increasingly apparent over the course of this dissertation, particularly the Catholic Church became a main source of “resistance” against the *Kulturbund* after its *Erneuerer*-driven *Gleichschaltung* in the late 1930s. One prominent example here is Adam Berenz. Originally a founding member of the *Kulturbund* in Apatin, Berenz later became a key anti-National Socialist resistance figure (more on him later in the dissertation). For more on Berenz’s biography and activities, consider: Philip W. Lyon, *After Empire: Ethnic Germans and Minority Nationalism in Interwar Yugoslavia* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2008), 484-493.

⁴⁴ Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 218-221; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 402; “Die Entwicklung nach dem

Fig. 2.4 “Girls’ Circle of the Local *Kulturbund* Chapter” in Crvenka (Batschka), Mid-1930s.

Source: *Volkswart: Vierteljahrschrift für deutsche Volkstumspflege in Südslawien*. Vol. 3, No. 2 (April-June 1935). Novi Sad: Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund. p. 150.

Caption: “Mädchenkranz der Kulturbundortsgruppe” (“Girls’ Circle of the Local *Kulturbund* Chapter”)



Various institutional skirmishes followed the “storm onto the Habag-Haus,” an event later mythologized in local National Socialist lore.⁴⁵ Ultimately, however, an agreement—later rejected by the VDA and the VoMi—was reached between *Erneuerer* and “old guard” *Kulturbund* circles.⁴⁶ In an October 27th, 1935 meeting, the pre-existing *Kulturbund* youth administration, the “*Verband der Deutschen Jugend*,” was dissolved.⁴⁷ The *Verband der Deutschen Jugend*, which had existed since May 14th, 1934, and which had appointed Jakob Lichtenberger at its helm, was then replaced by the “*Jugendstelle*.” The *Jugendstelle* thus became the new *Kulturbund* umbrella youth organization, from which most previous *Erneuerer* youth leaders were expelled.⁴⁸ Furthermore, all extant *Kulturbund* youth groups were provisionally suspended. In order to recommence their work, local youth group chapters were now obligated to reapply for a permit with their local *Kulturbund* “*Ortsgruppenleitung*” (“local chapter leadership”).⁴⁹ All youth group leaders could only be re-instituted if they signed a “*Verpflichtungsschein*” (“contract of

Weltkrieg,” 6a; Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 30. The Habag-Haus was the headquarters of the “Haus-Bau-AG” in Novi Sad, in which the German “*Volksgruppe*”—especially those leaders surrounding Janko—had their center. The Habag-Haus would again become the site of skirmishes (and weapons trade and distribution) with the Axis invasion of the Batschka in 1941. See: Wehler, *Nationalitätenpolitik in Jugoslawien*, 42-43, 125, 130.

⁴⁵ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 402.

⁴⁶ For more on the VDA and the VoMi’s protest against the October 1935 settlement, see: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 48-49.

⁴⁷ The meeting was dedicated to various internal *Kulturbund* issues, but focused primarily on youth.

⁴⁸ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 6a; Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 30.

⁴⁹ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 6a.

duty”) and filed a successful application with the *Kulturbund*’s central *Bundesleitung* (leadership).⁵⁰ The various “*Ortsgruppen*,” which were legally bound to the *Kulturbund* headquarters in Novi Sad, thereafter became the legal heads of the local (*Kulturbund*) youth groups.⁵¹ The *Jugendstelle* in Novi Sad—the new centralized organization of all *Ortsgruppen*-subordinate *Kulturbund* youth chapters—officially became not only the administrative, but also the “ideological” and “pedagogical” authority of the *Donauschwaben* youth groups.

The “old guard” *Kulturbund* leaders made some concessions, including the official incorporation of twenty *Erneuerer* into the SDKB *Bundesleitung*.⁵² However, at least from an official, structural, and legal standpoint, the *Kulturbund* had succeeded in removing the *Erneuerer* from youth group control. Such measures would prove to be ineffective, though. Indeed, the *Erneuerer*’s infiltration of *Kulturbund* youth groups continued. On December 17th, 1935, the Yugoslav authorities officially shut down Novi Sad’s “500-man strong” *Kulturbund* chapter. As the authorities explained, youth members of Novi Sad’s *Kulturbund* branch had been seen “wearing brown uniforms” with a “sign similar to a swastika” on their right arms and “black-white flags with the same signs ... as the Hitler Youth in Germany.” Furthermore, these youth had gathered at “events and celebrations” and “marched on command and sang songs with political tendencies” similar to those of the “SA or SS within the *Reich*.”⁵³ As a result, the Yugoslav authorities monitored all *Kulturbund* youth groups closely. As one letter from *Bundesleitung* leaders Keks and Giljum to all *Ortsgruppen* leaders in January 1936 explains, all songs, chants (“*Sprechchöre*”), and similar texts employed in youth meetings would need to be “examined closely.” Any “songs and texts, which allow for a political interpretation or could lead to any misunderstandings” would be immediately forbidden.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the insignia “introduced by the former *Jugendleiter*” (presumably Lichtenberger)—the flags and signs with a black-and-white “*Wolfsangel*” (the “wolf’s

⁵⁰ AMV/KB 43, “Rundschreiben Folge 3” by SDKB *Bundesleitung* in Novi Sad (28.3.1936), 2.

⁵¹ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 6a; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 223-224. For the *Kulturbund*’s own description of these events, consider: “Zum Kampf im Kulturbund” (10.1937), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 2.

⁵² For more information on these concessions, consider: Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 221-222.

⁵³ Quotation reproduced in: Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 230. Reports of this event even circulated in Berlin’s daily newspapers. Consider, for instance: “Die Auflösung in Neusatz: Verhältnisse im Deutsch-Schwäbischen Kulturbund,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 84 (19.2.1926), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 2.

hook,” a Nazi rune used primarily in SS and HJ divisions)— was to be confiscated and destroyed. Any “closed marches” and “marches on command” were prohibited for *Kulturbund* members. Finally, outdoor meetings would require approval in advance by the local Yugoslav authorities.⁵⁵

In its own quest to “unify” and “activate” the *Donauschwaben* youth, the *Jugendstelle* began coordinating a vast array of programs across Yugoslavia. These programs were constructed largely upon pre-existing efforts. *Wanderschulungen*— series of lectures and events conducted by “young,” “idealistic” *Wanderlehrer* concerned with the spread of folkloric, nationalistic, and linguistic education— expanded during the mid-1930s, so that during the 1934/1935 academic year (when these programs became officially coordinated in the region), up to 73 *Ortschaften* had hosted one of these teachers. By 1937/1938, this number had increased to 164.⁵⁶ “Germanic” (or increasingly “Germanized”) festivals, like “*Sonnenwendfeiern*” (solstice celebrations), folk dancing and singing events, harvest and grape vintage festivities, theater performances, and sports competitions, further expanded during this time.⁵⁷ The already popular “*Heimabende*”— evenings of German folk songs, stories, dances, and history-telling primarily for youth fresh out of school— further experienced a “revival.” Additionally, while many of these *Heimabende* were initially still directed in Serbo-Croatian, as many *Donauschwaben* had “forgotten their mother tongue,” these could increasingly be held in German. In “more advanced *Ortsgruppen*,” they were even imbued with “historical lessons and ideological schooling.”⁵⁸

Despite their 1935 settlement over youth, the relationship between more conservative, pro-Yugoslav “old guard” *Kulturbund* leaders and the *Erneuerer* remained tense during the mid-1930s. At least according to reports by (pro-*Erneuerer*)

⁵⁵ AMV/KB 40, letter (17.1.1936). Such instructions also highlight how the *Kulturbund* was, of course, functioning within the framework of the Yugoslav state and laws, and ultimately seems to have found itself in the position of a mediator between the Yugoslav authorities and various *Donauschwaben* formations, branches, and concerns. Based on available materials, it is not entirely clear how much of this National Socialist symbolism was adopted by “old guard” *Kulturbund* youth groups, and how much of it was used by the *Erneuerer*; as these passages show, however, the two factions appear to have intermingled even after the *Erneuerer*’s official ban in 1935.

⁵⁶ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 11. For more on “*Wanderlehrer*,” see: Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 208-209.

⁵⁷ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 8-11.

⁵⁸ “*Die Heimabende konnten zu Beginn nur in serbo-kroatischer Sprache abgehalten werden, zumal die Jugend teilweise ihre Muttersprache nicht mehr konnte. In mehr fortgeschrittenen Ortsgruppen konnte aber schon mit Geschichtsunterricht und weltanschaulichen Schulungen begonnen werden.*” “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 10.

contemporaries, the very struggle between “old guard” *Kulturbund* members and *Erneuerer* had helped “awaken” youth. These conflicts, “which had occurred in the first place over youth,” had caused previously “sleeping” or “ambivalent” youth to “wake up from their princess sleep” and “listen” to the German “struggle.” Upon seeing that they were now being endowed with a centrality, responsibility, and trust, these girls and boys flocked in droves (according to one hyperbolic report, by the hundreds of thousands) to the new youth groups and programs— especially those led by the more “enthusiastic” and “goal-oriented” *Erneuerer*.⁵⁹

While most of the *Erneuerer* had now officially been evicted from the *Kulturbund* and its youth groups, one can at least surmise that individual *Jugendstelle* youth leaders remained dedicated to the *Erneuerer* cause. Activities between the now “*Erneuerer*-free” and *Erneuerer*-coordinated youth programs also most probably intermingled on occasions like *Wanderschulungen* or official “Germanic” festivities. Furthermore, by 1936, the *Erneuerer* had secured both official and unofficial legal avenues for the continuation of their youth work. In March 1936, the *Kultur- und Wohlfahrtsvereinigung der Deutschen in Slawonien* (“The Cultural and Welfare Union of the Germans in Slavonia,” or KWVD) was established in Croatia. Financed by the VDA, the KWVD’s aims were explicitly National Socialist. Most of the now *Kulturbund*-expelled *Erneuerer*, including former youth leaders Schenk and Lichtenberger, therefore continued their agitation legally and unabashedly from within the KWVD.⁶⁰

Crucial, too, were the *Kulturbund*’s sports groups. Blocked officially from the *Kulturbund*’s youth formations, *Erneuerer*-sympathetic youth leaders turned to the *Kulturbund*’s sports teams instead. In late 1935, the *Erneuerer*— with leaders like Sepp Janko at their helm— submitted statutes to the SDKB *Bundesleitung* for the establishment of adult choir societies and youth sports clubs.⁶¹ It is not clear whether these statutes were accepted. Nevertheless, the *Kulturbund*’s “*Volksdeutsche Sportstelle*,” a centralized *Donauschwaben* sports organization (established in 1934 with Thomas Menrath at its head) soon became at least an unofficial avenue for the *Erneuerer*-driven “steeling” and “coordination” of youth.⁶²

⁵⁹ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 6a-7. These sentiments are also reflected in: Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 29-30.

⁶⁰ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 445-446.

⁶¹ Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 30.

⁶² “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 12-13.

The practices and mindsets of individual youth leaders and groups are impossible to trace based on available studies and archival materials. However, from the mid-1930s, both the *Kulturbund's* youth groups and the *Erneuerer*-led sports formations saw the production of regular circulars and directive letters. Partially available today in the archive of the Museum of Vojvodina, these sources allow for insight into at least the official concerns, aims, and activities of this period's Yugoslav German youth groups.

2. *The Kulturbund Jugendstelle and its Publications, 1935-1938*

Following the *Kulturbund Jugendstelle's* 1935 "reconstruction," this now nominally centralized office began publishing and circulating monthly "*Arbeitsbriefe*" ("work letters") to all *Kulturbund* youth chapters in January 1936. Containing letters from the *Bundesleitung* on their hopes and ambitions for the *Donauschwaben* youth, detailed descriptions of activities, songs, dances, poems, stories, games, and physical activities to be conducted within the youth groups, and short reports on recent events, these letters provide crucial insight into the work of the *Kulturbund* youth groups from 1936 until the "*Gleichschaltung*" (coordination by local pro-Nazi forces) of the *Kulturbund* between late 1938 and early 1939.⁶³ Unfortunately, a complete set of these *Arbeitsbriefe* no longer exists. Nevertheless, even in the few surviving letters, certain preoccupations of the *Kulturbund Jugendstelle's* leadership emerge: the "rediscovery" and maintenance of German cultural traditions in the region; the education of youth towards a "true" national consciousness; and the creation of a unified "*Volksgemeinschaft*" among Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben*.

Pursuing the intentions of the *Kulturbund* more generally, one of *Jugendstelle's* main aims became the dissemination, appreciation, and preservation of the "German" cultural heritage in Yugoslavia. The majority of the *Arbeitsbriefe* were dedicated not merely to a description of the manner in which "cultural" youth events were to be conducted, but also to very precise reprints of the lyrics and musical notation of folk songs, choreographic instructions for folk dances, poems, and short histories to be read aloud at youth events. Interestingly, however, these *Arbeitsbriefe's* "national canon"

⁶³ "*Gleichschaltung*" in this context refers to the take-over of *Donauschwaben* organizations by a pro-National Socialist, often directly *Reich*-supported elite, and the reformulation of their programs and structures according to Germany's National Socialist model. Consider: Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 203-252, 265-327.

offered a broad array of *Donauschwaben*-specific poems, histories, and songs, as well as excerpts of works spanning almost a millennium across the German-speaking world. The works ranged from an “ode” to the “*Schwabenbauern*” (“Swabian farmers”) and a poem on the “Banat Swabians,” to songs typical for pre-war German youth formations (like “*Die Gedanken sind frei*”), to nationalistic German songs (like “*Heil dir mein Heimatland*”), to the “*Rütlichschwur*” (the mythical foundational pledge of the Swiss nation), to a “Warsaw” folk dance, to quotations by writers like Wolfgang von Goethe.⁶⁴

The wide-ranging national canon disseminated by these *Jugendstelle* papers certainly hints at a discord of interpretations around the “national” culture that was to be “maintained” by *Donauschwaben* youth groups, as well as at some uncertainty as to what even “made” a German—a particularly agonizing question for a nationally mobilizing diaspora. Despite the disparate nature of these collections, however, it is possible to detect a “*Gleichschaltung*” even within these documents. Partially in response to the popularity of *Erneuerer* youth activities, the rising influence of the *Erneuerer* even within the supposedly “*Erneuerer*-free” *Kulturbund Jugendstelle*, and covert *Reich* support, a certain admiration for National Socialists’ interpretation of the German “national” canon became apparent as the *Arbeitsbriefe*’s publication continued.⁶⁵ In the April 1936 *Arbeitsbrief*, poems and songs dedicated to the “Swabians” (though also in a fairly “*Blut-und-Boden*” tone) predominated, along with various children’s games and songs, and fairly neutral Easter poems.⁶⁶ By December 1936, the month’s leading quotation was supposedly penned by Adolf Hitler.⁶⁷ By February 1937, exclusively “Germanic” month names marked these letters’ publication dates, and poems warned the *Donauschwaben* youth to, at all costs, “keep [their] blood pure,” as blood represented “the weight of a thousand ancestors” and the source of youth’s “immortality.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ AMV/KB 48, “Arbeitsbrief” (4.1936), 2-3, 6, 13; AMV/KB 78, “Arbeitsbrief” (2.1937), 5.

⁶⁵ This issue of *Reich* support (financially, but also in terms of materials, personnel, and other programs) for the *Kulturbund* (outside of *Erneuerer* circles) remains shrouded in mystery, also largely due to the largescale destruction of N.S. documentation at the close of World War II. However, as Lumans has argued, the *Kulturbund*, from its establishment in 1920, was supported by the VDA (Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 118-119). As Böhm further describes, “old guard” *Kulturbundler* like Keks had already realized during the 1920s that “without financial and moral support from Germany not even the simplest cultural-political goals of the German minority could be achieved with the Yugoslav government.” Therefore, by the mid-1930s, even the “old guard” *Kulturbund* became willing to cooperate at least somewhat with the *Reich* and the *Erneuerer*. Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 227-226.

⁶⁶ AMV/KB 48, “Arbeitsbrief” (4.1936).

⁶⁷ AMV/KB 68, “Arbeitsbrief” (12.1936), 1.

⁶⁸ AMV/KB 78, “Arbeitsbrief” (2.1937), 6.

The detectable turn towards National Socialist credos is further reflected in *Arbeitsbriefe* dedicated to traditionally religious holidays. Over the preceding decade, Germany had already seen various earnest (and ultimately ill-fated) attempts to combine Christian doctrine with National Socialism. As Bergen has shown, Christianity and National Socialism were not necessarily seen as incompatible: both had flourished in a more general “German culture of the post-World War I period,” in which “shared ideas and obsessions about religion, race, and gender” tapped into broader societal concerns.⁶⁹ By the mid-1930s, a certain National Socialist-Christian syncretism also developed in *Donauschwaben* literature. Particularly prominent here, as in Germany, was Christmas.⁷⁰

The *Jugendstelle*’s December 1936 *Arbeitsbrief* especially presents a fascinating example of the complex negotiations that occurred— within the mid-1930s *Kulturbund*— between a maintenance of the “original” Christian, predominately Catholic, heritage of the *Donauschwaben* and the pagan “Germanic” culture that was now supposedly being “rediscovered” among Yugoslavia’s Germans.⁷¹ The *Arbeitsbrief* opened with a letter from the head of the *Kulturbund*, Johann Keks, and the current head of the *Jugendstelle*, Sepp Redinger. After quickly quoting Hitler on the importance of sacrifice in the name of the *Volk*, Keks and Redinger continued their letter with a traditional Christmas carol, “*Alle Jahre wieder kommt das Christuskind*” (“every year anew the Christ child comes”). Using the recurring celebration of the birth of Jesus as a starting point, the authors explained how, indeed, this “*Julfeier*”— the winter solstice celebration, this “night of the rolling wheel”— was a sign of new beginnings, in which the “new fire,” the “new man,” the “new hero,” and “God’s son” was born. The *Julfeier*, a “celebration of change,”

⁶⁹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 3-4. Bergen here of course focuses on the connection between National Socialism and the German Christian movement in particular. However, as Derek Hastings has claimed, especially during the 1920s, National Socialism and Catholicism were also deeply entwined. See: Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-16.

⁷⁰ For examples of how, especially during the late 1930s and early 1940s, Christmas became a venue for both National Socialist ideology and Christian symbolism in Germany and German-occupied Eastern Europe, see: Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 117, 118, 170; Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 94, 147-148, 163, 223, 229, 250-251, 269.

⁷¹ The pagan, pre-Christian origins of the “Germanic” people seems to have been of some concern to the *Donauschwaben* even from the early 1930s [see, for instance, “Germanische Reste im heutigen Jugoslawien,” *Volkswart: Vierteljahrschrift für deutsche Volkstumspflege in Südslawien*, edited by Johann Keks (Novi Sad: Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund), vol. 1, no. 2 (1.-3.1933): 28-33]. Interestingly, in one *Kulturbund*-published article, especially children— in their songs, rhymes, games, etc.— were seen as the source in which the most ancient Germanic traditions were preserved and not, as most other *Donauschwaben* culture, replaced by later Christian traditions. See “Methodologisches und historisches im Kinderspiel von Backa Palanka,” *Volkswart*, vol. 3, no. 10 (1.-3.1935): 81-89.

represented a chance for humanity to “chase out” with love “all that is evil [:] hatred, jealousy, disunity, and fraternal feud.” Only if all Germans were to “reach for their brother’s hand” and “incorporate themselves into our [*Kulturbund*] rows” would a true “German Christmas celebration” (“*deutsches Weihnachtsfest*”) be possible.⁷²

This peculiar mixture of Germanic paganism, Christianity, and politics continued throughout the *Arbeitsbrief*. In some cases— particularly with newer poems and songs, presumably penned explicitly for Christmas/*Julfeier* celebrations in German communities— this combination was explicit. One poem by an anonymous author, “*Deutsche Weihnacht*,” urged the “German *Volk*” to reflect on the unity of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as they decorated their Christmas trees and listened to the ringing of bells. The “surging light” of Christmas love would help unify classes, urban and rural peoples, and parties, so that— “unified with God”— the Germans could form their “future” in the shape of a “new man,” a “glorious lineage.”⁷³ Where this amalgamation of a supposed Germanic heritage and Christmas could not be achieved in the form of newly composed verses, the *Arbeitsbrief*’s authors simply juxtaposed traditional Christmas carols with nationalistic German song. The songs “*Deutsche Jugend heraus!*” (“German youth, go out!”) and “*Auf, hebt unsre Fahnen*” (“Awake, raise our flags”) were thus followed by traditional Christian songs like “*Macht hoch die Tür, die Tor macht weit*,” “*Leise rieselt der Schnee*,” and “*Es is ein Ros entsprungen*.”⁷⁴

In the explicit instructions on how to host a “*Julfeier*” in the *Kulturbund Ortsgruppen*, this syncretism of “Germanic” and Christian folklore became similarly apparent. As Keks and Redinger explained, all local *Kulturbund* chapters were to host a *Julfeier* on December nineteenth (the last Saturday before Christmas). These celebrations were to be “strictly kept in the *völkisch* spirit” and to leave “a deep impression on the participants.” A nativity play (“*Krippenspiel*”) was to form the center of this event; a Christmas tree, small gifts, and “solemn” music (“obviously ... no *Schlagerlieder* and similar things”) were also encouraged. Nevertheless, “wartime letters of fallen students” would also have to be read. According to Keks’ and Redinger’s explicit instructions, furthermore, a reading from the Gospel of Luke, various Christmas carols, and works by

⁷² AMV/KB 68, “Arbeitsbrief” (12.1936), 1

⁷³ AMV/KB 68, “Arbeitsbrief” (12.1936), 5. It must be stated that “*Geschlecht*” in the German language is an ambiguous term with multiple denotations, including (patrilineal) “lineage,” “gender,” or “household.”

⁷⁴ AMV/KB 68, “Arbeitsbrief” (12.1936), 6-8.

Bach were to be followed first by the nativity play, then by either more carols or the “*Deutsche Weihnacht*” poem. Ultimately, the entire event was to be closed by the patriotic “*Schwabenlied*.”⁷⁵

As these passages on the hosting of *Kulturbund* Christmas activities indicate, no event— particularly one centered around youth— would be left to chance, or to the possibility of the non-inclusion of a “national” ethic.⁷⁶ The content of this “national” element, certainly, was still a matter of debate even within the “unified” *Jugendstelle*’s instructional letters. Nonetheless, a “national” education was to be the main priority of the region’s “youth work.” As one 1936 *Arbeitsbrief* claimed, “*Volksgemeinschaft*” and “national feeling” (“*Nationalgefühl*”) could only appear as one learned to sacrifice in the name of the greater good; “national feeling, which only seeks profit, does not exist.” Similarly, “nationalism” that “only encompasses certain classes also does not exist.”⁷⁷ The goal of the *Jugendstelle*, in its creation of youth chapters, hosting of youth events, and organization of training camps for future youth leaders was thus the steeling of the “young *Volksgenossen*’s” (“*Volk* members”) “characters” and “*völkisch*” sensibilities, and the creation of a national “spirit of camaraderie” among the *Donauschwaben*’s next generation.⁷⁸

The precise nature and content of this “national” education was malleable and caught in a web of continuous negotiation. Not only did the content of the “national canon” to be conveyed, the balance between Christian and “Germanic” tradition, or the inclusion of *Erneuerer*-type slogans seem to have caused debate; the interplay between the *Donauschwaben* minority’s national movement(s) and responsibility towards the “host state” also caused conflict. As a March 1936 letter from the *Bundesleitung* to the *Ortsgruppen* explained, every *Kulturbund* event had to begin with an official greeting of the “representative of the [Yugoslav] authorities.” At any mentioning of “His Majesty the King’s name,” and the following requisite cheers, the entire congregation would further be required to rise from their seats.⁷⁹ Despite these concessions to the “host state,” however, it seems that the *Kulturbund* youth groups adopted increasingly nationalist, and

⁷⁵ AMV/KB 68, “Arbeitsbrief” (12.1936), 2-3.

⁷⁶ As is published in the February 1937 *Arbeitsbrief*, for instance, “... youth work must be carried out and shaped precisely according to the work plans of the *Jugendstelle*.” AMV/KB 78, “Arbeitsbrief” (2.1937), 2.

⁷⁷ AMV/KB 48, “Arbeitsbrief” (4.1936), 2.

⁷⁸ See, for instance: AMV/KB 69, call to applications for a *Jugendstelle* training camp for future youth leaders (1936).

⁷⁹ AMV/KB 43, “Rundschreiben Folge 3.”

nationally exclusionary, policies. In the February 1937 *Arbeitsbrief*, for instance, Keks and Redinger required that all youth group members have German names. As Keks and Redinger explained, they wanted to “get rid of the foreign first names, like Vilmos, Frigyes, Jani, Kato, Nuši, Mimi, Boris, etc. once and for all” within the SDKB’s youth groups. If youth would not adopt the names “Fritz, Hans, Bärbele, Käthe, etc.,” then they were no longer to consider themselves members of the German “*Volk*,” and were thereby to relinquish their youth group membership.⁸⁰

These exclusionary policies, however, were not merely aimed at “foreign” youth (or youth with “foreign” names). Rather, they were also directly targeted against the *Erneuerer*. In one letter to the *Ortsgruppen*, Keks and Giljum instructed that the excluded *Erneuerer* were to have no contact or possibility of work with the local *Ortsgruppen*— a detailed list of the most “forbidden” individuals, including Jakob Awender and Jakob Lichtenberger, was further enclosed.⁸¹ Similarly, “members or followers of the splinter movement / the so-called *Erneuerungsbewegung* /” were explicitly banned from *Jugendstelle* events, like a 1936 training for youth group leaders.⁸² The aim of such policies was the creation of a “*Volksgemeinschaftsorganisation*” (organization of the “*Volksgemeinschaft*”) that would “include all Germans” in their totality. Repeatedly railing against the *Donauschwaben*’s internal conflicts, their “little groups and little special organizations” (“*Grüppchen und Sonderorgansatiönchen*”), and the efforts expended in the “brother fight” between *Donauschwaben*, the *Kulturbund* urged everyone to “work towards one goal,” to move “with one mentality and one spirit,” and to unify under the SDKB’s wing.⁸³

In its forging of a true *Volksgemeinschaft*, however, the *Kulturbund* faced challenges even beyond the skirmishes between political and ideological factions. One of the most significant problems that the *Kulturbund*’s *Jugendstelle* faced— one indeed shared by *Erneuerer* and other mobilizing forces, too— was of a geographical nature.⁸⁴ Yugoslavia’s *Donauschwaben* communities were spread across an immense territory, in which dozens of kilometers of fields and marshes, non-German-speaking villages and

⁸⁰ AMV/KB 78, “Arbeitsbrief” (2.1937), 2. Such rules may have also been a reaction to previous name policies, as through the mass Magyarization of names during the Habsburg era, or Yugoslavia’s “name analysis” practices (as described in the previous chapter on school policies).

⁸¹ AMV/KB 43, “Rundschreiben Folge 3.”

⁸² AMV/KB 69. Punctuation as in original source.

⁸³ AMV/KB 78, “Arbeitsbrief” (2.1937), 1.

⁸⁴ For more on this issue from an *Erneuerer*’s (postwar) perspective, consider: Janko, *Leben und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, 29-30, 109-110.

towns, and a fairly underdeveloped system of roads and public transportation separated German communities from one another. Most *Donauschwaben*, furthermore, did not live in exclusively German-speaking villages, but rather in mixed communities of Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, or Slovak-speaking administrators, employers, employees, relatives, teachers, neighbors, and peers. One of the *Jugendstelle*'s main priorities hence quickly became the "overcoming" of the geographical obstacles that hindered the creation of a "*Volksgemeinschaft*" across Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben*.

According to the *Kulturbund*'s mid-1930s publications and correspondence, the *Donauschwaben* could only become a "*Volksgemeinschaft*" if two conditions were met. First, all youth activities would need to be precisely coordinated according to the *Jugendstelle*'s instructions. Second, exchanges and joint activities between German villages would need to be fostered. One of the main purposes of these *Arbeitsbriefe* thus became the distribution of a unified program of youth activities, which would enable all *Donauschwaben* youth— regardless of geographic location— to learn the same songs, poems, and histories, participate in the same activities, and be "raised" and "uniformly incorporated" ("*einheitlich gleichgegliedert*") into the "*Volksgemeinschaft*."⁸⁵ The centralized education of youth leaders further would help ensure a "uniformity" of the *Kulturbund* youth program.⁸⁶ Joint sports and cultural events between youth groups from various towns were organized.⁸⁷ Finally, the *Jugendstelle* established exchanges between Yugoslavia's "German" youth from (mainly agricultural) villages "with weak *Germandom*" and youth from "more German villages." As described in the December 1936 *Arbeitsbrief*, the aim of these exchanges was twofold. On the one hand, youth from less "German" villages could "learn many useful things about *Volkstums*-work and bring it back to their hometowns with the blessing of our *Volksgemeinschaft*." On the other hand, youth from more "German" backgrounds could actively teach their host

⁸⁵ AMV/KB 78, "Arbeitsbrief" (2.1937), 2.

⁸⁶ These efforts included the *Jugendstelle*'s youth leader training camps, in which two youth group members per *Ortsgruppe* attended a joint summer training camp for at least one week each year. Consider: AMV/KB 69. As the February 1937 *Arbeitsbrief* (AMV/KB 78) further indicates, these youth leaders were also obligated to send monthly reports to the *Jugendstelle* in Novi Sad describing their efforts in the youth work arena. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate these reports, and there is a high likelihood that these have been lost, if they were produced in the first place.

⁸⁷ Consider: AMV/KB 1185, letter by Thomas Menrath to all SDKB sports and youth branches regarding a joint sports event (1936); AMV/KB 43, letter from Keks to Giljum (3.1936).

communities about the “*Volk*” and experience, first hand, the “struggles” involved in establishing a “*Volksgemeinschaft*.”⁸⁸

The struggles of building a cohesive “*Volksgemeinschaft*” around varied definitions of “Germandom,” as we shall see, would continue well into the 1940s. However, it was not merely the *Kulturbund*’s *Jugendstelle* that tried to mobilize *Donauschwaben* youth according to national— and increasingly National Socialist— lines. Rather, the *Jugendstelle*’s “rival” organization, the *Erneuerer*-dominated *Volksdeutsche Sportstelle* (VDS), also attempted to enthuse youth for its own (vacillating) conceptions of “Germanness.”

3. *The Volksdeutsche Sportstelle and its Publications, 1934-1938*

Sports organizations emerged within the *Donauschwaben* communities well before the mid-1930s. Indeed, one of the first *Donauschwaben*-specific sports organizations, the “*Rumaer Deutscher Turnverein*” (Syrmia) was established as early as 1905. The foundation of this first formal gymnastics society was followed by the establishment of several others: the “*Semliner Deutscher Turnverein*” in 1908, and the German sports clubs of India/Indija/Ingylia (Syrmia) in 1920, Gottschee/Kočevje (Slovenia) in 1924, Weisskirchen/Bela Crkva/Fehértemplom (Banat), Gross-Betschkerek/Veliki Bečkerek/Nagybecskerek (today’s Zrenjanin, Banat), and Neu-Werbass/Novi Vrbas/Újverbász (Batschka) in 1927, and Karlsdorf/Banatski Karlovac/Nagykárolyfalva (Banat) in 1928.⁸⁹ In 1928, the “*Deutsche Turn- und Sportverein*” (the “Association of German Gymnastics and Sports Clubs”) was established in Novi Sad. Henceforth, this association became the umbrella organization for all German sports societies in the region, as well as a branch of the SDKB.⁹⁰ With the general re-establishment of the *Kulturbund* in Yugoslavia in 1931, the “*Deutsche Turn- und Sportverein*” was renamed the “*Verband der deutschen Sportvereine*” (“Association of German Sports Clubs”). This organization, however, was dissolved with the more general *Kulturbund-Erneuerer* skirmishes in 1934. In its place, the “*Volksdeutsche Sportstelle* (VDS) was established with Thomas Menrath at its head. In 1937, the VDS’ leadership was allocated to the LBA-

⁸⁸ AMV/KB 68, “Arbeitsbrief” (12.1936).

⁸⁹ “Verband der Deutschen Turnvereine Jugoslawiens im Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbunde,” “3. Arbeitsbrief” (1935), pp. 1-3, BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 67.

⁹⁰ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 12.

associated gym teacher Peter Seifert, who himself was replaced by Karl Lohnhardt in 1939.⁹¹

While these sports associations were initially not focused exclusively on youth, most of the earliest sports groups had individual youth sections.⁹² Youth, furthermore, soon became these sports' clubs' main constituents. In 1928— when the first centralized *Kulturbund* sports association was established— a separate youth branch (the “*Jugendturnerabteilung*”) was founded. Initially, these youth branches mainly carried out floor exercises (“*Bodenturnen*”) and ball games, while the adult branches focused on fistball (“*Faustball*”) and track and field athletics. However, these youth branches increasingly also incorporated track and field, fistball, and soccer into their routines. Even the formerly primarily adult sports associations hence became dominated by “new” and more competitive sports that attracted younger members. By 1938, these sports associations were almost entirely composed of youth.⁹³

The VDS' 1930s publications reflect this shift in interest towards youth. Like the *Jugendstelle's* *Arbeitsbriefe*, the “*VDS-Arbeitsbriefe*” were sent on a monthly basis from the VDS headquarters in Novi Sad to all local *Ortsgruppen*.⁹⁴ Like the *Jugendstelle's* *Arbeitsbriefe*, furthermore, the *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe* began with a letter from the SDKB's central office (in this case, by the VDS chiefs Menrath and, later, Seifert). Framed by an “inspirational” quotation, each letter reflected upon the organization's monthly tasks and aims. Thereafter, the *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe* described past and future training and contests within the *Donauschwaben* communities, and enumerated detailed instructions for these.

A complete set of these *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe* is not available. Nevertheless, as becomes apparent even from the surviving issues, the *Volksdeutsche Sportstelle*— as another branch of the *Kulturbund*— espoused similar aims and concerns as the *Jugendstelle*, especially in its youth projects. Like the “*Erneuerer-free*” *Jugendstelle*, the *Erneuerer-dominated* VDS leadership aimed at the creation of a unified “*Volksgemeinschaft*” through the total organization and education of *Donauschwaben* youth (albeit under the VDS's helm). Formally a sports association, the VDS' main tactics in mobilizing the *Donauschwaben* for their “national”— and ultimately “racial”— cause

⁹¹ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 12-13.

⁹² “Verband der Deutschen Turnvereine,” “3. Arbeitsbrief” (1935), 1.

⁹³ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 13-14.

⁹⁴ As one 1936 letter from the SDKB *Bundesleitung* suggests, the VDS' letters were sent within the same postal package as the *Jugendstelle's* *Arbeitsbriefe*. AMV/KB 43, “Rundschreiben Folge 3.”

were, of course, athletic. Nevertheless, even within the VDS, a gradual turn towards “cultural” concerns can be detected.

As part of the *Kulturbund*, the VDS— like the *Jugendstelle*— had at least indirectly profited from *Reich* aid through the sponsorship of Germany’s *Volkstum für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA).⁹⁵ Interestingly, however, it seems that the *Sportstelle* (along with its predecessor, the *Verband der deutschen Sportvereine*) had fostered a direct relationship with the *Reich* in other ways almost immediately after Hitler’s 1933 ascent to power. Athletic teams from Germany, such as the *Deutsche Turnerschaft*, traveled to Yugoslavia as early as 1933 at the behest of the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (“Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda”).⁹⁶ These and similar, Hitler Youth-related groups conducted “cultural” programs, joint athletic competitions, and trainings with Yugoslavia’s German youth.⁹⁷ Letters filed at the Museum of Vojvodina further attest to a growing exchange between athletic instructors from the *Reich* and from *Donauschwaben* communities in Yugoslavia during the mid-1930s. One July 1934 letter— signed “*Mit Gut-Heilgruss!*”— from Thomas Menrath, for instance, gave detailed instructions to “*Sportfreunde*” (“sports friends”) from Yugoslavia interested in traveling to Berlin and Nuremberg for a ten-day sports training camp in July or August of that year. As Menrath explained, all interested parties now had the opportunity for a large-scale transportation discount for this journey, as the German *Reichsbahn* would grant a sixty percent price reduction for the tickets of “*Auslandsdeutsche*” on Germany’s railways over the summer months. The *Kulturbund*’s “sports friends” would simply need to apply for these tickets at their local (Yugoslav) *Reichsdeutsche* “Putnik” travel office. Room and board for this trip, furthermore, would be free.⁹⁸

The sports association of the district of Pančevo (Banat)— the hometown of many infamous *Erneuerer*, including Awender— seems to have been especially active in fostering an exchange with Germany. One September 1934 letter by a Pančevo gym instructor, Rudolf Horesch, to his “*Lieber Turnbruder Max!*” (Trinkle), a gym teacher from Berlin, testifies to these efforts. Horesch described how, upon his return to his

⁹⁵ See: Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 118-119; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 44-45.

⁹⁶ Letter (3.11.1933), PA AA, R 73123.

⁹⁷ See: “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 7; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 44-45; Vitári, *A Hitlerjugend és Délkelet-Európa*, 95-97.

⁹⁸ AMV/KB 4, letter (4.7.1934).

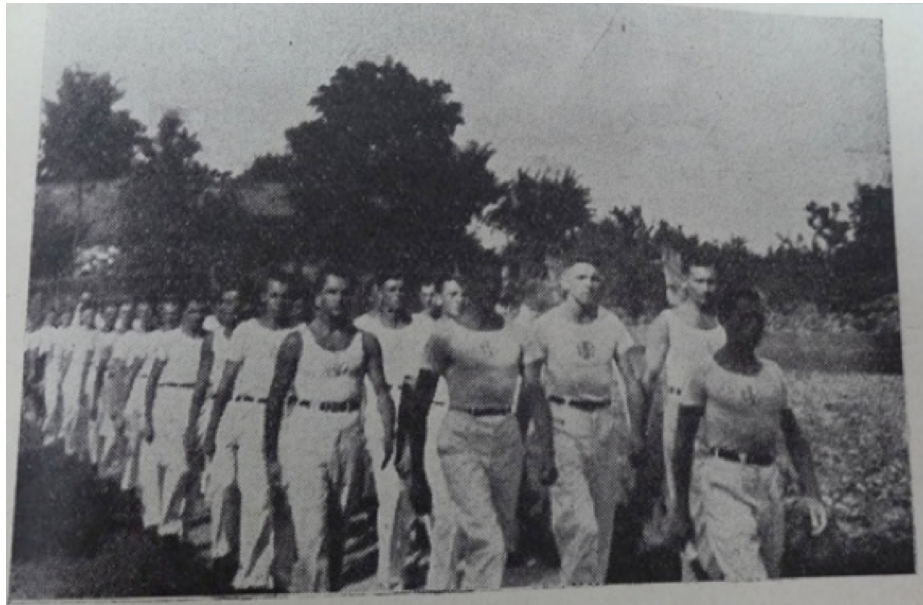


Fig. 2.5 Meeting of the *Volksdeutsche Sportstelle* (VDS) in Zemun/Semlin, ca. 1937.
 Source: *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung*. Novi Sad:
 Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937. p. 43.

hometown (presumably after a trip to Berlin), he immediately initiated steps to secure housing for Trinkle in all local villages in which “sports divisions still had to be secured.” Unfortunately, his pleas to Thomas Menrath to announce Trinkle’s visit to the Banat in a letter to all *Kulturbund* divisions had been unsuccessful so far— Menrath had not replied. However, Horesch himself would ensure that “everyone is prepared” and “expecting [Trinkle]” upon his arrival to the region. Ideally, Horesch elaborated, Trinkle would stay for at least a week, as Horesch would like him to lead a week-long “preparatory gym course” (“*Vorturnerkurs*”) for all athletes in the area. Additionally, Horesch suggested, Trinkle should meet his good friend from the neighboring village of Franzfeld (Kraljevićevo/Francföld, today’s Kačarevo), as his friend was “one of the most diligent youth leaders in our settlement area.” Soon, upon “invitation from his *Reichsdeutsche* friends,” this friend himself would travel to Frankfurt to study newspaper journalism with the German “*Presseamt*.” His ultimate goal, as Horesch explained, was to “bring the *Volksruf* [a *Donauschwaben* newspaper], the body for *völkisch Erneuerung*, to a higher level.”⁹⁹

Donauschwaben gym teachers, who had such connections to the *Reich*, indeed became instrumental in spreading “*Reich* practices” within the region. One August 1934

⁹⁹ AMV/KB 24, letter (23.9.1934).

letter, written by a leader of the Pančevo *Sportabteilung*, announced the arrival of the (presumably *Reich*-educated) Pančevo sports teachers in the smaller Banat town of Omoljica/Homolitz/Omlód. As the letter claimed, after a visit in the *Donauschwaben* village of Brestovac/Banat Brestowatz/Beresztóc, the Pančevo gym teachers would come to Omoljica on August 6th to lead an afternoon of physical exercises and lectures with the local youth about “how sports are conducted in the *Reich*.” Further instructions—prescribing that all local permissions be organized, that major advertisements of the event be made beforehand, and that all “elderly and adults” also attend—capped off the “*Gut Heil!*”-concluded letter.¹⁰⁰

In light of the *Reich*-supported and *Erneuerer*-driven nature of the *Volksdeutsche Sportstelle*, it is perhaps not surprising that the VDS’ official publication—first released at the end of 1935—primarily reflected concerns with the creation of a unified, steeled, and “pure” “*Volksgemeinschaft*.”¹⁰¹ Even in some of the earliest *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe*, the aim of all youth sports activities became clear: “the most healthy education [“*Erziehung*”] of our youth” towards “spiritual and physical formation” and the creation of “unity for the good of our *Volksgemeinschaft*.” Only through the VDS’ physical and—above all practical—work would the “ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft*” be realized, as youth from all “*Gaue*” (administrative regions), professions, and classes would be brought together and trained in one “*völkisch*” spirit.¹⁰²

What precisely this “*völkisch*” spirit entailed, at least ideologically, was not elaborated within the *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe*. Particularly the early *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe* thus described with great precision the types of exercises to be completed within the local sports groups, prescribing everything from the weight of shot-put balls, to the sequence of events for track and field competitions, to the packing list for sport instructors’ training camps, to precise diagrams and measurements for the “simple and cheap” construction of gymnastics equipment (a “must” for any “good and advanced practice workshop”).¹⁰³ Much information was also presented on the new and expanding VDS youth efforts, like the 1936 introduction of the “*Volksdeutsche Sportabzeichen*” (a sports certificate for accomplished athletes according to the *Reich*’s model), or the 1936 Yugoslav-authority

¹⁰⁰ AMV/KB 14, letter (22.8.1934).

¹⁰¹ AMV/KB 92, “*VDS-Arbeitsbrief*” (9.-10.1937), 2.

¹⁰² AMV/KB 50, “*VDS-Arbeitsbrief*” (5.1936), 1.

¹⁰³ “... *guten und fortschrittlichen Übungsbetrieb*.” AMV/KB 47, “*VDS-Arbeitsbrief*” (4.1936), 1-5; AMV/KB 50, “*VDS-Arbeitsbrief*” (5.1936), 4; AMV/KB 76, “*VDS-Arbeitsbrief*” (1.1937), 3-4, 7-8.

approved “*Allgemeine Sportsonntag der deutschen Jugend*” (“General sport Sunday of the German youth,” held several times per year with youth groups from various *Donauschwaben* towns).¹⁰⁴ However, it was especially upon one occasion— henceforth memorialized across Yugoslavia’s German-speaking press¹⁰⁵— that attention veered explicitly towards the *völkisch*, national, ideological, and “cultural” components of the *Sportstelle*: the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin.

Among the *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe*, a flurry over the Olympic games appeared as early as May 1936. In an issue otherwise concerned with the unification of the “*Volksgemeinschaft*,” the *VDS-Sportabzeichen*, and the compulsory nature of the June 7th *Sportsonntag*, several paragraphs were also dedicated to preparations for the Olympics. The information distributed included where *Donauschwaben* could purchase tickets for individual Olympic events (the German travel office in Belgrade), how many nations had announced their participation so far (thirteen), and the exact appearance of the Olympic torch (a 700-gram torch by the German Krupp company, engraved with the words “*Als Dank dem Träger. Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade in Berlin 1936*”).¹⁰⁶ By the July/August 1936 *VDS-Arbeitsbrief*, what began as an interest seems to have turned into a frenzy, as the *Sportstelle* realized that the Olympic torch would travel through “our Fatherland” on its journey between Athens and Berlin. As Menrath explained in his opening letter: “In the months of July and August sports events will occur that the entire world’s gaze will be set upon.” However, “our *Volksgenossen*,” unlike most of the world’s people, “will not only be able to be present as spectators, but our sports youth will even have the opportunity to participate actively themselves as torch bearers of the torch relay!” However, this “once in several decades” opportunity, in which the “German *Volk*” would demonstrate “an immense material,” “organizational,” and “willpower-driven ... historical feat,” could not occur without the participation of the *Donauschwaben*. The *Donauschwaben* youth and other “*Volksgenossen*” would have to flock by the thousands to the route of the relay on July 27th, not only to supply torch

¹⁰⁴ AMV/KB 47, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (4.1936), 1, 47; “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 15-16. For more on the *Sportsonntage* and their approval by the “Yugoslav Ministry for the Physical Training of the People,” see: AMV/KB 92, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (9.-10.1937), 2; “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 16; AMV/KB 1185.

¹⁰⁵ Consider, for instance: “Die Olympischen Spiele 1936,” *Deutscher Volksfreund*, Wrschetz, vol. 37, no. 68 (23.8.1936), 5-6; *Deutscher Kalender 1941*, edited by Deutsch-Jugoslawische Gesellschaft (Berlin: Terramare Presse, 1940), December sheet.

¹⁰⁶ “In gratitude to the carrier. The organizational committee of the 11th Olympics Berlin 1936.” AMV/KB 50, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (5.1936), 3.



Figs. 2.6 and 2.7 Scenes from VDS Events, ca. 1937.

Source: *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung*. Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937. p. 44.

bearers, but also to construct triumphal arches in each *Donauschwaben* village along the torch's pathway and to demonstrate their witnessing of a historic event.¹⁰⁷

The *Donauschwaben* youth's "participation" in the Olympic games extended beyond their hometowns, however, as they also traveled directly to Berlin. As one 1936 letter by Keks and Menrath explained, boys and girls between the ages of fifteen and twenty would have the opportunity to travel to Berlin for a ten-day sports camp near the site of the Olympic games in July that year. All participants would have to bring "simple, but sturdy and practical" clothes, gym shoes, and bathing suits. Their *Reichsbahn*-discounted tickets would have to be picked up in advance at the local "Putnik office," however, everything else would be free of charge.¹⁰⁸ Even older sports teachers at German schools and sports associations would be able to participate in a "special education" outside of these youth camps in Berlin. All participants— regardless of age or gender— would be held strictly accountable for maintaining the "prescribed camp discipline" and "strong spirit of community and comradeship."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ AMV/KB 57, "VDS-Arbeitsbrief" (7.-8.1936), 1.

¹⁰⁸ AMV/KB 1185.

¹⁰⁹ "... hat sich an die vorgeschriebene Lagerdisziplin strenge zu halten, denn ohne festen Gemeinschaftsgeist und Kameradschaft, ohne straffe Zucht ist die Durchführung eines Sportlagers nicht denkbar." AMV/KB 1185.

The *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe* continued revolving around the 1936 Olympics for several months.¹¹⁰ Henceforth, a reflection on the Olympics— no matter how superficial— constructed a platform from which the *Sportstelle* launched its pleas and propaganda. In October 1936, for instance, the final “balance sheet” (“*Bilanz*”) of the Olympic games had apparently indicated that youth sports facilities needed to be fostered within the *Donauschwaben* communities. “In the name of the Fatherland,” all communities would need to construct a soccer pitch and an “*Eigenheim*” (“independent home”) for its sports groups.¹¹¹ Propaganda from the *Reichsdeutsche* Olympic committee further dotted these issues, including detailed lists of the most successful German athletes, or quotations from the “*Olympische Jugend*” publication:

*Allen Spiels
heil'ger Sinn:
Vaterlands Hochgewinn
Vaterlands höchst Gebot
in der Not:
Opfertod!*¹¹²

In the VDS’s memorializations, the 1936 Olympic games assumed a prominent position. In its September/October 1936 *Arbeitsbrief*, the *Sportstelle* listed the Olympic torch relay as one of the highlights of the development of *Donauschwaben* youth associations. One brief history of the *Donauschwaben* youth organizations from around 1943 similarly described how “thirty young German athletes were successfully incorporated into” the “1936 Olympic torch relay” through Yugoslavia.¹¹³

The VDS activities seem to have burgeoned in scale and breadth following these Olympic games. In July/August 1936, for instance, the VDS began discussing methods for recruiting new members. Even “the youngest” (under-fourteen-year-old) youth would now also have to be included in “*Spielmannschaften*” (“game teams”), in order to ensure

¹¹⁰ At the same time, the SDKB’s *Jugendstelle* had moved on to other topics entirely, such as the details of holding a proper thanksgiving (“*Erntedank*”) event. Consider: AMV/KB 56, “Arbeitsbrief” (7.-8.1936).

¹¹¹ AMV/KB 61, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (10.1936), 1-2.

¹¹² AMV/KB 61, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (10.1936), 3. “The holy purpose of each game: the Fatherland’s highest victory. The Fatherland’s highest commandment in a moment of need: sacrificial death!”

¹¹³ “... und schliesslich der *Olympie-Fackellauf 1936*, wobei es gelungen ist auch 30 junge deutsche Sportler in den Lauf durch Jugoslawien einzureihen.” “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 17. Spelling as in original.

the “formation” of future leaders.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, specific “*Werbeanstaltungen*” (“publicity events”) and “*Bühnenturnen*” (“stage gymnastics”) would have to be conducted across *Donauschwaben* communities. As the October 1936 *VDS-Arbeitsbrief* explained, publicity events would have to be held especially in the fall and winter months, when individuals were less occupied by agricultural labor. These events could take place either as part of a more general festivity, as a specific “publicity” evening (with “appropriate framing”), or as an outdoor or indoor gymnastics show. Exercises demonstrated at these events would have to be not only simple, rapid, easy to understand, and “engaging,” but also “supported” by a “festive” atmosphere, with music, poems, and speeches about the value of physical education for the “*Volk*.” According to these instructions, furthermore, “hearts are best won” with a full house, and when only a few highly planned and “dignified” events occur (as opposed to many sloppy public presentations).¹¹⁵

As these instructions illustrate, the VDS developed a growing “cultural” component to their work. While athletic pursuits indeed expanded over the following years—including with the introduction of new sports camps and training, athletic meetings and competitions, and youth sport prizes¹¹⁶—the VDS also introduced “book discussions” (“*Buchbesprechungen*”) on various *Reich* and *Donauschwaben*-related publications within their *Arbeitsbriefe*.¹¹⁷ They launched summer solstice celebrations, competitions for farming youth, St. Nicholas and *Julfeier*/Christmas festivities, and started educating “*Wanderlehrer*” of their own.¹¹⁸ They began to promote arts and crafts lessons, as well as geography and language courses, as an essential component of the “spiritual-educational” training of their youth.¹¹⁹ Finally, they became part of Yugoslavia’s more general “Peter Five-Year Plan of the Sokol” to achieve a comprehensive mobilization of Yugoslavia’s youth in sports groups by 1941, the year of Prince Peter’s planned ascension to the throne. Nonetheless, the VDS continued to stress its role in the “healthy racial construction of the [German] *Volk*.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ AMV/KB 57, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (7.-8.1936), 5.

¹¹⁵ AMV/KB 61, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (10.1936), 4-5.

¹¹⁶ Consider, for instance: AMV/KB 92, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (9.-10.1937), 2-3.

¹¹⁷ AMV/KB 76, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (1.1937), 5-6.

¹¹⁸ AMV/KB 90, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (7.-8.1937), 7; AMV/KB 92, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (9.-10.1937), 4; AMV/KB 103, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (1.1938), 2.

¹¹⁹ AMV/KB 76, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (1.1937), 3.

¹²⁰ “*Gesundrassichen Aufbaues eines Volkes*.” For more on the “*Peter-Fünffjahresplan des Sokols*,” see: “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (10.1936), 2. On the “racial” components of the VDS activities, see: AMV/KB 92,



Fig. 2.8 Scenes from a *Kulturbund* Camp for the Training of Youth and Girls' Group Leaders ("Jugendgruppenleitern" and "Mädchenabteilungsleiterinnen"), ca. 1937. Source: *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung*. Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937. p. 42.

An important component of this “racial construction of the *Volk*”— as within the *Reich*— would include the specific “education” and training of girls. Female youth groups had become an ordinary component not only of local *Kulturbund Jugendstellen* by the mid-1930s, but also of the VDS sports groups. From at least April 1936 onwards, instructions for physical activities for females became standard fare within the *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe*. According to such instructions, girls and young women had to be “motivated” by the “playful” nature of physical activities.¹²¹ Women’s training and competitions came in three basic variations: either a “lighter” and more “dynamic” and “rhythmic” variant of otherwise standard gymnastics exercises (on the ground, with weighted balls, etc.); an abbreviated version of men’s track-and-field exercises; or a competitive adaptation of otherwise mundane domestic chores (like races in which girls served beverages, sewed, and carried and peeled potatoes).¹²² Furthermore, girls were

“VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (9.-10.1937), 6. As this reference to the Sokol also indicates, the *Donauschwaben* youth organizations of course established themselves within a larger context of youth cultural and sports organizations in Yugoslavia. For an interesting overview of Yugoslav youth organizations (including the Sokol, as well as Croatian Catholic youth formations), consider: Sandra Prlenda, “Young, Religious, and Radical: The Croat Catholic Youth Organizations, 1922-1945,” *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, edited by John Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 82-109.

¹²¹ AMV/KB 47, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (4.1936), 5-6.

¹²² For such gymnastics exercises, consider: AMV/KB 47, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (4.1936), 5-6; AMV/KB 92, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (9.-10.1937), 5-6. See: “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 16, for a list of the different track-and-field requirements for girls and boys for the “*Reichssportabzeichen*.” For

specifically targeted as future youth sports leaders even in the earliest VDS training camps. A May 1936 announcement thus encouraged young women to apply for a sports leader training camp, to prepare them for future work with women's and children's groups.¹²³

While the *Kulturbund Jugendstelle* conducted camps and training specifically geared towards women, it seems that especially the VDS felt the need to justify its involvement in the education of *Donauschwaben* females.¹²⁴ An extensive article in the July/August 1937 *VDS-Arbeitsbrief* described how physical exercise, as organized by the *Sportstelle*, offered a valuable temporary liberation from the otherwise “tough fight for living” (“*harter Lebenskampf*”) and dreary daily tasks of the mother and working woman. By engaging in organized physical activities, girls and young women would find “an increase in physical strength” and a renewed “appreciation” for “intellectual-spiritual values.” Only through such an “awakening” would women be sufficiently equipped for their traditional tasks as daughters, “comrades,” wives, and mothers— all roles fundamental to the construction of a “*Volksgemeinschaft*.”¹²⁵ The *Sportstelle*— in direct competition for the *Donauschwaben* youth— ultimately expended great efforts not only in creating female-specific sports programs, but also in making the athletic training of females palatable to more “traditional” gender sensibilities.¹²⁶

4. The National Socialist Coordination of Yugoslavia's Ethnic German Youth Organizations, 1938-1941

The *Kulturbund's Jugendstelle* and *Sportstelle*, within their self-fashioned competition over the *Donauschwaben* youth, employed extensive tactics and, increasingly, assumed each other's practices and rhetoric over the course of the mid-1930s. The extent to which youth were mobilized within either group, however, should

instructions on the “athletic” domestic chores competitions, see: AMV/KB 90, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (7.-8.1937), 8.

¹²³ AMV/KB 50, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (5.1936), 4.

¹²⁴ See: AMV/KB 107, letter from SDKB *Bundesleitung* on introduction of *Kulturbund* courses for females (7.3.1938).

¹²⁵ AMV/KB 90, “VDS-Arbeitsbrief” (7.-8. 1937), 3.

¹²⁶ The early dates of such efforts contradict the few reports that have been written on the mobilization of girls by the *Kulturbund*, which claim that girls were severely neglected and underrepresented in these projects before the radical restructuring of the youth program in 1939. See, for instance: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 265.

not be over-estimated. Indeed, according to some statistics, by 1938, perhaps 60,000 adults had officially joined *Kulturbund* chapters across 120 *Donauschwaben* communities. Among the *Erneuerer*, only approximately 5,000 had officially joined the “*Kameradschaften*.”¹²⁷ Unfortunately, precise statistics for youth group membership do not exist. Nevertheless, according to the *Kulturbund*’s 1937 annual report, some 202 local *Kulturbund* “*Jugendabteilungen*” existed by 1937—the VDS, at the same time, had only 51.¹²⁸

Despite the relatively small size of the *Erneuerungsbewegung*, the *Erneuerer* succeeded in taking control over the *Kulturbund* by the late 1930s. The conflict between “old guard” *Kulturbund* leaders and *Erneuerer*— so stylized, and perhaps even purposefully over-emphasized and employed as a propaganda tool by both sides— came to a climax in 1938. Observing the “*Anschluss*” and the occupation of Czechoslovakia with some awe and admiration for the *Reich*, many factions within the *Donauschwaben* population became increasingly attracted to the *Erneuerer* cause.¹²⁹ Further realizing that the *Kulturbund* could achieve nothing without *Reich* aid— which had flowed from around 1934 onwards from the VDA and the *Reichsjugendführung* directly into *Erneuerer* hands— the “old guard” *Kulturbund* leaders called for a meeting with the *Erneuerer*. On November 20th, 1938, a formal agreement was reached between the SDKB “*Bundesobmann*” Keks and the *Erneuerer* Jakob Awender. According to this agreement, the *Erneuerer* who had been barred from the *Kulturbund* in 1935 (including Jakob Awender, Gustav Halwax, Hans Thurn, Georg Henlein, and Jakob Lichtenberger) could now officially be reinstated into the SDKB leadership. The *Kultur- und Wohlfahrtsvereinigung der Deutschen in Slawonien* (KWDS)— established, as we have seen, in 1935 by the *Erneuerer* as a right-wing splinter organization with youth leaders Jakob Lichtenberger and Helly Shenk at its head— was also officially merged into the *Kulturbund*. Finally, the SDKB’s branches were re-organized according to a “*Gau*” principle, whereby the Banat, the “Upper Batschka” (“*Oberbatschka*”), the “West Batschka” (“*Westbatschka*”) including the Baranja/Baranya, and Syrmia/Srem with

¹²⁷ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 558.

¹²⁸ *Die Arbeit des Kulturbundes 1937. Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung* (Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G, 1937), 7.

¹²⁹ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 560-561; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 54-56.

Bosnia and Slavonia each formed a separate district. An *Erneuerer* could be placed at the head of each of these *Gaue*.¹³⁰

Due to this November 1938 agreement, the *Erneuerer* were once again officially positioned within the *Kulturbund* leadership. Any skirmish between the *Kulturbund* and the *Erneuerer* thereby became almost exclusively an internal battle. Nevertheless, *Erneuerer* agitation did not cease. Between late 1938 and early 1939, the *Erneuerer* dismantled most of the previous *Kulturbund* structures and organizations according to their own, National Socialist principles.¹³¹ Furthermore, with direct support from the VoMi, the *Erneuerer* launched a massive campaign around the Yugoslav parliamentary elections in December 1938, and proclaimed the creation of the “*Volksdeutsche Einheitsfront*,” an organization that henceforth was to organize all *Donauschwaben* on a “totalitarian” basis.¹³² Various institutional and personal skirmishes between the *Kulturbund*, the *Erneuerer*, the Yugoslav authorities, and the *Reich* ensued. Ultimately, in a move largely orchestrated by the VoMi, Keks and his closest associates were forced to resign from the *Kulturbund*’s leadership between May and August 1939. Instead, Sepp Janko, an avid *Erneuerer*, was installed as head of the SDKB. Almost all other *Kulturbund* leadership positions, too, were thereafter occupied by *Erneuerer*.¹³³

This period of instability, to an extent, is also reflected in the *Kulturbund* youth publications of the time. Perhaps in an effort to salvage an independent, “*Erneuerer*-free” youth program, perhaps due also in part to a renewed informal *Erneuerer* take-over of youth offices, the *Jugendstelle* began publishing new kinds of *Arbeitsbriefe* and youth journals in mid-1938. The *Arbeitsbriefe* thus turned into a bi-monthly publication for youth leaders entitled *Jugend voran!*— a periodical adorned with progressively more ostentatious graphics, slogans, and calls towards a “*völkisch*,” even “racial,” patriotism. In the June/July 1938 issue of *Jugend voran!*, for instance, Keks and Redinger called upon all *Donauschwaben* youth to become “worthy of the German *Volk*” by “adhering to the values of our German *Volk*: breeding, discipline, hardship, diligence, comradeship,

¹³⁰ Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 227-228, 233-235, 277-280.

¹³¹ Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 281-282.

¹³² As Shimizu describes, the creation of the “*Volksdeutsche Einheitsfront*” represents the start of the “*Gleichschaltung*” of Yugoslavia’s German *Volksgruppe* on a “totalitarian basis.” This totalitarian “*Gleichschaltung*” thus occurred well before war-related mobilization. Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 56-57.

¹³³ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 559-568; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 59-65.

loyalty, *Volks*-conscience, and social ethos.”¹³⁴ Various poems on the “holy blood” of the *Volk*, the value of the “German ways” in maintaining “German blood and soil,” and quotations by Adolf Hitler and Baldur von Schirach (head of Germany’s Hitler Youth) further dominated these issues.¹³⁵ Ultimately—as Redinger wrote—the aim of this youth work would be the “*Gleichschaltung der Geistesrichtung*” (“*Gleichschaltung* of the ways of thinking”) of all *Donauschwaben* through the “education of German youth towards *Volksgemeinschaft*, [towards becoming] the guardians of German blood, German culture, German ways and customs, and to physical and spiritual health, national attitude, love towards the *Volk* and Fatherland, and harmonious living with all other peoples of our Fatherland.”¹³⁶

Despite the *Jugendstelle*’s efforts to accommodate the *Donauschwaben* leadership’s right-wing radicalization, the final months of 1938 heard the death knell of the large-scale youth mobilization attempts by “old guard” *Kulturbund* leaders. On January 1st, 1939, the *Jugendstelle* was officially dissolved. In its place, a “*Jugendamt*” (“youth office”) was established in Novi Sad, directed by Jakob Lichtenberger.¹³⁷ Lichtenberger—now the official “*Landesjugendleiter*” of the *Kulturbund*’s youth section—thereafter oversaw the large-scale reconstruction of *Donauschwaben* youth programs “according to the model of the Hitler Youth.”¹³⁸ The *Sportstelle* and the *Jugendstelle* were officially merged, so that all youth were required not merely to attend “cultural” meetings, but also to engage in physical training. All *Jugendamt* chapters—now informally referred to as the “*Deutsche Jugend*” (DJ)—were organized into “*Gaue*” and “*Kreise*.” Each of these regional divisions had a youth leader at its head who was, at least theoretically, in direct communication with the central office in Novi Sad.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ AMV/KB 122, *Jugend voran!* (6.-7.1938), 1-2. “... damit wir, deutsche Jugend, des deutsches Volkes würdig werden ... Die Tugenden unseres deutschen Volkes: Zucht, Disziplin, Entbehrung, Fleiss, Kameradschaft, Treue, Volksbewusstsein und soziale Gesinnung.” Grammatical error in original.

¹³⁵ AMV/KB 122, *Jugend voran!* (6.-7.1938), 6-7; AMV/KB 129, *Jugend voran!* (10.-11.1938), 15.

¹³⁶ AMV/KB 129, *Jugend voran!* (10.-11.1938), 2-3.

¹³⁷ The *Jugendamt* thus became one of the *Kulturbund*’s six administrative offices, the others being the departments of “organization,” culture, propaganda, social welfare, and women. Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 65.

¹³⁸ “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 25.

¹³⁹ Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 164-165. As Böhm explains, the “*Deutsche Jugend*” (DJ) was constructed precisely according to the leadership structures and models of the German Hitler Youth. It was also with youth (with organizations like the DJ) that the *Erneuerer* first tested the Nazi principles of mobilization, organization, and leadership in the region; only thereafter were these “experiments” brought to *Donauschwaben* organizations as a whole. Furthermore, it was only thanks to the success of projects like the DJ that the “*Totalitätsanspruch*” (“claim

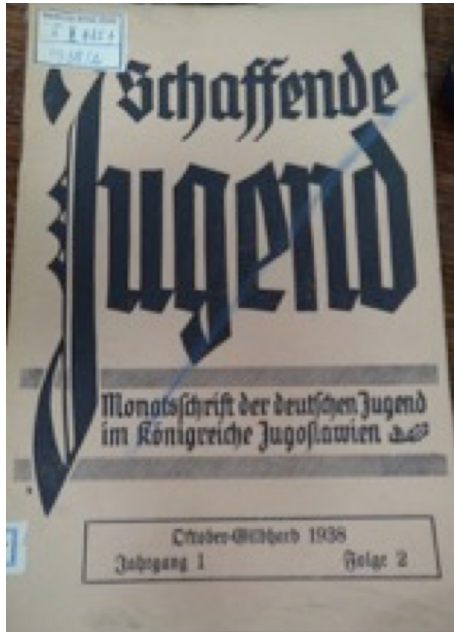


Fig. 2.9 Early Issue of *Schaffende Jugend*, the *Deutsche Jugend*'s Paper.
 Source: *Schaffende Jugend: Monatsschrift der deutschen Jugend im Königreiche Jugoslawien*. Edited by Adam Maurus (Novi Sad). Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 1938). Pančevo: Buchdruckerei "Typographia", Koch u. Merkle, 1938.

"Führerschulen" for former and future youth leaders, as well as more general youth camps and training for "Wanderlehrer," were organized according to the new principles for hundreds of *Donauschwaben* youth that year. Furthermore, in order to "also offer a unified image externally," a uniform (previously worn more casually) now became mandatory at youth meetings: boys were required to wear black shorts, a white shirt, white stockings, and black shoes (or simply long black trousers, black shoes, and a white shirt), while girls had to don either a white blouse and dark skirt or a traditional folk dress.¹⁴⁰

Through the creation of the *Jugendamt*, the *Erneuerer* once again officially controlled the mobilization of Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben* youth. This "Machtergreifung" also became apparent in the *Kulturbund*'s youth press. Publications like the *VDS-Arbeitsbriefe* and *Jugend voran!* disappeared entirely from the archival record of the time. Instead, a new— now officially printed, bound, and illustrated— monthly youth journal appeared: the *Schaffende Jugend: Monatsschrift der deutschen Jugend im Königreiche Jugoslawien* ("Working Youth: Monthly Paper of the German Youth in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia"). First published in September 1938, the *Schaffende Jugend* developed some of the basic themes already established in the

to totality") of these *Erneuerer*-driven SDKB projects could succeed in *Kulturbund* organizations and *Donauschwaben* communities more generally. Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 278-279.

¹⁴⁰ "Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg," 13, 25. For a discussion of the significance and controversies revolving around this "Einheitsstracht" (uniform) and folk costume, consider: Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 475-488.



Fig. 2.10 Scenes from a *Kulturbund* Youth Camp, ca. Summer 1939.

Source: Haug, Friedrich. “Zuchtvolle Jugenderziehung zum Dienst an der Gemeinschaft. Lagerleben— das richtige Kameradschaftserlebnis.” *Schaffende Jugend: Monatsschrift der deutschen Jugend im Königreiche Jugoslawien*. Edited by Adam Maurus (Novi Sad). Vol. 2, No. 9 (September 1939). pp. 3-7.

Arbeitsbriefe, as well as in *Kulturbund* publications like *Unsere Schule*. It included articles on “pedagogical” questions, songs, poems, stories to be learned at youth meetings, book reviews, and passages on the history and (increasingly “Germanic”) traditions of the *Donauschwaben*.¹⁴¹ However, perhaps unsurprisingly, a National Socialist tinge, which had already manifested itself in the *Arbeitsbriefe*, became even more apparent here. Extensive speeches and poems by Hitler on the value of youth to the German *Volk* were reproduced, along with Hitler adulations and biographies, reflections by von Schirach on the rights of *volksdeutsche* youth abroad, and childrens’ “prayers” asking God to “awaken” in their hearts the “strength and loyalty” of their German ancestors and make “pure” Germans of them once again.¹⁴²

As German Foreign Office and DAI reports and press clippings further indicate, the new *Jugendamt* rose considerably in popularity and visibility after 1939. According to an October 1940 report from Filipowa/Filipovo/Szentfulöp (Batschka), for instance, over 1,200 youth from Karawukowo, Parabuć/Parabutsch/Paripás, Krnjaja/Kernei/Kerény, Sivac/Siwatz/Szivác, Bački Brestovac, Miletić/Milititsch/Ráczmilletics, Crvenka, and other Batschka villages had attended a “*Kreissportfest*” (district sport event) in full Nazi uniform that month. Besides providing an arena for athletic achievements, the event was

¹⁴¹ See: *Schaffende Jugend: Monatsschrift der deutschen Jugend im Königreiche Jugoslawien*, edited by Adam Maurus (Pančevo: Buchdruckerei “Typographia”, Koch u. Merkle), vol. 1, no. 2 (10.1938).

¹⁴² Consider Adolf Hitler’s “Ein Wort an die deutsche Jugend,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 1, no. 4 (12.1938), 17; *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2.1939), 8-10; *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 5 (5.1939), 6; *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 9 (9.1939), 16.

also intended as a “massive manifestation” (“*gewaltige Kundgebung*”) for all Germans of the Western Batschka. Flanked by victory runes (“*Siegesrunen*”) and spurred by fervent “*Heil Hitler!*” calls, various *Kulturbund* leaders held speeches on the significance “of the new German *Weltanschauung*, which the *Führer* has given us, as he created a new German *Volk* across all state borders.” Fully enthusiastic, youth raised their right arms, sang the “*Horst-Wessel-Lied*” and “*Heilig Vaterland*,” and cheered at proclamations of the “new rising [*Wiedererstehung*] of the German *Volk*.” According to the report, all of the hard “fighting” for local Germandom had paid off: the over 1,200 youth assembled at Filipowa received the news that they would now be led by a member of the *Erneuerungsbewegung* with a wholehearted, unified “*Sieg Heil!*”¹⁴³

Such scenes occurred even at the epicenter of *Donauschwabern* anti-*Reich* protest: Apatin. According to the *Deutsches Volksblatt*, over eight hundred youth had assembled in Apatin three days before Christmas in 1940 to “express their avowal of the great German cause.”¹⁴⁴ Alluding explicitly to the “hounding by certain priests against everything *völkisch*” that had occurred in the area, speakers at the event praised that majority of *Donauschwabern* youth who had nevertheless integrated itself into the *Kulturbund* and, thereby, into the “*Volksgemeinschaft*.” A small number of youth purportedly still required an “*Erziehung*” to take this step. However, the *Kulturbund*’s youth groups would “not stop and rest until even the last youth has stripped off everything alien [*Artfremd*] to start living according to all laws of our own kind [*Gesetzen unserer Arteigenheit*].”¹⁴⁵

Similar events took place across the Batschka and the Banat in late 1940, early 1941. Werschetz (Banat) hosted a *Kulturbund* demonstration in December 1940 whereby, in front of over two thousand *Donauschwabern*, local SDKB leader Josef Beer asserted that “the only direction” for the *Donauschwabern* would be “the National Socialist one.”¹⁴⁶ That same month, Novi Sad’s youth group leader, “*Kamerad*” Schweitzer, proclaimed that seven hundred youth had now joined this youth chapter alone. Furthermore, over the course of seven events that month, the local youth had been able to show publicly how

¹⁴³ Transcription of article from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (13.10.1940), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 2.

¹⁴⁴ “... um ihr Bekenntnis zur grossen deutschen Sache erneut zum Ausdruck zu bringen.” “Grosse Jugendkundgebung in Apatin,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (29.12.1940), BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 22.

¹⁴⁵ “Grosse Jugendkundgebung in Apatin,” BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 22.

¹⁴⁶ “Grosskundgebung der Deutschen in Vrsac,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (31.12.1940), BArch 57/neu/1070 Bd. 9.

the *Kulturbund* was able to “take care of all life branches of our *völkisch* life, from childhood to youth to adulthood of all occupations.”¹⁴⁷ These activities, of course, were not unanimously accepted. According to a secret May 1940 German Foreign Office memorandum, the Yugoslav authorities were highly sensitized about the nature of such events. All members of Belgrade’s SDKB youth group reportedly were arrested in 1940 at one of their *Heimabende*, left in jail for three hours, and beaten by the local police. Several LBA students in Novi Vrbas, furthermore, were arrested for “supposedly distributing National Socialist flyers.”¹⁴⁸ Such “intimidation,” however, had little effect. By November 1940, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* proudly proclaimed that between ninety-six and one hundred percent of Germans, including youth, across Vojvodina had joined the *Kulturbund*.¹⁴⁹ By March 1941, ethnic German correspondents from Bački Brestovac (Batschka) further exclaimed that this town had “no more associations anymore!” as every organization and individual had now joined the *Kulturbund*.¹⁵⁰

The new (and expanding) youth groups did not merely provide ample opportunity for the physical and ideological training of youth, however. Indeed, due to larger geopolitical developments, the *Donauschwaben* youth were now also implicated in more practical and “monumental” war-related tasks. Following treaties between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, as well as the Third Reich and Romania, up to 200,000 ethnic Germans from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dobrudja were “resettled” into the *Reich* during the summer, fall, and early winter of 1940.¹⁵¹ Since the “resettlement” route of these ethnic Germans led through Yugoslavia, large camps were established in Semlin/Zemun and Prahovo, where settlers were registered, fed, clothed, attended to medically, and entertained with “folkloric” events. Youth became instrumental to these camps’ functioning: as one (presumably exaggerated) report indicates, up to 7,000 men

¹⁴⁷ “Auf den Dienst im Volke kommt es an,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (30.12.1940), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 72.

¹⁴⁸ Confidential memorandum (14.5.1940), PA AA, R 103367.

¹⁴⁹ Transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (27.11.1940), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 71, Tl. 2. As Shimizu writes (in quoting Yugoslav German propaganda minister Heinrich Reister), by March 1940, approximately 50% of Yugoslavia’s *Volksdeutsche* were members of the SDKB. Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 65.

¹⁵⁰ As the article states, the only organization that did not “integrate itself” into the *Kulturbund* was the *Katholische Jünglingsverein*. However, the *Jünglingsverein* was “forced to become inactive” that year due to a lack of members. “Bački Brestovac hat keine Vereine mehr!,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (7.3.1941), BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 18.

¹⁵¹ Consider, for instance: Dirk Jachomowksi, *Die Umsiedlung der Bessarabien-, Bukowina- und Dobrudjadeutschen: Von der Volksgruppe in Rumänien zur “Siedlungsbrücke” an der Reichsgrenze* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1984), 191-195, 209-227.

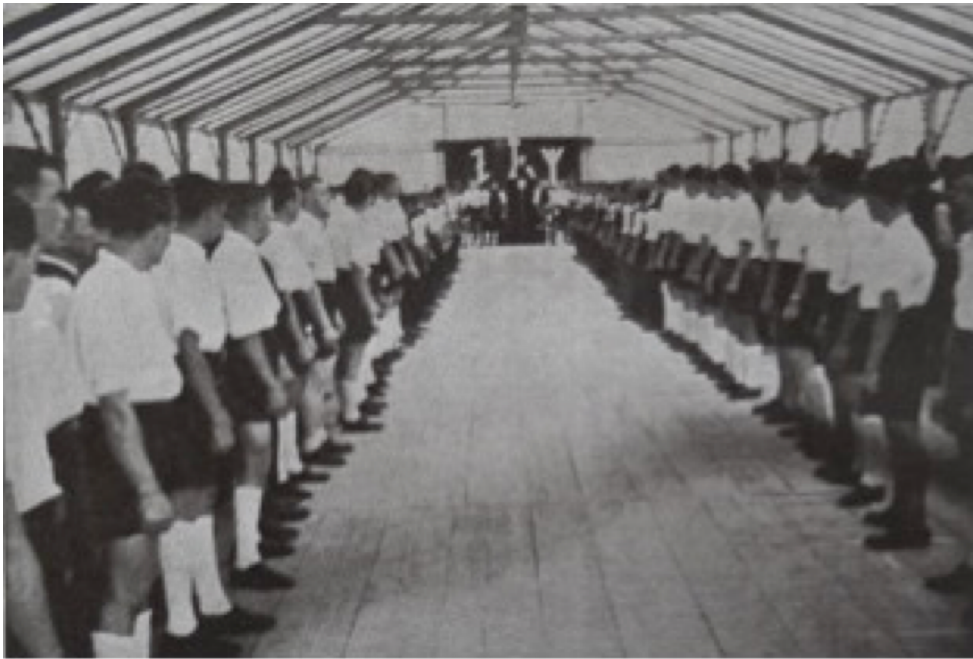


Fig. 2.11 *Deutsche Jugend* Prepares for Service at the “*Volksdeutsche*” Relocation Camp in Semlin, 1940. Source: Heinrich Reister and Leopold Egger. *Das grosse Aufgebot*. Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A.G., 1941.

and boys (“especially boys”) and 1,800 girls volunteered a total of two million working hours during these months.¹⁵² As Sepp Janko claimed in one 1941 illustrated volume by the *Landespropagandaamt der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (the official propaganda office of the Germans in Yugoslavia), this was precisely the type of challenge that would enable the realization of the Yugoslav Germans’ “calling.”¹⁵³ In dispensing food and clothing, constructing barracks, and lending a hand in the administrative and medical facilities, youth would be able to “swear themselves to the ideals of the German *Weltanschauung*.”¹⁵⁴ Not an organization to miss an opportunity for publicity, the *Landespropagandaamt* further circulated dozens of images, in which *Donauschwaben* girls and boys were depicted in their service, organizing German folk and athletic events, or standing in rows by the hundreds in folk costume, greeting visitors such as Sepp Janko, Princess Olga of Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković, SS leaders Toni Schnitzler and Werner Lorenz, or Himmler’s wife.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 26.

¹⁵³ Heinrich Reister and Leopold Egger, *Das grosse Aufgebot* (Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-A-G., 1941), 10.

¹⁵⁴ Reister and Egger, *Das grosse Aufgebot*. Quotation from: “Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg,” 26.

¹⁵⁵ Reister and Egger, *Das grosse Aufgebot*, 104-106, 86-97.

C. Religious Youth Groups, 1918-1941

By 1941, the majority of *Donauschwaben* youth had been mobilized into decidedly pro-National Socialist youth formations, which had originated in *Erneuerer* efforts to “harness” the *Kulturbund*’s youth groups. As intimated above, however, this mass mobilization of youth into the pro-*Reich* “*Deutsche Jugend*” did not occur without resistance or alternatives. Indeed, in the wake of the precipitous expansion and radicalization of the *Kulturbund* youth chapters, the Church established itself as a defender of “traditional,” Christian definitions of local “Germandom” during the 1930s, attempting to counteract what it saw as the rising “heathen,” hateful, and divisive National Socialist influences on its communities.

To a degree— and as has been the predominant historiography of both former *Donauschwaben* and current German historians— the Catholic Church launched youth mobilization efforts from the mid-1930s onwards to contest the increasingly pro-National Socialist SDKB youth chapters.¹⁵⁶ However, as this dissertation’s chapter on interwar schools has already suggested, even the Catholic Church’s development of an anti-National Socialist stance was neither smooth, nor cohesive, nor all-encompassing. Particularly in the extra-curricular youth group arena, the *Reich* once again became party to the battles that were launched by ecclesiastical actors over the souls of *Donauschwaben* youth. Furthermore, by the mid-1930s, conflicts in the ecclesiastical extra-curricular youth landscape had become much more complex than the existing historiography suggests.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, it was not merely the Catholic Church that initiated a variety of youth programs during these years, but also the various Protestant denominations. During the interwar period, all major *Donauschwaben* confessions initiated youth programs and publications, while simultaneously navigating conflicts between *Donauschwaben* secular and religious organizations, “host state”-German relations, and the *Reich*’s continuous reach into the affairs of Yugoslavia’s German minority.

¹⁵⁶ Consider: Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 253-255; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 507-511; Michael Merkl, *Weitblick eines Donauschwaben: Widerstand gegen nationalsozialistische Einflüsse unter den Donauschwaben Jugoslawiens und Ungarns 1935-1944* (Dieterskirch: M. Merkl, 1968).

¹⁵⁷ There is very little historiography on the *Donauschwaben* religious youth groups. Ones that do mention (especially Catholic) youth formations, however, are very cursory and rely heavily on a Catholicism vs. Nazism dichotomy within their writings. Consider: Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 209-214; Böhm, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien 1918-1941*, 253-260; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 506-516.

1. Catholic Youth Mobilization, 1918-1941

Religious youth organizations had been the original form of extra-curricular youth activity among the *Donauschwaben*, reaching back at least into the nineteenth century. While such formations undoubtedly continued even after the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, it seems that during the 1920s— as Church administrations reformulated themselves according to new boundaries and state conditions— not much emphasis was placed on youth group development, especially not according to any “national” concerns. Archival sources from this period related to religious youth organizations, too, are limited. However, those traces that have survived suggest that— like with the confessional school system— the *Donauschwaben*’s main ecclesiastical priorities during the early to mid-1920s were much more related to questions of Church authority within the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, than to specifically “German” or national concerns. Embedded within a distinctly multinational framework during this time, the *Donauschwaben*’s Catholic authorities in fact formulated their grievances largely in concert with the Croat, Hungarian, Slovene, and other Catholic minorities. As such, their main official concern during the 1920s revolved not around youth groups dedicated to the maintenance of a mother tongue or a national culture; rather, they lodged their main protest against Yugoslavia’s newest youth project: the Sokol.

Established with the intention of training Yugoslavia’s youth in a centralized, pro-Slavic, pro-Yugoslav national spirit, the Sokol (“Falcon”) was perceived as a threat to Yugoslavia’s *Donauschwaben* Catholic authorities as early as 1921. According to reports filed in Germany’s Foreign Office from 1921 onwards, the Sokol had begun to spread and replace the previously confessional youth organizations. In its “atheistic” nature, it had become a purely “political institution of the current regime,” a propagator of “confessional indifference,” morally “rotting,” and a bane to the Catholic Church’s continued educational efforts.¹⁵⁸ Yugoslavia’s Catholic leadership initially took a unified stance against the Sokol, launching such virulent propaganda against the Sokol formations that it resulted in the purported— and much publicized— suicide of a guilt-

¹⁵⁸ Letter from German Consulate in Zagreb to German Foreign Office, “Der katholische Klerus gegen den staatlichen Sokol” (12.1.1933), PA AA, R 72167; letter (19.2.1921), PA AA, R 73196; letter (22.10.1929), PA AA, R 73169; letter (3.12.1932), PA AA, R 72167; letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, “Weitere Auseinandersetzungen in der Sokolfrage” (1.2.1933), PA AA, R 72167; letter (14.2.1933), PA AA, R 73196.

stricken Sokol member in 1933.¹⁵⁹ Activities against the Sokol, however, did not remain entirely coordinated. The 1920s thus also saw the formation of nationally-specific Catholic youth organizations, such as the Croat Eagle Union (“*Hrvatski orlovski savez*”).¹⁶⁰ Ultimately, while the 1920s had seen an initial rise in the *Donauschwaben* Catholic Church’s concern over youth groups, its efforts remained both uncoordinated and centered on larger, multinational questions of Church authority in the newly founded Yugoslav state.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the 1930s saw an abrupt shift away from these more generalized concerns. Frustrated in the formal curricular sphere, backed by Germany, and faced by the increasingly nationalized, even right-wing radicalized, youth activities of the *Kulturbund*, the *Donauschwaben* Catholic authorities, too, increasingly turned their attention to the creation of nationally and ecclesiastically specific youth groups. As in the curricular arena, one of the main catalysts for this development was the *Reich*. In the fall of 1934, Emil Clemens Scherer, head of the *Katholische Auslandsdeutsche Mission*, traveled to Belgrade to visit a delegation of *Donauschwaben* Catholic authorities. This delegation included Franz Leh, a religion teacher in Werbass, and Vicar Emmanuel Wethmar, a *reichsdeutsche* clergyman and NSDAP member who had been sent to Belgrade in order to support Yugoslavia’s ethnic German Catholics.¹⁶¹ Concerned by the past years’ “developments of the youth movement,” Scherer, Wethmar, and the other representatives decided to establish a German-specific Catholic youth movement.¹⁶² According to reports on these negotiations, the previous “union [*Zusammenfassung*] of the entire Catholic youth: the German, the Hungarian, and the Croat,” represented a “national . . . danger.” The *Reichsverband für die katholischen Auslandsdeutschen* (RKA) and the German Foreign Office would therefore need to counteract such developments through funding and manpower (in the form of *reichsdeutsche* priests). Henceforth,

¹⁵⁹ Letter (1.2.1933).

¹⁶⁰ Letter (19.2.1921), 2. For more on the interwar Croat Catholic Youth movement, see: Prlenda, “Young, Religious, and Radical: The Croat Catholic Youth Organizations, 1922-1945.”

¹⁶¹ *Filipowa—Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde. Achter Band: Filipowa 1914-1944*, edited by Franz Schreiber and Georg Wildmann (Vienna: Verlag der Donauschwäbischen Kulturstiftung, 1999), 159; letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, “Zulassung reichsdeutscher Geistlicher in Jugoslawien” (3.11.1938), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁶² Letter, RKA to German Foreign Office, “Beihilfe von 2.000.— RM zur Förderung katholischer deutscher Jugendarbeit in Jugoslawien” (26.6.1935), p. 2, PA AA, R 62220.

Yugoslavia's ethnic German Catholic youth was to be trained in a "religious youth movement built on the basis of the German *Volkstum*."¹⁶³

In order to realize these ambitions, Vicar (also known as "*Rektor*") Wethmar was declared head of youth pastoral care ("*Jugendseelsorge*") for Yugoslavia's Catholics in 1934, a move endorsed by Yugoslavia's Archbishop.¹⁶⁴ Wethmar was to maintain close ties both to the "*Landesführer*" (leader) of Yugoslavia's *Reichsdeutsche*-based NSDAP, and to the leadership of the *Kulturbund*. His task was to help build a German-specific Catholic youth movement—initially in conjunction with the *Kulturbund*—to help prevent "dangerous" "national mixings [*Vermischungen*]."¹⁶⁵ By 1935, the details of this initiative had further been clarified between the *Reichsverband*, the German Foreign Office, and the *Donauschwaben* Catholic authorities. Henceforth, money would stream from the RKA and the Foreign Office into five specific projects. First, religious "*Einkehrwochen*" ("self-reflection weeks") were to be held for Yugoslavia's German academics and students in the Abbey of Maria Stern in Banja Luka (Bosnia). Second, theological seminars, with an emphasis on religious youth education and literature, were to be convened in Banja Luka for theologians and priests interested in working with the *Kulturbund* and its youth. Third, those ethnic German theology students who could not study in the *Reich* were to be educated in additional seminaries, led by *Reichsdeutsche*, in Banja Luka. Fourth, training camps for future Catholic youth leaders were to be convened in Werschetz (for the Banat) and Doroslovo (for the Batschka). Catholic holiday camps for groups of thirty to forty ethnic German boys and girls at a time were further to be organized in Banja Luka and on the Fruška Gora (a mountain in northern Srem, now split between Serbia and Croatia). Finally, a voyage through Germany ("*Deutschlandfahrt*") was to be prepared for thirty-two pupils from Belgrade's German school that year alone.¹⁶⁶

True to their word, the RKA and the German Foreign Office helped fund these programs over the following years. Particularly interesting to the Foreign Office, it seems, were the courses for future youth leaders in Banja Luka. Not only were the full planned

¹⁶³ "*Es handelt sich vielmehr um eine ausgesprochene religiöse Jugendbewegung auf der Grundlage deutschem Volkstums.*" Letter (26.6.1935), 2.

¹⁶⁴ This position, it seems, was not specifically restricted to Yugoslavia's Catholic ethnic Germans; however, Wethmar's appointment was seen very positively by *Reich* officials, and as a way to settle German-specific issues once and for all. Letter (26.6.1935), 2.

¹⁶⁵ Letter (26.6.1935), 2.

¹⁶⁶ Letter (26.6.1935), 3-5.



Fig. 2.12 Snapshots from Catholic Youth Leader Camp at Banja Luka, Late 1930s.
 Source: *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde. Achter Band: Filipowa 1914-1944.*
 Edited by Franz Schreiber and Georg Wildmann. Vienna: Verlag der Donauschwäbischen
 Kulturstiftung, 1999. p. 158.

itineraries of these events filed with the Foreign Office, which included a complete, two-week daily program from seven in the morning until ten at night, filled with prayers, German literature and singing lessons, and lectures on the importance of youth for the German faith and *Volk*.¹⁶⁷ Rather, detailed reports on the courses were also sent to the Foreign Office once they had been carried out. According to the first such report from February 1935, the “*Jugendführerkurs*” (“youth leader course”) at Banja Luka had been a major success. Vicar Wethmar, along with two *reichsdeutsche* priests (Georg Wagner and Chaplain Fritz Gogolin), teacher Leh, and several *Donauschwab*en clergymen, had instructed fifty-three male youth from twenty-eight towns (“*Gemeinden*”) that month. Most of them came from the Batschka, and seven came from the Banat. Through practical schooling related to youth groups, regular German-language reading and rhetoric courses, the learning of fifty-five German folk songs, and the study of phonographic and film materials, these young men had apparently gained a new appreciation for “faith and *Volkstum*.” Through their training, they would now be able to build “a German *Christusjugend* ... that fights the widely disseminated materialism in marriage and family, stands up for folk traditions and folk culture, and serves the renewal of faith and *Volkstum* according to the best historical transmissions of the *Heimat* and the settler-forefathers.”¹⁶⁸ By the closing celebration— which was led by Abbot Egerth from

¹⁶⁷ Transcription “Tagesordnung,” with letter “Beihilfe von 1.000.— RM zur Förderung der katholischen deutschen Jugendarbeit in Jugoslawien” (5.2.1935), PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁶⁸ “... eine deutsche *Christusjugend* als junge Erneuerungsbewegung ausgerufen, die gegen Verflachung und den weit eingerissenen Materialismus in Ehe und Familie, Volksbrauch und Volkskultur aufsteht und der Erneuerung von Glaube und *Volkstum* nach den besten geschichtlichen Überlieferungen

Apatin— the “young leaders” (“*Jungmänner*”) reportedly had developed such an enthusiasm that they wholeheartedly sang and chanted a “declaration of faith” (“*Bekanntnis*”), in which they swore to “live and fight in their home country for faith and *Volkstum* as German Catholic men.”¹⁶⁹

The Banja Luka courses continued over the following years, continuously funded by the Foreign Office and supplied with instructors and school materials by the RKA. At least according to reports filed in Berlin, they attracted more and more men each year, most of whom were between twenty-two and twenty-five years of age.¹⁷⁰ Unlike with the first course in 1935, however, the *reichsdeutsche* instructors turned their attention increasingly to compensating “the lack of schooling and education ... in general knowledge, as well as German reading and writing”— a product of the *Donauschwaben*’s lacking German-language education, and an affliction to be remedied further by schooling with the “local ethnic German organizations.”¹⁷¹ Alarmed by the declining *Donauschwaben* birthrates,¹⁷² moreover, the schoolings’ curriculum was slightly revised: by 1937, lectures regarding “racial questions, and the health and growth of the *Volk*” were introduced, lectures to be held by a member of the country’s “Party” branch (presumably the NSDAP).¹⁷³

At these training camps, the newly educated youth leaders not only received practical training and theoretical schooling; they also received Catholic German literature

der Heimat und der Einwanderer-Väter dienen will.” “Bericht über den Jugendführerkursus in Maria Stern bei Banja Luka vom 14. bis 28. Februar 1935,” pp. 5-6, PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁶⁹ “Bei der Schlussfeier legten die Jungmänner in Lied und Gelöbnis-Sprechchor das Bekenntnis ab, als deutsche katholische Jungmänner in ihrem Heimatlande für Glaube und Volkstum zu leben und zu kämpfen.” “Bericht über den Jugendführerkursus in Maria Stern” (1935), 4.

¹⁷⁰ “Bericht über die deutsche Jugend-Schulungskurse in Jugoslawien,” attached to letter, “Betr. Deutsche Jugend-Schulungskurse in Jugoslawien” (20.3.1936), p. 1, PA AA, R 62220.

¹⁷¹ “Bericht über die deutsche Jugend-Schulungskurse in Jugoslawien,” 2.

¹⁷² The *Kulturbund*’s activists were obsessed with the *Donauschwaben*’s declining birthrate, frequently publishing statistics and calls to end the “biological decay” (“*biologischen Verfall*”) of the local German community. Indeed, birth rates were often quite low, as families attempted to avoid having too many children who would inherit (and divide) the family’s landed properties (which were in comparatively scarce supply in Vojvodina). However, according to *Donauschwaben* authors, the political instability of the 1920s, as well as the more general climate of the post-1929 global economic depression, had further discouraged families from having too many children. Consider: Johann Wüsch, “Natürliche Bevölkerungsbewegung der deutschen Volksgruppe in der Wojwodina,” *Volk und Heimat*, vol. 1, no. 4 (10.-12.1938), 27-33.

¹⁷³ “Zu den Themen betr. Rassefragen, Volksgesundheit und Volkswachstum wird der Referent der Landesgruppe der Partei einige Arbeitsgemeinschaften übernehmen.” Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (8.2.1937), PA AA, R 62220. Yugoslavia’s PdD had been shut down in 1929 with the royal dictatorship. Officially, non-*Reich* citizens in Yugoslavia could not join the NSDAP; however, the NSDAP might have had a branch there based on its *reichsdeutsche* citizens.

to disseminate in their villages.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine today what literature was distributed to the *Donauschwaben* parishes when, by whom, and through which channels. Nonetheless, an enormous collection of German-language Catholic literature— geared specifically towards children and youth— has been preserved through the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* in Apatin. Some of this literature— such as *Der Jesusknabe: Monatsschrift fürs Kinderherz*, printed in the Netherlands— came from non-*Reich* sources, and therefore remained both specifically Catholic and nationally neutral.¹⁷⁵ The Catholic youth group libraries— preserved in full in the case of Apatin’s *Marienbund*, *Jungmännerverein*, and similar organizations— further contained much literature unrelated to Germany or Catholicism, harboring everything from Karl May’s Western novels to H.C. Andersen’s fairytales.¹⁷⁶ Nonetheless, it seems that a majority of imported German-language youth periodicals had come from the *Reich*, and, as such, experienced a “*völkisch*” politicization over the course of the 1930s.

Some of the earliest *reichsdeutsche* Catholic youth literature to reach the *Donauschwaben* was *Das Singeschiff*, a series of song books published in the early 1930s in Düsseldorf (the seat of most German Catholic youth literature to come). Containing both religious hymns and folk songs from across the German-speaking world, the *Das Singeschiff* booklets contained few traces of a nationalist, let alone pro-National Socialist worldview.¹⁷⁷ Various practical youth education manuals imported from Germany and Austria— including the essay collection *Landjugend und Seelsorge*, guides for the sexual education of youth (such as *Um die Reinheit der Jugend*), and manuals for girls’ religious groups (*Werkbuch der religiösen Mädchenführung*)— similarly harbored few nationalist concerns.¹⁷⁸ At least some of the Catholic German literature that reached the

¹⁷⁴ “Bericht über den Jugendführerkursus in Maria Stern” (1935), 4.

¹⁷⁵ *Der Jesusknabe: Monatsschrift fürs Kinderherz: Belehrungen und Erzählungen aus Heimat und Mission*. Most of the 1931 to 1934 issues, as well as some individual issues from the late 1930s and early 1940s, are available at the ABV today. As the one preserved 1943 issue indicates, the publication was being printed in Switzerland by then.

¹⁷⁶ ABV library. Particularly Karl May’s novels suggest a link to, or interest in, the global Boy Scout movement. Consider: Wu, “‘A Life of Make-Believe,’” 589–619.

¹⁷⁷ *Das Singeschiff: Lieder deutscher katholischer Jugend*, edited by Katholischer Jungmännerverband Deutschlands, vol. 1 and 2 (Düsseldorf: Verlag Jugendhaus Düsseldorf, 1932–1934). *Das Singeschiff* was also advertised in the *reichsdeutsche* Catholic youth literature. See, for instance: “Das gelbe und das graue Singeschiff,” *Der Jungführer*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1.1935), 64.

¹⁷⁸ *Landjugend und Seelsorge: Referate der zweiten Dorfseelsorgerwoche in Hubertendorf, N.-Ö. vom 6.-10. August 1934* (Vienna: Seelsorger-Verlag, 1935); Hardy Schilgen, *Um die Reinheit der Jugend: Ein Buch über die Erziehung zur Keuschheit für Eltern, Seelsorger und Erzieher* (Düsseldorf: L. Schwann,

Donauschwaben from Germany, however, seems to have undergone not just a nationalist politicization, but also a certain degree of *Gleichschaltung* (Nazi “coordination”), over the course of the mid-1930s. The RKA’s official magazine, *Die Getreuen*, thus reached *Donauschwaben* church libraries. By 1940, the publication distributed articles on the joyful “*Heimkehr*” (“homecoming”) of Bukowina Germans and the Hungarian Germans’ longing for the “*Urheimat*.”¹⁷⁹ Issues of *Am Scheidewege: Zeitschrift für Katholische Jungen* further assumed not only the aesthetic (in fonts, images, and colors) of the National Socialist youth press, but also distributed militant slogans advocating a rigorous national and religious comportment among the German Catholic youth. As one 1935 issue, preserved in Apatin, proclaimed:

Haltung, Junge
Den Körper gestrafft, Aufrecht, gerade, himmelwärts.
Den Blick frei in die Welt, unbefangen, frisch, wagemutig.
Junkatholische Art will mehr: Zucht der Seele,
gebändigte Kraft, Herrschaft des Geistes.
Haltung heißt auch: treue Gefolgschaft unter unseren Führern!
Unter unserem Kreuzes-Fähnlein! Unter Christi heiligem Zeichen!
Unter Gottes ewigem Gesetz.
Solche Haltung fordert Kerle— bildet aber auch Kerle,
*Echt – deutsch – katholisch.*¹⁸⁰

Possibly the starkest illustration of this— certainly also *Reich* state-mandated— movement towards National Socialism, is provided by the *Jungführer*, the official monthly journal of the German Catholic *Jungmännerverband*. Printed by the *Jugendhaus* in Düsseldorf from 1909, it was received, almost in full, by Apatin’s Catholic Church during the mid-1930s. The *Jungführer* contained not only official announcements on

1930); Otilie Mosshammer, *Werkbuch der religiösen Mädchenführung* (Freiburg: Herder & Co. G.m.b.H., 1939). ABV.

¹⁷⁹ “Heimkehr aus der Bukowina,” *Die Getreuen*, vol. 17 (11.1940), photographic inlay; “Ein Deutscher aus Ungarn sucht seine Urheimat,” *Die Getreuen*, vol. 17 (12.1940), 137-140. It is interesting to note that *Die Getreuen* was also advertised as a publication from the “motherland” in the local Catholic *Donauschwaben* press. Consider: *Der Familienfreund: Katholische Zeitschrift für religiöses Leben*, vol. 12, no. 19 (1.10.1938), front cover.

¹⁸⁰ “Poise, boy. The body taut, upright, straight, towards the heavens. The vision free into the world, impartial, fresh, bold. [The] Young Catholic way wants more: cultivation of the soul, subdued power, control of the spirit. Poise also means: loyal obedience under our leaders! Under our flag of the cross! Under Christ’s holy sign! Under God’s eternal law. Such poise challenges chaps— but also educates chaps, real-German-Catholic.” *Am Scheidewege: Zeitschrift für Katholische Jungen*, no. 18 (1935), center pages.

legislation, but also instructions for Catholic youth meetings, full monthly schedules of events to be conducted with youth groups, and texts to be discussed at meetings. Perhaps unsurprisingly, at least in the early 1930s issues, a mild critique of National Socialism can be detected among its pages: even in 1933, articles quoted the Nazi press, in conjunction with the Communist press, under the title “messages of hate.”¹⁸¹ However, following largescale restrictions on the activities of Germany’s Catholic youth groups, the publication’s tone, too, changed.¹⁸² From 1935 onwards, its issues became dominated by a “*Blut und Boden*” tenor, which urged all *Jungmänner* to work towards “the unity of the German youth in the victorious faith in Germany and in the sacrificial love to Germany”—sentiments to be expressed also through service on the home and military fronts.¹⁸³

While a considerable amount of politicized *reichsdeutsche* Catholic youth literature reached the *Donauschwaben*, it would be erroneous to think that the *Donauschwaben* Catholic youth groups depended solely on literature imported from abroad. Indeed, especially the mid-1930s saw the flourishing of a substantial home-grown Catholic German-language youth press. The most important of these publications was the *Jugendruf*. Founded in 1934 as a supplement to the Catholic *Donauschwaben* journal *Der Familienfreund*, the *Jugendruf* was turned into an independent, sixteen-page monthly youth magazine in January 1936.¹⁸⁴ Between 1934 and 1938, *Rektor* Wethmar himself was the editor of this publication; his main Batschka assistant was “*Religionslehrer* Leh.” Following Wethmar’s dismissal in 1938 (more on this later), Jakob Busch, a *Donauschwaben* chaplain born in 1909 and an eventual leader of the Batschka’s Catholic youth movement, became editor of the journal.¹⁸⁵ Following Busch’s early death in 1940, the *Jugendruf* became the joint enterprise of Chaplain Koloman Moullion and Chaplain Josef Buschbacher, two Batschka-based clergymen heavily involved in the religious “renewal” of the *Donauschwaben* youth.¹⁸⁶ Throughout the mid- to late 1930s, the *Jugendruf* seems to have enjoyed a growing popularity, becoming the officially

¹⁸¹ Consider “Botschaft des Hasses,” *Jungführer*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1.1933), 32-33.

¹⁸² For more on the *Reich*’s legislation against Catholic youth organizations, consider: Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 22-23. More on this to follow in this chapter.

¹⁸³ “*Die Einheit deutscher Jugend im sieghaften Glauben an Deutschland und in der opferbereiten Liebe zu Deutschland.*” “Führerweisung,” *Jungführer*, vol. 24, no. 2 (3.-4.1935), 85.

¹⁸⁴ *Jugendruf: Monatsschrift junger deutscher Katholiken*, vol. 2, no. 21 (1935), 94.

¹⁸⁵ *Filipowa—Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 159, 169, 177-178, 187; “Kaplan Jakob Busch, unser Schriftleiter—tot,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 7, no. 11 (11.1940), 169.

¹⁸⁶ *Filipowa—Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 187. The publication ended in October 1944.



Fig. 2.13 1939 Issue of the Catholic *Jugendruf* Periodical. Source: *Jugendruf: Zeitschrift ins deutsche Jungvolk*. Vol. 6, No. 8-9 (August-September 1939). ABV. Caption (in red): “Let the banners wave over our ranks, all the world should see that we consecrate ourselves anew. We are ready, and call it out widely, [that] Christ is King also in our time.”

recommended paper for Catholic youth groups, and reaching a subscription level of four thousand issues (in 178 communities) by 1938.¹⁸⁷

According to its first issues, the *Jugendruf* was designed as a “call to [youth] towards a faithful Catholic life conduct out of the strengths of [the] *Volkstum*.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, contrary to the contemporary “thoughtless masses,” it would be the Catholic youth’s duty to realize that *Volk* and community (“*Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein*”) go hand in hand; only those “full, real, conscientious Catholics, who are permeated by the ideas of their faith” could consider themselves part of *Volk* and Church.¹⁸⁹ However, at least in the publication’s early years, the precise nature of this *Volk*— besides being Catholic— was not necessarily specified. The *Jugendruf* initially focused on practicalities (explaining the layout of a Catholic church and the progression of the Mass, for instance), the provision of German youth literature and religious songs, and the distribution of announcements

¹⁸⁷ As Busch himself estimated, such subscription numbers meant that at least 15,000 to 20,000 individuals read the paper. *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 187.

¹⁸⁸ “Ein Ruf an Dich zu treu katholischer Lebenshaltung aus den Kräften Deines Volkstums heraus ...” *Jugendruf*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1934), 1.

¹⁸⁹ “Zum Volk der Kirche gehören nur die ganzen, echten, bewussten Katholiken, die durchdrungen sind von der Ideenwelt ihres Glaubens ...” “Mit frischem Mut ins neue Jahr!,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1.1935), 1.

and short reports sent by local Catholic youth chapters to editor Wethmar.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the *Jugendruf* published instructions to the Catholic youth groups (“*Christusjugend*”) to help ensure the unity of their activities. As one 1935 issue explained, the *Christusjugend*’s official symbol was the “silver Christ’s needle” (“*silberne Christusnadel*”), to be worn also at meetings of the *Kulturbund* and other organizations.¹⁹¹ Sunday mass, “*Heimabende*,” and other occasional service days (“*Einkehrtage*”) were mandatory, as was the reading of Catholic literature like the *Jugendruf*, *Der Familienfreund*, and the *St.-Raphaelsblatt*. The *Christusjugend*’s goal, ultimately, was to foster individuals who were Catholic, German, and loyal to the host state. As such, it would be misleading to claim that the Catholic youth held any responsibility for the *Kulturbund*’s, and the *Donauschwaben* communities’, fracturing.¹⁹²

The community reports published in the *Jugendruf* are fascinating, and offer some of the only available insight into the activities of the *Donauschwaben*’s Catholic youth groups. These monthly reports, which took the form of short news articles on events held or priests appointed, suggest, that, even during the 1930s, the *Donauschwaben*’s Catholic youth groups were not part of a simple, unified organization. Roughly speaking, almost all Catholic youth groups envisioned themselves as working in conjunction with the “*Katholische Aktion*” (“Catholic Action”), an international movement towards religious “renewal” carried out by the laity, established under Pope Pius X at the turn of the twentieth century, and officially introduced to Yugoslavia in 1924.¹⁹³ Nonetheless, many parishes had youth formations of their own title, which were built upon youth groups that had often been in existence since the Habsburg period. Generally, the Catholic youth chapters came under the auspices of the official “*Christusjugend*,” the female “*Marienbund*,” or the “*Katholische Jungchar.*” However, some groups— such as in Parabutsch’s “*Römisch-katholischer Jugendverein*” or Apatin’s “*Katholischer Fischerburschenverein*”— retained their original, Habsburg-era titles even during the

¹⁹⁰ “Grundriss der heiligen Messe,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1934), 2; *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 7 (7.1935), 33-34; *Jugendruf*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1934), 1.

¹⁹¹ This symbolism corresponded to that of the *reichsdeutsche* Catholic youth movement. Consider: “Abzeichen deutscher Jugendverbände und –bünde,” *Jungführer*, vol. 24, no. 3-4 (1933), 220-222.

¹⁹² *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 7 (7.1935), 36.

¹⁹³ “Amtliche Mitteilungen vom Reichsamt des Jungmännerverbandes,” *Jungführer*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1.1935), 3; “Die Pflichten der Katholischen Aktion,” *Der Familienfreund*, vol. 14, no. 11 (1.6.1940), 164-165; *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 177-186; “Diozösenausschuss der Katholischen Aktion- Rundschreiben,” no. 1 (20.4.1940), ABV, Adam Berenz Fond [hereinafter: ABF]. The “Katholische Aktion” was also a topic of instruction at the Banja Luka camps. Consider: “Tagesordnung,” (5.2.1935), p. 3, PA AA, R 62220.

1930s.¹⁹⁴ Such differences in organizational names, however, did not prevent these formations from hosting not only their own religious youth events— including *Heimabende*, excursions, and masses; rather, during the mid-1930s, these groups also increasingly joined their efforts at (occasionally *Reich*-sponsored) Catholic youth events.

Perhaps unsurprisingly (considering the *Jugendruf*'s editor), much attention was paid in the journal from the start to the Catholic youth events planned in conjunction with the RKA and the German Foreign Office. The *Jugendruf* even reported on the first *Jungführer* course in Banja Luka. According to one 1935 article, over fifty young men had attended the course, and had proudly received the “silver Christ’s needle” at a ceremony in which they surrounded the “holy fire of the *Christusjugend*.” Following their release, these newly trained leaders would help spread the “movement” to their communities, no longer afraid of their peers’ teasing and harassment.¹⁹⁵ Youth courses held in Werschetz, according to the *Jugendruf*, were similarly successful over the following years.¹⁹⁶ Pilgrimages to Doroslovo regularly attracted over two thousand attendees.¹⁹⁷ The “*Ferienkolonien*” (“holiday camps”) for Catholic children and youth in Banja Luka— almost free of charge for the poor— not just continued, but became heavily advertised, over the following years.¹⁹⁸ Training organized for students and academics in Banja Luka, furthermore, were presented as a raging success, in which full enthusiasm for the religious “*Erneuerung*” was built, and in which all participants learned the true value of the *Christusjugend*'s “declaration of faith” (“*Bekennnis*”):

*Noch sind wir jung,
Noch sind wir stark,
Wir bleiben treu,
Treu bis ins Mark,
Wir bauen auf Gott,
Wir sind bereit,*

¹⁹⁴ See: “Vereinsnachrichten-Parabuć,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1934), 2; “Reihenfolge der an der Firmungsprozession teilnehmende Vereine und Körperschaften,” flyer, Apatin (20.5.1935), ABV.

¹⁹⁵ “Etwas von unserm Tun in Banjaluka,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 6 (1935), 31.

¹⁹⁶ *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 9 (1935), 43; *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 13 (1935), 60; “Jungführerkurs in Vršac vom 24. bis 31. August 1935,” vol. 2, no. 15 (1935), 67-68; “Jungführerwoche in Vršac,” vol. 2, no. 18 (1935), 77-78.

¹⁹⁷ In 1935, for instance, the *Jugendruf* reported that 2,106 “*Jungmänner*” had attended the pilgrimage to Doroslovo, the majority of whom came from the Batschka. “Deutsche kath. Jugend wallfahrt!” *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 13 (1935), 57.

¹⁹⁸ *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 14 (1935), 63.

*Wir kennen nicht Furcht,
Wir sind gefeit,
Gegen Spott und Hohn einer lästernden Welt.
Wir halten die Reinheit unser Panier,
Im Leben und Tod gehören wir
Unserer Mutter Maria!*¹⁹⁹

The *Jugendruf* even published a series of articles on the 1935 and 1936 (VDA and RKA-sponsored) “*Deutschlandfahrten*” of Catholic youth from Belgrade’s German schools. Accompanied by (presumably *reichsdeutsche*) nuns stationed in Belgrade, at least two groups of thirty girls embarked on three-week journeys through the “*Reich*” in those years. During these trips, the girls were greeted by representatives of the VDA and several hundred “*Heil!*”-shouting ethnic German youngsters in Glatz (today’s Powiat Kłodzki in Poland, presented to the girls as part of the “German East”). They visited the “*Reichshauptstadt*” Berlin, now in full preparation for the Olympics. There, they slept in a VDA dorm and met RKA chief Scherer. They attended the Richard-Wagner-*Festspiele* in Munich; marveled at the cultural heritage of cities like Dresden, Nuremberg, and Vienna; and took part in religious services in Fulda.²⁰⁰

In light of such German-focused activities, it is perhaps hardly surprising that by 1938—the same year in which Jakob Busch became the *Jugendruf*’s editor, and in which the *Kulturbund*’s youth groups became unified under the pro-*Erneuerer* “*Deutsche Jugend*”— the *Jugendruf*’s tone and format changed considerably. Like its Catholic counterparts in the *Reich*, the *Jugendruf* began to adopt the aesthetic (in red-white-black print, fonts, and imagery) of the pro-National Socialist press. News reports no longer merely relayed messages from *Donauschwaben* parishes, but from “the German *Volk* around the world.”²⁰¹ Religious articles became supplemented by “*Heimatgeschichte*” and German history, which emphasized the stories of “great German men” (such as

¹⁹⁹ “Still we are young, still we are strong, we will remain loyal, loyal to our core, we build on God, we are prepared, we know no fear, we are immune, against the ridicule and mockery of a gossiping world. We maintain the purity of our banner, in life and in death we belong to our Mother Mary!” “Unsere religiöse Akademikerwoche in Banjaluka,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 14 (1935), 62.

²⁰⁰ “Unsere Deutschlandfahrt,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 19 (1935), 82-84; “Unsere Deutschlandfahrt,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 2, no. 20 (1935), 86-88; “Deutschlandfahrt,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1.1.1937), 5-7.

²⁰¹ Consider the “*Deutsches Volk in aller Welt*” column, such as in: *Jugendruf*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1.1939), 7.



Figs. 2.14 and 2.15 Images from Catholic Girls' 1935 "Deutschlandfahrt."
 Sources: "Unsere Deutschlandfahrt." *Jugendruf*. Vol. 2, No. 19 (1935). p. 82;
 "Unsere Deutschlandfahrt." *Jugendruf*. Vol. 2, No. 20 (1935). p. 87.

Bismarck) and German contributions to the Catholic Church.²⁰² Cover-page slogans and poems now drew direct parallels between the "German *Volk* and blood," religious devotion, and the mission of youth.²⁰³ And, while the *Kulturbund* youth shouted "*Ein Volk!- Ein Reich!- Ein Führer!*," the *Donauschwaben*'s Catholic press propagated the slogan "*Ein König!- Ein Volk!- Ein Reich!*"²⁰⁴

²⁰² For example: "Unsere Heimat und ihre Geschichte," *Jugendruf*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1.1939), 3; "Bismarcks Werbebrief an Herrn Puttkamer," *Jugendruf*, vol. 6, no. 3 (3.1939), 36; "Wir Deutsche und die katholische Kirche," *Jugendruf*, vol. 6, no. 4 (4.1939), 57.

²⁰³ "Deutsche katholische Jugend, geboren aus deutschem Volke und Blute, erzogen in deutscher Zucht und Sitte— Wiedergeboren aus heiliger Taufe und heiligem Geiste, erlöst durch Jesus Christus unsern Herrn und Gott ..." *Jugendruf*, vol. 6, no. 8-9 (8.-9.1939), 140.

²⁰⁴ The complete slogan read: "*Ein König!—Ein Volk!— Ein Reich! Jesus Christus, wir erkennen Dich an, als König des Weltalls.*" "One King!— One People! – One Kingdom! Jesus Christ, we recognize you as king of the universe." *Der Familienfreund*, vol. 13, no. 20 (15.10.1939), 306.

This shift in tone and motifs can be interpreted as a strategy employed by Catholic youth authorities to win for themselves the “hearts and minds” of the *Donauschwaben* youth who, by the late 1930s, were attracted in droves to the activities and symbolism of the *Kulturbund*’s right-wing youth formations. Furthermore, this turn towards topics such as the “German blood” and *Volk* must be seen against the backdrop of the general, pro-German (and *Reich*-supported) “nationalization” of *Donauschwaben* organizations and discourses during the interwar period, in which national imaginations became tied by different actors to their own conceptions of markers of “Germanness.” However, it is also crucial to view this phenomenon of ideological radicalization in the larger context of the time, as the main Catholic youth activists negotiated a complex, frequently restrictive and self-contradictory, landscape of political and social conditions.

Questions of agency and its limitations are of course tricky to approach in any historical study. Based on archival evidence, however, it seems that not only *Donauschwaben* youth, but also their leaders possessed an (often circumscribed) individual agency. One striking case in point is presented by the very clergymen who were sent by the *Reich* to the *Donauschwaben* communities during the mid-1930s. As documents archived in Berlin’s Foreign Office indicate, the clergymen who were dispatched from the *Reich* to Yugoslavia to “educate” youth about “the German language and the German worldview” were themselves kept under very close surveillance.²⁰⁵ The *Reich*’s scrutiny of priests increased particularly after 1935. In July 1935, the Third Reich and the Vatican signed a Concordat. According to its stipulations, the Catholic Church would be granted sovereignty over religious matters. However, the Church was prohibited from engaging in any political activity. Germany’s Catholic youth groups, including the *Katholischer Jungmännerverband*, were continuously accused of engaging in politics thereafter; by 1939, Germany’s Catholic youth organizations had largely crumbled.²⁰⁶

Repression of *reichsdeutsche* priests occurred even within the *Donauschwaben* communities. In August 1935, for instance, the Gestapo arrested Fritz Gogolin— a clergyman from Fulda who had instructed *Donauschwaben* youth at the first Banka Luka camps— for breaking the new *Reich* laws on Catholic youth organizations within

²⁰⁵ “... *Kursen teil, die in verschiedenen Gebieten Jugoslawiens gehalten werden mit dem Zweck, die schulentlassene Jugend in der deutschen Sprache und deutscher Weltanschauung fortzubilden.*” Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (27.8.1935), PA AA, R 62220.

²⁰⁶ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 22-23. Germany’s traditionally strong Catholic Center Party was shut down in 1935, too.

Germany. According to the Gestapo, Gogolin would henceforth be blocked from “realizing German interests” among the “*Auslandsdeutsche*” in Yugoslavia due to his “political unreliability,” as expressed in his sermons and general comportment.²⁰⁷ Another *reichsdeutsche* priest, Karl von Koeth— who had been sent to Elemir/Elemér (Banat) through the RKA to support the “national-political development” of the *Donauschwaben* during the early 1930s— similarly came under the Gestapo’s scrutiny. According to reports collected between 1937 and 1939 by the RKA, the Foreign Office, Belgrade’s German legation, the Gestapo, and various NSDAP and SS authorities, von Koeth had made quite a name for himself as an opponent of National Socialism. Not only had von Koeth, in his sermons, regularly denounced the Nazi regime’s treatment of religion in the *Reich*, and equated Germany’s “concentration camps” as equally criminal to the Soviet Union’s. Apparently, he had also held anti-*Reich* speeches at *Erneuerer* youth rallies, ostracized those youth who no longer attended mass, and publicly denounced all of those youth who returned from “luxury travels” (“*Luxusreisen*”) through Germany. The way to proceed with von Koeth was highly debated. Ultimately, the various *Reich* authorities agreed that if threats from the *Reich* would not suffice to thwart his activities, he would simply be deprived of his *reichsdeutsche* citizenship.²⁰⁸

Such restrictions were not only enacted by the *Reich*, however. The Yugoslav authorities, too, kept a close eye on the *reichsdeutsche* clergymen’s activities. As archival materials from Germany’s Foreign Office suggest, the Yugoslav authorities became increasingly reluctant, during the late 1930s, to grant visas and residence permits to *reichsdeutsche* priests. Such policies affected one *reichsdeutsche* clergyman, Emil

²⁰⁷ Letter from Gestapo to German Foreign Office, “Kuratus Gogolin aus Fulda” (11.9.1935); “Schnellbrief!” transcription (27.8.1935); letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (27.8.1935). All: PA AA, R 62220.

²⁰⁸ Letter from German Foreign Office to RKA (31.12.1937); letter from German Legation Belgrade to German Foreign Office (12.11.1937); letter from German Foreign Office to Office of the *Reichsführer-SS* and *Chef der Deutschen Polizei im Reichsministerium des Innern* (21.12.1937); letter with reports, German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (12.11.1937); letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (25.1.1938); letter from NSDAP *Leitung der Auslands-Organisation* to German Foreign Office (21.3.1938); letter from RKA to German Foreign Office (14.11.1938); letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (15.12.1938); letter from German Foreign Office to RKA (5.4.1938); letter from NSDAP *Leitung der Auslands-Organisation* to German Foreign Office (10.6.1938); letter from *Reichsführer SS* to *Abteilung I des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern*, “Den Pater Karl v. Koeth” (27.6.1938); letter from *Reichsführer SS* to German Foreign Office, “Pater Karl von Koeth, geb. am 24.6.1873 in Lorsch” (14.1.1939); letter from *Reichsführer SS* to German Foreign Office, “Pater Karl von Koeth, geb. 24.6.73 in Lorsch” (23.2.1939). All: PA AA, R 62220.

Cramer, who had been sent to the Banat by Stuttgart's *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* (DAI) to assist Archbishop Rodić with Yugoslavia's "lack of priests" in 1936. As monthly reports on Catholic youth activities in the *Jugendruf* suggest, Cramer had actually been quite active in the Banat's Catholic youth scene, directing events held by Werschetz's *Christusjugend*, for instance.²⁰⁹ However, in 1938, the Yugoslav authorities decided to no longer extend his residence permit, as— according to Yugoslavia's bishops— those tasks accomplished by *reichsdeutsche* priests could also be carried out by Yugoslav citizens.²¹⁰ Such measures even affected Vicar Wethmar, whose residence permit was withdrawn in the spring of 1938.²¹¹ While this incident created some commotion with the Foreign Office, the RKA, and other *Reich* agencies, by October 1938, the *Reichsminister* for ecclesiastical affairs concluded that Wethmar had ultimately not "acted sufficiently in the *volksdeutsche* interests."²¹² Wethmar was thus replaced in 1939 by Chaplain Schönberger from Frankfurt, a man who, according to Yugoslavia's *Reichsdeutsche*-based NSDAP chapter, was considered completely politically "reliable" by *Reich* authorities.²¹³

Such sources suggest that, while *reichsdeutsche* Catholic clergymen did engage in educational efforts specific to the *Donauschwaben* and their "German" national heritage, and were often directly financially supported by Germany, their relationship to the *Reich* was at times ambivalent, if not downright antagonistic. By the late 1930s, such contention occasionally turned into open resistance in the case of *Donauschwaben* priests. One of the main leaders of the anti-National Socialist movement among the *Donauschwaben* was

²⁰⁹ "Vršac, Christusjugend," *Jugendruf*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1.1.1937), 13.

²¹⁰ Letter from German Foreign Office to German legation in Belgrade (21.10.1938); letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Aufenthaltsgenehmigung des katholischen Geistlichen Emil Cramer" (9.11.1938); letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Aufenthaltsgenehmigung Cramer" (2.1.1939); letter from German Foreign Office to German Legation in Belgrade (25.1.1939); letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Aufenthaltsgenehmigung Cramer" (9.2.1939). All: PA AA, R 62220.

²¹¹ Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "Zulassung reichsdeutscher Geistlicher in Jugoslawien und jugoslawischer Geistlicher im Reich" (28.7.1938), PA AA, R 62220.

²¹² "Nach mir inzwischen gewordenen Mitteilungen war der zur Deutschenseelsorge [sic] in Jugoslawien nun nicht mehr zugelassene katholische Geistliche Rektor Wethmar nicht im wünschenswerten Maße für die Volksdeutschen Interessen tätig, sodaß kein Anlaß bestehen dürfte, seine Wiederzulassung in Belgrad zu betreiben." Letter from *Reichsminister der kirchlichen Angelegenheiten* to German Foreign Office, "Zulassung reichsdeutscher Geistlicher in Jugoslawien und jugoslawischer Geistlicher im Reich" (12.10.1938), PA AA, R 62220.

²¹³ Letter from RKA to German Foreign Office, "Nachfolger für Herrn Kaplan Wethmar in Belgrad/Jugosl." (2.5.1939); letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (26.4.1940). All: PA AA, R 62220.

the clergyman Adam Berenz. Born in Apatin in 1898, Berenz pursued theological studies in Kalocsa and a series of ecclesiastical appointments in smaller Vojvodina parishes before being appointed Chaplain of Apatin's newly founded Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1933.²¹⁴ In order to “counteract” the “new worldview” that was now being so heavily propagated among the “Catholic *Schwabenvolk*,” Berenz— with the support of Abbot Egerth— decided to establish a Catholic German newspaper under the “*Aktio Katholico*” shortly thereafter.²¹⁵ In 1935, *Die Donau: Wochenblatt für das katholische Deutschtum Jugoslawiens* was founded, with Berenz as its editor. Thereafter, the publication was sponsored in part by *Donauschwaben* priests' personal donations, in part through the newly established “*Katholischer Presseverein*” for Yugoslavia's German Catholics, and in part through the newspaper's subscription fees.²¹⁶

From the start, *Die Donau* fashioned itself explicitly as a bastion of German Catholic values, in tune with the *Donauschwaben*'s unique heritage, and against National Socialism's destructive agitation. National Socialism, according to a February 1936 article, was “no more and no less than a political party” which had, out of happenstance and opportunism, taken the lead in Germany. As such, it could “in no shape or form claim a monopoly on ‘being German’.”²¹⁷ As the article continued:

*Wir stehen in felsenfester Treue auf dem Fundamente unserer katholischen Weltanschauung, dabei sind u. bleiben wir aber auch selbstbewußte und ehrliche Bekenner unseres angestammten deutschen Volkstumes.*²¹⁸

“German,” for Berenz and his followers, meant “loving our *Volkstum* [and] mother tongue,” a love which would last from a person's first breath to their last prayer. Being German further included values like diligence (“*gründliches Schaffen*”), an appreciation

²¹⁴ Merkl, *Weitblick eines Donauschwaben*, 9. Berenz thus became Apatin's second leading Catholic priest, next to Egerth.

²¹⁵ Letter from Abbot Egerth, “Hochwürdiger Herr Pfarrer!” (1936), ABV- ABF.

²¹⁶ The *Katholischer Presseverein* was officially ratified by Archbishop Budanović. Prior to March 21st, 1936, *Die Donau* was titled *Die Donau: Wochenblatt für gesellschaftliche Politik und Volkswirtschaft*. “Satzungen des Katholischen Pressevereines,” signed Budanović (28.3.1936); letters from various Batschka priests on personal donations. ABV- ABF.

²¹⁷ “*Der Nationalsozialismus ... ist in unseren Augen nicht mehr und nicht weniger als eine politische Partei, welche durch die Gunst der Zeit im Deutschen Reiche ans Ruder gelangt ist, welche aber keineswegs das Monopol für ‚Deutsch-sein‘ beanspruchen kann und darf.*” “Durch und durch deutsch?” vol. 2, no. 5 (1.2.1936), 1.

²¹⁸ Bold in original. “We stand in rock solid loyalty on the foundations of our Catholic worldview, however, we thereby are and also remain confident in and honest to our lineage of the German *Volkstum*.” “Durch und durch deutsch?”



Fig. 2.16 Blessing of *Marienbund* Flag in Apatin, May 1940.
Source: Josef Mayer. *Erinnerungen an Apatin und die Apatiner*. Deggendorf:
Apatiner Gemeinschaft e.V. Haßfurt, 1991. p. 357.

for German culture, and a devotion to God. “German,” however, could under no circumstance be equated with “National Socialist.” Indeed, “millions and millions of good, *Volks*-loyal Germans” had existed for centuries before National Socialism “was even known in name.” “Millions and millions” more would remain loyal to their German “name and *Volkstum*” even once National Socialism would long since have passed.²¹⁹

Over the following years, *Die Donau* became one of the main *Donauschwaben* newspapers that did not experience a pro-*Reich* radicalization, remaining firmly dedicated to propagating anti-National Socialist messages and promoting Catholic projects. Weekly editorials by Berenz spoke out against National Socialist activists and articles, such as those printed in *Die Batschkaer Zeitung*, a virulently pro-Nazi newspaper edited by Mathias Gass (also from Apatin).²²⁰ Articles in *Die Donau* continuously assured those

²¹⁹ “Wir lehnen es grundsätzlich ab anzuerkennen, daß ‚Deutsch-sein‘ gleichbedeutend sei mit ‚Nationalsozialist-sein‘ ... Es hat Millionen und Millionen gute, volkstreue Deutsche gegeben im Laufe der Jahrhunderte, bevor noch der Nationalsozialismus auch nur dem Namen nach bekannt gewesen wäre ... und es wird auch dann noch Millionen u. Millionen überzeugungstreue Träger und Bekenner des deutschen Namens u. Volkstumes geben, wenn der Nationalsozialismus längst schon der Vergangenheit angehören wird.” Bold in original. “Durch und durch deutsch?”

²²⁰ Especially important here was the weekly column “Im Lichte des Scheinwerfers,” in which Berenz took a stance on specific *Erneuerer* claims and activities, especially also as promoted by Gass. Consider: “Im Lichte des Scheinwerfers: ‘Dummheit und Stolz wächst aus einem Holz ...’” *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 18 (6.5.1939), 5. Gass in turn launched a virulent press campaign against Berenz. Consider: “So, Herr Berencz-Berenz, nun haben wir das Wort!,” *Batschkaer Zeitung*, vol. 43, no. 6 (7.2.1942), 2-6. More on this in Chapter VI.

Donauschwaben— especially youth— who had resisted the *Erneuerer*'s temptation, and remained active in organizations like the *Christusjugend*, that their stance was not merely the moral one, but the brave one.²²¹ Like the *Jugendruf*, *Die Donau* published advertisements and reports on events like the youth camps of Doroslovo and Banja Luka; the foundation of local *Christusjugend* chapters; and Catholic children's and youth camps ("*Ferienkolonien*") to Yugoslavia's seaside and mountains.²²² In all of these cases, such activities were framed as counteracting the dangerous "new *Weltanschauung*" propagated by "*Führer* and *Führerlein*" (big and little leaders) like Jakob Awender, Fritz Metzger, and Mathias Gass.²²³ However, while organizations like the *Christusjugend* had succeeded in offering non-*Erneuerer* alternatives to the *Donauschwaben* youth, such groups had not— according to Berenz— merely been established in response to the *Erneuerer*'s youth groups. Indeed, the reasons behind the Catholic Church's "activation" of youth were deeper: the *Donauschwaben* had, for a much longer time, already "forgotten themselves" and their "German" and "Christian" heritage and morals. The Catholic youth movement had thus been established during the mid-1930s as a response to larger societal ailments, and— ultimately— could hardly be blamed for the growing divisions in the *Donauschwaben* society.²²⁴

And divisions there were. As *Die Donau* reported in June 1939, even Abbot Egerth was now being harassed by Apatin's *Kulturbund* youth, as these youth had repeatedly shouted "*Heil Hitler!*" at him and attempted to cover him in manure.²²⁵ According to Egerth (in his private correspondence), it had become normal in the meantime that Apatin's "*Volk*" occasionally ranted against priests. However, it was usually not meant in an ill manner, since they had— as people heavily involved in the shipping trade— simply

²²¹ Consider, for instance: "Bravo, katholische deutsche Jugend! Glänzender Verlauf der Jugendwallfahrt in Doroslovo. 3000 Jungmänner und Jugendfreunde am Mariengnadenorte." *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 25 (20.6.1936), 1-2.

²²² "Bravo, katholische deutsche Jugend!," 1-2; "Aus der Christusjugendbewegung. Bekenntnisfeier der Christusjugend in Bajmok," *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 27 (4.7.1936), 6; "Aus der kath. Jugendbewegung," *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 48 (28.11.1936), 6; "Dritte Jungmännerwallfahrt in Doroslovo," *Die Donau*, vol. 3, no. 26 (26.6.1937), 1; "Ferienkolonien für Kinder," *Die Donau*, vol. 4, no. 25 (18.6.1938), 2; "Unser Ferienlager in Maria Stern," *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 22 (3.6.1938), 3-4; "Wir gehen nach Sombor!," *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 31 (5.8.1939), 1; "Das Ferienlager 1939 in Maria Stern," *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 33 (19.8.1939), 3.

²²³ "Randbemerkung zur 'Gautagung' in Apatin," *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 23 (19.6.1939), 1-2; "Weißt du, lieber Leser, nun Bescheid?," *Die Donau*, vol. 6, no. 13 (30.3.1940), 3; "Auch du, Apatin?," *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 30 (25.7.1936), 1.

²²⁴ "Deutscher Aufbruch," *Die Donau*, vol. 2, no. 28 (11.7.1936), 1.

²²⁵ "Der Vorfall mit Abtppfarrer Dr. Jakob Egerth," *Die Donau*, vol. 5, no. 23 (19.6.1939), 2.

already seen too much.²²⁶ Other Batschka clergymen had a different interpretation of such activities. The few hand-written parochial histories of the Batschka's Catholic communities ("*liber historiae parochiae*") that have been salvaged through the *Deutsche Bürgerverein "Adam Berenz"* thus attest to a growing frustration among local priests about the radicalization of their parishioners. Filipowa's parochial history— written during the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s by priest Peter Müller— described in some detail how "*Erneuerer*" began causing unrest in the parish after 1935.²²⁷ Although— through the efforts of Chaplain Busch— new Catholic youth facilities were being built to help "save the Catholic youth," the "*Erneuerer*" won continuous ground among the young. In some cases, *Erneuerer* youth formations were now even being led by formerly devout Catholics, such as Jakob Ament (who had participated in the first Banja Luka camp), and Rosina Milla (a former nun novice).²²⁸ More and more "belligerent students" ("*verkrachte Studenten*") were returning from the *Reich*. They publicly read anti-Catholic manifestos, "mindlessly ran after" Hitler, held marches and rallies instead of going to Mass on Sundays, and distributed "terrorizing" flyers among non-*Kulturbund* youth urging them to attend *Kulturbund* meetings. Despite these measures, clergymen like Busch and Moullion continued holding Catholic youth events, encouraging pilgrimages, and overseeing the construction of a Catholic youth meeting house.²²⁹

In Apatin, too, such conflicts raged from the mid-1930s. According to Apatin's 1936 chronicle ("*historiae eventuum in parochia*"), the "dangerous subversive activities [*Wühlarbeit*]" of the so-called '*Erneuerer*,' who want to carry the neo-heathen 'German worldview' into our *Volk*," was rearing its head most noticeably among youth.²³⁰ Perhaps to help counteract this, an official *Marienbund* was established in Apatin in 1937, and a *Christusjugend* in 1938.²³¹ However, Apatin's *Donauschwaben* took over "Hitlerism in all its shadings" even thereafter.²³² This led to one particularly ugly incident on April 11th, 1939, following the Catholic baptism and marriage of the Jewish woman Margareta Ulmann. "Enraged about the supposed racial defilement" that this act entailed, a group

²²⁶ Letter from Egerth to Lohrbach, ABV- ABF.

²²⁷ Filipowa— *Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 187.

²²⁸ *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo Bački Gračac in territorio Dioecesis Bačiensis sitae*, 36-37, ABV.

²²⁹ *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, years 1937-1940, pp. 36-47.

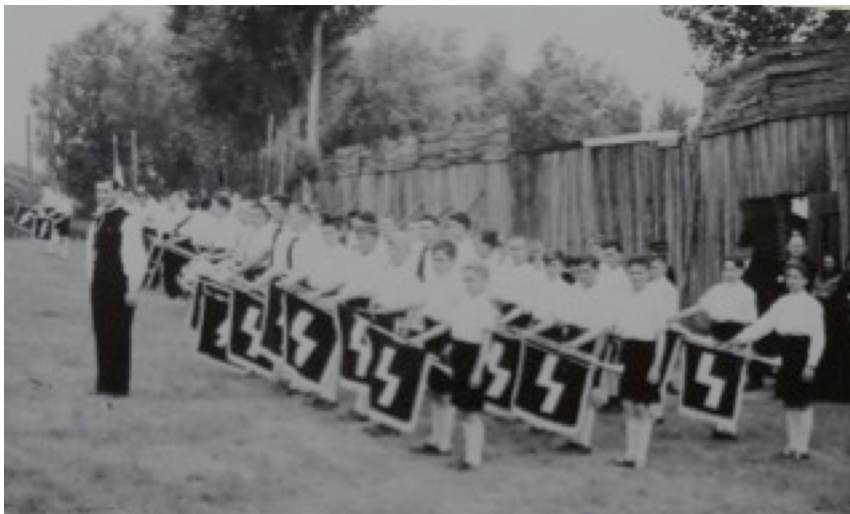
²³⁰ "Historia eventuum in parochia anni 1936" for Apatin, ABV- ABF.

²³¹ "'Historiae domus' parochiae Apatinensis inserendi anno 1937," pp. 1-2, ABV- ABF.

²³² "... *des Hitlerismus in allen Schattierungen übernommen.*" "'Historiae domus' parochiae Apatinensis inserendi anno 1938," p. 2, ABV- ABF.



Figs. 2.17 and 2.18 *Gautagung* (“Gau Convention”) in Apatin, 1939. Source: Josef Mayer. *Erinnerungen an Apatin und die Apatiner*. Deggendorf: Apatiner Gemeinschaft e.V. Haßfurt, 1991. pp. 349-350.



of “neo-heathen, anti-Christian” youth attacked Ulmann’s house with 167 eggs that night.²³³ Furthermore, Apatin became the site of regular pro-National Socialist *Kulturbund* mass demonstrations (“*Grosskundgebungen*”) during the late 1930s. At a 1939 “*Gautagung*” (regional meeting) in Apatin, at least four thousand *Donauschwaben* had traveled from across the Batschka to Apatin to march in formation and listen to anti-Christian speeches by *Kulturbund* and youth leaders.²³⁴ The following year, the *Kulturbund* organized a similar meeting in Apatin for youth only. According to the *Deutsches Volksblatt*, over eight hundred youth attended the event, in which they pledged

²³³ “Bei diesem Ereignis zeigte es sich, wie weit die neuheidnische, antichristliche Gesinnung bei der verhetzten Jugend um sich gegriffen hat, da man seine Wut an der angeblichen Rassenschänderin dadurch kühlen wollte, dass man ihr Haus über Nacht mit 167 Eiern bewarf.” “Historiae Domus: Apatin 1939,” p. 2, ABV- ABF.

²³⁴ According to *Die Donau*, the numbers reported by pro-National Socialist sources (like the *Batchkaer Zeitung*) hovered around 10,000 people who came from outside of Apatin, plus 10,000 Apatin residents. “Randbemerkung zur ‘Gautagung’ in Apatin.”

to “strip themselves of everything foreign [*Artfremd*],” foster “pride in their *Volkstum*,” and reject the “dumbing agitation of certain priests.”²³⁵

Despite *Reich* sponsorship of Catholic *Donauschwaben* youth projects, the stage had been set during the mid-1930s for heated battles on the local level between the Catholic Church and the pro-National Socialist *Erneuerer* and *Kulturbund* members. Such skirmishes continued during the 1940s, and would deeply affect the experiences and memories of *Donauschwaben* children and youth. However, it was not merely the Catholic Church that organized a *Donauschwaben*-specific youth movement during this time. Yugoslavia’s Protestant Churches, too, gave rise to a variety of youth initiatives intended to promote their own religious and, occasionally, national definitions of “Germandom.”

2. Protestant Youth Mobilization, 1918-1941

While a large amount of *Donauschwaben* youth-related material regarding the Catholic Church has survived to the current day, the Protestant source base remains highly fragmentary and incomplete. In part, this is perhaps due to the fact that Protestant youth literature and other archival sources were produced in much smaller quantities to begin with, as Lutherans, Calvinists, and Methodists represented a very diverse minority within the *Donauschwaben* communities, and never attained the same level of organization as their Catholic counterpart. In part, this lack of sources is also a question of preservation. Thus, while the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* has spent over a decade collecting all possible materials on the Catholic Church, it only began including (highly disorganized) assortments of Protestant sources in their collection in 2014. Within German archives, furthermore, information on the Calvinist and Methodist Churches remains minimal as not much attention was paid to these confessions within the *Reich* to begin with. Finally, and largely due to the activities of priests like Adam Berenz, the Catholic Church has been memorialized over the previous decades as the main bastion of anti-National Socialist resistance among the *Donauschwaben* communities.²³⁶ Any discussion on pro-*Reich* activities among the *Donauschwaben* is therefore almost always

²³⁵ “... der auf Verdummung ausgehenden Hetze gewisser Priester gegen alles Völkische.” “Grosse Jugendkundgebung in Apatin,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (29.12.1940), BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 22.

²³⁶ Consider: Merkl, *Weitblick eines Donauschwabens*.

countered with illustrations of Catholic resistance in both *Donauschwaben* historiography and oral history interviews. The Protestant Churches, conversely, have almost never taken this role in historical or popular memory, and their activities thereby have remained shrouded in mystery to the current day.

The few sources that have been preserved, however, indicate that the interwar period also saw an upsurge in the Protestant confessions' concern for youth. Fueled by the competition between minorities and the "host state," the various religious confessions, secular and religious actors, and intensifying "national" debates, all *Donauschwaben* Protestant Churches, no matter how small or nationally "mixed," developed their own youth programs, groups, and even literature during this time. Quite prominent here, once again, was the Lutheran Church.

a. Lutheran (Evangelical) Youth Programs

The Lutheran Church was regarded by the *Reich*— and by *Donauschwaben Reich*-enthusiasts— as a "bastion" of "Germanness" for much of the interwar period.²³⁷ As one 1930 *Reich* report claimed, it was the German-Evangelical Church, "with its thoroughly German clerics," that formed "the strongest fortress of the *Volkstum*" in Yugoslavia.²³⁸ The continuous "German" Lutheran education of youth— both within the classroom and, increasingly, outside of it— therefore became a priority for the *Reich* and for *Donauschwaben* clerics alike.

To an extent, the Lutheran Church, like the Catholic Church, had maintained its own, frequently German-specific, organizations even prior to the interwar period. Lutheran formations, such as women's and men's choirs, "*Gesellenvereine*," and confirmation classes, had already been established during the Habsburg period, and continued their activities well into the 1930s.²³⁹ German literature aimed at Lutheran children and youth, furthermore, also seems to have been imported from Germany to the *Donauschwaben* villages from at least the turn of the twentieth century. An 1895 version of Martin Luther's catechism for school and confirmation classes from Breslau has

²³⁷ Consider the previous chapter for a more detailed explanation.

²³⁸ "... bietet die deutsch-evangelische Kirche mit ihren durchweg deutschen Geistlichen unter den heutigen Verhältnissen die festeste Burg ihres Volkstums ..." Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, "400-Jahr-Feier der Augsburgischen Konfession und III. Evangelisches Sängerkunstfest des Evangelischen Kirchen-Distrikts in Jugoslawien" (10.6.1930), p. 4, PA AA, R 61630.

²³⁹ Consider: *Bilder aus Werbass* (Karlsruhe: Werbaßer Heimatauschuß, 1990), 57, 201.

survived in the Protestant collections of the *Deutsche Bürgerverein "Adam Berenz"*, as have sources like a 1914 German manual on children's services and Sunday schools.²⁴⁰

However, it was only during the late 1920s that Yugoslavia's Lutheran authorities developed a particular interest in organized extra-curricular youth groups. According to Bishop Popp's official 1931 annual report, recent years had seen a growth of youth projects, most of which involved younger clergymen and fairly informal clusters of youth followers. Most of these groups belonged to one of three categories: the "*Jugendbund für entschiedenes Christentum*" (the youth groups of the Christian Endeavour, a Lutheran sect started in the U.S.A. during the 1880s); the "*Christliche Verein junger Männer*" (the CVJM, or YMCA); and a more general movement of "*Evangelische Jugendvereine*" ("Evangelical youth groups").²⁴¹ Most of these activities, according to the report, were uncoordinated. While meetings among various youth leaders and clergymen in Yugoslavia had seen initial attempts at defining a coherent Lutheran youth program, such efforts had not borne much fruit by 1931, and all of Yugoslavia could only boast twenty-nine Lutheran youth groups. However, largely through consultations with "experienced Lutheran youth leaders from abroad," Yugoslavia's Lutheran leadership would attempt, over the following years, to create a professionalized youth movement aimed at the "winning of youth over to Christ, and their rooting in the Church and their own *Volk* [*Eigenvolk*]." ²⁴²

By 1933, some progress had been made in the organization of Lutheran youth programs. According to Yugoslavia's Lutheran Church's annual report, that year alone had seen considerable activity on the youth front. In February, a youth pastor from Vienna, Georg Traar, had held a lecture series in Belgrade, Pančevo, Nova Pazova, Feketić, Nove Sove, Bulkes, Jarek, and Novi Sad on the religious organization of youth. That same month, Bishop Popp had further convened a youth leaders' convention ("*Jugendführertagung*") in Novi Sad. At this meeting, an official "*Deutsch-*

²⁴⁰ A. Giebe and H. Koffmane, *Dr. Martin Luthers Kleiner Catechismus für den Schul- und Konfirmandenunterricht* (Breslau: Königliche Universitäts- und Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1895); R. Emlein, *Der Kindergottesdienst. Handbuch für Leiter und Helfende* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914). ABV.

²⁴¹ For brief descriptions of these organizations' activities before 1941, consider: Georg Wild, *Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Jugoslawien 1918-1941* (Munich: Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerkes München, 1980), 241-249.

²⁴² "Tätigkeitsbericht des Bischöflichen Administrators Dr. Philipp Popp erstattet beim I. Landeskirchentag der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche A.B. im Königreiche Jugoslawien zu Novisad (Neusatz) am 17. Februar 1931," p. 24, PA AA, R 61630.

Evangelischer Jugendring” (“German-Evangelical Youth Ring”) was called into life, and its provisional statutes were drafted. A leadership structure was put in place. In the Batschka, the physician Dr. Andreas Zimmermann— who had established the first Lutheran German youth groups in several Batschka towns in 1929— officially became a main youth organizer, along with Pastor Heinrich Meder (Bulkes), Pastor Friedrich Mornan (Novi Sad), and Pastor Friedrich Konrath (Nove Sove).²⁴³ In the Banat, Pastor Alex Konecny (Kikinda) was announced as the main Lutheran youth leader. Finally, it was decided that Vicar Martin Haas (Banja Luka) was to receive an education as a youth pastor, so that he could become the official leader of a newly established Lutheran “*Jugendpfarramt*” (pastoral youth office).²⁴⁴

According to the 1935 Lutheran annual report, Martin Haas indeed received this education over the following months. Between October 1933 and January 1934, Haas traveled through Germany, studying the methods of Germany’s Protestant youth formations and the HJ.²⁴⁵ Upon his return, the annual report claimed, he could not take a position as the official youth leader of the German-Evangelical Church, as the financial means for such a position were still lacking. In reality, however, Bishop Popp had urged Haas to step down from his intended office due to Haas’ open criticism of the antagonistic HJ-church relationship that he had witnessed within the *Reich*. Haas was replaced by the *reichsdeutsche* Horst Thümmler, a pastor who had already worked with the Bosnian Lutheran community in Glogovac/Schutzberg. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Thümmler and his wife were arrested in Werschetz in 1939 and expelled from Yugoslavia; thereafter, Thümmler fell as an Axis soldier in Greece.²⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Haas continued to work unofficially, attempting to forge a unified, German Lutheran youth movement across Yugoslavia’s *Donauschwaben* communities. To that effect, two camps for youth leaders had already taken place in the Fruška Gora in 1934, camps at which current and future youth leaders learned “discipline,” polished their knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine, and studied history. According to the Yugoslav German-Lutheran Church’s 1935 report, the Lutheran youth movement was

²⁴³ For more on Zimmermann, see: *Heimatbuch der Gemeinde Schowe*, edited by Christian Ludwig Brückner (Schower Heimatausschuß, 1961), 143.

²⁴⁴ “Tagung des Landeskirchenrates der Deutschen Evangelisch-Christlichen Kirche A.B. im Königreiche Jugoslawien vom 27.-29. April 1933 in Zagreb,” pp. 10, 30-31, PA AA, 61630.

²⁴⁵ Haas’ study of HJ methods is not mentioned in this report, but in: Wild, *Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Jugoslawien*, 239.

²⁴⁶ Wild, *Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Jugoslawien*, 239-240.

still split between the *Deutsch-Evangelische Jugendring*, their related “*Kreuzfahrer*” (“Crusaders”), the “*Jugendbund für entschiedenes Christentum*,” and the CVJM during the mid-1930s. However, while the *Jugendring* attempted to work in harmony with these groups and not claim a “totality” over youth education, it was only through the German-Evangelical *Jugendring* that *Donauschwaben* youth would receive training that was both Lutheran and of “a true, deep *völkisch* conviction, [dedicated to] the mother tongue and the inherited ways.”²⁴⁷

Based on the available sources, it is impossible to determine how popular the Lutheran German youth initiatives were, or what precisely their teachings and activities entailed. As the historian Mariana Hausleitner has claimed, however, by the mid-1930s, the Lutheran German youth groups had come largely under pro-National Socialist influence. Individuals like Gustav Halwax—who had studied Lutheran theology in Germany thanks to a GAV scholarship—thus began his initial, pro-*Reich* youth agitation in the framework of Lutheran youth groups, which then expanded to the *Kulturbund*’s youth chapters. The Lutheran youth camps held in 1934, moreover, became a site of “agitation” by “young National Socialists.”²⁴⁸ Furthermore, at least based on the few *Donauschwaben Heimatgeschichten* that describe Lutheran youth activities, it seems like the German Lutheran youth groups were generally a short-lived affair. According to Bulkes’ *Heimatbuch*, the town’s Lutheran youth group had been established in 1929 by Pastor Heinrich Meder. Apparently, over the following years, this organization attracted almost the entire town’s male youth between the ages of thirteen and twenty. For almost a decade, the youth group carried out a diverse program, including schooling in German language, history, and literature, sports events, the establishment of a youth library, and multi-village Lutheran youth events. However, during the late 1930s, the Lutheran youth group “dissolved in favor of the youth group of the *Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*.”²⁴⁹ This migration of the Lutheran German youth to the *Erneuerer*-led *Deutsche Jugend* seems to have been a larger trend.²⁵⁰ Indeed, from the late 1930s

²⁴⁷ “*Unsere Kirche ist seit ihrem Bestande der beste und treueste Pfleger und Sachwalter einer echten, tiefen völkischen Gesinnung, der Muttersprache und der angeborenen Art gewesen und will es auch in der Zukunft sein.*” “Dritter Landeskirchentag der Deutschen Evangelisch-Christlichen Kirche A.B. im Königreiche Jugoslawien am 22. u. 23.I.1935 in Nova Pazova,” pp. 30-32, PA AA, R 61631.

²⁴⁸ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 170.

²⁴⁹ “Der evangelische Jugendverein,” *Bulkes: Geschichte einer deutschen Gemeinde in der Batschka, 1786-1944* (Kirchheim unter Teck: Heimatausschuss Bulkes, 1984), 277.

²⁵⁰ This interpretation is also supported by: Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 521-522.

onwards, almost no mention of separate Lutheran German youth organizations appears in the press, the archival record, the *Donauschwaben*'s community histories, or— as we shall see— personal recollections in oral history interviews.

One should be careful, however, not to attribute the disappearance of Lutheran German youth groups at the end of the 1930s exclusively to a migration towards pro-*Reich Kulturbund* youth groups, as encouraged by the National Socialist proclivities of some German Lutheran youth leaders themselves. Certainly— as the chapter on schools has shown— Yugoslavia's Lutheran leadership had exhibited some willingness to accommodate to, and even promote, *Reich* interests. However, such activities occurred within a larger context of political, social, and state conflicts, a context in which even Bishop Popp was forced to dance between the requirements and desires of antagonistic actors. In April and May 1935, for instance, a flurry of correspondence arose between Popp, the DEK, and the German Foreign Office regarding the planned visit to Yugoslavia of the *Landesbischof* of Saxony (and NSDAP member), Dr. Friedrich Coch. Coch had planned a trip through Yugoslavia and Romania that spring in order to “seek connections to the youth movement leaders” of Yugoslavia's Lutheran youth groups.²⁵¹ Through this trip, Coch was interested in “studying the youth question” of Yugoslavia's Lutheran *Volksdeutsche*, in establishing a regular cooperation between the Lutheran youth organizations in Yugoslavia and in the *Reich*, and in advising the local “*völkisch*” youth movement.²⁵² Due to the already tense relationship between the Yugoslav authorities and the Lutheran Church, however, Popp feared that such a visit would harm rather than aid the situation of Yugoslavia's German Lutheran Church. Furthermore, it might make official relations between the *Reich* and Yugoslav Lutheran authorities even more difficult.²⁵³ Popp thus wrote to both the DEK and Coch personally, asking for the cancellation of the visit, especially if this visit was to occur on an “unofficial”— and hence automatically more suspicious— level outside the parameters of the “*Freundschaftsvertrag*” signed between the *Reich* and Yugoslavia's Lutheran German Church in 1934.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Telegram from Belgrade (6.5.1935), PA AA, R 73124; telegram from Berlin to Coch (10.5.1935), PA AA, R 61631.

²⁵² Letter from Popp to DEK (25.4.1935), PA AA, R 61631.

²⁵³ “*In jedem anderen Falle wäre sein Besuch unterwünscht und könnte das Verhältnis zwischen der Deutschen evangelischen Kirche in Jugoslawien und der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche im Reich nicht bessern, sondern eher beeinträchtigen und schädigen.*” Letter (25.4.1935), p. 3.

²⁵⁴ Letter (25.4.1935); letter from Popp to Coch (7.5.1935), PA AA, R 61631.

Furthermore, while both the *Reich* and Yugoslav Lutheran authorities not only tolerated, but promoted visits by *reichsdeutsche* students and preachers to Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben*, there were limits as to what kinds of proselytizing both parties deemed acceptable.²⁵⁵ According to one 1936 report, for instance, a Johannes Pösger from Dresden had traveled through Yugoslavia— from Feketić to Belgrade— between August and October that year. A self-stylized “missionary and cultural philosopher,” Pösger reportedly spent several months distributing questionable religious materials, teaching the *Donauschwaben* a “*Christuslied*” (“Christ song”) set to the “new German national anthem” (the *Horst-Wessel* song), and holding anti-Bolshevik Bible lessons with local youth. According to clergymen in Yugoslavia, Pösger was part of the “*Weissenbergsekte*” (or of the “*Johannische Kirche*,” a Protestant sect founded in Germany in 1926). Furthermore, most of his teachings— including that Daniel had not been eaten in the lions’ den due to his vegetarian diet— were deemed blasphemous by the local pastors. Yugoslavia’s Lutheran authorities pleaded to remove Pösger from their communities, as they did “not need such prophets in Yugoslavia!,” “prophets” who would merely “taint the Lutheran name.”²⁵⁶

While sources on Lutheran German youth groups among Yugoslavia’s *Donauschwaben* remain limited, it nevertheless appears that the Lutheran communities, too, produced confessionally- (and nationally-) based extra-curricular youth projects during the interwar period. As in the case of the *Donauschwaben* Catholics, concerted youth mobilization efforts were first made during the late 1920s, and expanded and (to a degree) unified on an organizational level during the mid-1930s. However, while Yugoslavia’s Lutheran German authorities attempted to create a coherent youth movement— an ambition once again supported by *Reich* authorities like the DEK— it seems that such aspirations never fully materialized. The *Jugendring* thus remained only one of several Lutheran youth group formations after its creation in 1933, and— at least on the community level— seems to have disappeared almost entirely in favor of the *Deutsche Jugend* by the late 1930s. To a degree, this development stood in contrast to that of the *Donauschwaben*’s other Protestant confessions.

²⁵⁵ Letter (25.4.1935).

²⁵⁶ “*Zusammenfassend möchte ich sagen: Wir brauchen solche Propheten in Jugoslawien nicht! Sie beschmutzen nur den evangelischen Namen.*” Letter from Bornikoel (Belgrade) to Bishopric seat in Zagreb, “‘Missionar und Kulturphilosoph’ Johannes Pösger” (22.10.1936), PA AA, R 61631.

b. Calvinist (Reformed) Youth Programs

Only a small minority of *Donauschwaben* belonged to the Calvinist Church. Furthermore, the Calvinist Church—with its large number of Hungarians and additional Slavic minority—had been discredited by the *Reich* almost from the outset as overly “Magyarized,” and therefore unable to carry out the “*Volkstumsarbeit*” possible in the Catholic or Lutheran communities.²⁵⁷ Largely in response to the lack of mother-tongue education and the mobilization of youth into other secular and religious organizations, however, Yugoslavia’s Reformed Church attempted to develop a youth program of its own during the late 1920s and 1930s.

Sources on the *Donauschwaben*’s Calvinist youth activities—at least from a German-language perspective—are extremely limited, and are restricted almost exclusively to the annual reports, protocols, and calendars published by the Reformed-Christian Church of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia itself. The earliest such report that can be found at the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* is from 1929, and it already included a specific “youth work” (“*Jugendarbeit*”) column. According to the report, the Reformed “youth movement is growing continuously larger and more serious.” In the past years, twelve Calvinist congregations across Yugoslavia had established a youth group, which, in some cases, was seen as a “great blessing” by these communities. That year had further seen a youth training course organized through the “*Hrišćanska Zajednica Mladih Ljudi*” (or YMCA) in Belgrade, at which twenty young people had received not only “free meals,” but also an education on the “foundations of youth work.” Sixty-one youth had additionally traveled to the Dalmatian coast for a summer camp that year. Furthermore, the Reformed *Seniorat* had been able to organize an electric projector for illustrated lectures (an activity reserved only for those towns with electricity), and—largely through the support of Belgrade’s YMCA—twenty copies of the youth paper *Ébresztő* (Hungarian for “awakening”) were now being circulated every month among Yugoslavia’s Calvinist communities.²⁵⁸

Over the next three years, Yugoslavia’s Calvinist youth groups grew considerably. The Reformed Church’s youth initiatives expanded primarily under the auspices of Yugoslavia’s YMCA (CVJM) branch in Belgrade during the early 1930s. In 1930, a

²⁵⁷ See the preceding chapter for more on this.

²⁵⁸ “Protokoll der am 14. November 1929 in Sombor abgehaltenen ordentlichen Jahressitzung und Gerichtssitzung des Reformierten Seniorates im Königreiche Jugoslawien,” p. 11, ABV.

youth leader camp was held by the “Belgrade headquarters” in Crvenka (Batschka); Calvinist “secretary” Karl Dobos conducted a “propaganda tour” in the Banat and the Baranya; and some nineteen communities had established their own youth branch, incorporating a total of 1,069 members.²⁵⁹ In 1931— following additional YMCA-financed “propaganda tours” by Dobos, seaside summer camps for workers’, farmers’, and student youth, and another youth leader training course in Stara Moravica/Bácskossuthfalva/Alt-Morawitza (Batschka)— membership statistics rose to 1,123 youth members in twenty-four communities.²⁶⁰ Despite initial suspicions by the Yugoslav authorities— who wanted to incorporate all youth in the “Serbian youth organization of the pre-war period” (presumably the Sokol)— such programs were able to continue in 1932 and 1933. Now further including the assistance of the Hungarian YMCA secretary, who had traveled to Yugoslavia several times to help organize the local youth, such activities seem to have been quite successful: by 1933, 1,224 youth had joined the organization across twenty-five congregations.²⁶¹

While these numbers may sound impressive, there is unfortunately no way of telling who was included in these statistics, or how many of these individuals were even *Donauschwaben*. Following the largely Hungarian-based leadership structure of the Yugoslav Reformed Church, it seems that the main Calvinist youth activists were also Hungarian. By 1935, Belgrade’s YMCA headquarters had set up a fund for an itinerant youth pastor, who received one thousand dinars per month and a free train pass to proselytize (for six months at a time) among Yugoslavia’s Reformed youth. Over the past year, this task had been realized by an Arpad Baksa and an Alexander Torok.²⁶² Furthermore, the YMCA-financed “propaganda tours” were largely carried out by individuals with Hungarian names, while the main Reformed youth magazine, *Ébresztő*, was also Hungarian. At least according to available sources, it therefore seems unlikely that the Calvinist youth groups— to the extent that these were even established among the *Donauschwaben* communities specifically— became vehicles of “German” nationalism. Indeed, no specifically nationalist traces exist in the official Reformed

²⁵⁹ “Protokoll der am 20. November 1930 in Stara Moravica abgehaltenen ordentlichen Jahressitzung und Gerichtssitzung der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche im Königreiche Jugoslawien,” pp. 12-13, ABV.

²⁶⁰ “Protokoll der am 13. November 1931 in Subotica abgehaltenen ordentlichen Jahressitzung der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche im Königreiche Jugoslawien,” p. 10, ABV.

²⁶¹ “Protokoll der am 8. Feber 1933 in Sombor abgehaltenen ordentlichen Landeskirchenversammlung u. Gerichtssitzung der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche im Königreiche Jugoslawien,” p. 16, ABV.

²⁶² “Jahrbuch der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche des Königreiches Jugoslawien 1935,” p. 7, ABV. Spelling of names in original (probably missing Hungarian diacritics).

literature. According to the Church itself, the youth groups' foundation, exclusively, was to be "Jesus Christ," and their "food the word and *odem* prayer."²⁶³

By the late 1930s, certain changes had taken place in the organization of Calvinist youth groups. For reasons that are not elaborated on in the available sources, the previous system of YMCA/CVJM youth mobilization was disrupted in 1937, and a clear break between the Protestant confessions was made. Henceforth, youth groups were to be incorporated into the general activities of a particular Church (such as the Lutheran or the Calvinist Churches), and no longer in more general youth organizations, such as the CVJM.²⁶⁴ By 1938, Yugoslavia's Calvinist authorities officially had terminated the "independent nature" of its previous youth groups, and drafted statutes for a new type of confessional "youth work," tied to the individual Calvinist congregations.²⁶⁵ According to these 1938 statutes, the Reformed-Christian Church of Yugoslavia would now establish Reformed "youth chapters" ("*Jugendabteilungen*") "in service of Christian faith and the life of youth." These youth chapters, established for girls and boys separately, were to be founded by local congregations and registered with the central Yugoslav Calvinist authorities. In order to support and coordinate both the religious and "cultural" education of these youth, regional youth conferences between the leaders of the various "*Kreise*" were to be held several times per year; similar meetings on the state level were to occur once per year. All youth chapter activities, moreover, were to be reported annually to the Calvinist Church's headquarters. Finally, friendly relations were to be sustained with the Yugoslav state, and contact with organizations like Yugoslavia's CVJM, or other international religious organizations, could be maintained.²⁶⁶

Unfortunately, there is no record of the activities of these youth organizations among the *Donauschwaben* after 1938. It is unclear, furthermore, whether this is due to an absence of Calvinist extra-curricular youth activities in the *Donauschwaben* communities after this time, or due to the arbitrary and large-scale destruction (or misplacement) of archival sources on the topic. Nonetheless, the Calvinist Church, too,

²⁶³ "Protokoll" (11.1929), 12. "*Odem*," derived from the Old Testament, roughly translated is "breath," especially the "breath" of life/soul that God gave mankind.

²⁶⁴ *Protestanten-Kalender für das Jahr 1937*, 106.

²⁶⁵ "... daß der Landeskirchenrat den Vereinscharakter der Jugendarbeit aufhob und ein Statut ausarbeitete, laut welchem die Jugendarbeit sich als Zweig der einen Gruppe der Kirchengemeinde, in das Leben der Kirchengemeinde organisch einschaltet." *Jahrbuch der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche des Königreiches Jugoslawien 1938*, p. 9, ABV.

²⁶⁶ "Satzungen über die Jugendarbeit der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche des Königreiches Jugoslawien," *Jahrbuch der Reformierten Christlichen Kirche des Königreiches Jugoslawien 1938*, 14-17.

began developing a confessional youth program during the late 1920s and 1930s. Such extra-curricular youth efforts partially seem to have been a response also to “rival” youth programs, such as the Sokol and, by the late 1930s, the Lutheran youth groups. However— and very much in tune with the Calvinist Church’s curricular initiatives within the school system— there is no evidence to suggest that these youth programs developed a particularly “German” agenda. Like the Methodist Church, this must at least in part have been due to the persistently “inter-national” composition and financing of the particular confession, both on the global and on the regional scales. What effects precisely this may have had on the *Donauschwaben* youth during the 1930s— whether the Calvinist youth groups offered a welcome haven to non-Catholic, non-*Kulturbund* *Donauschwaben* youth, or, conversely, were actually rejected for their comparatively dry and anational programs to begin with— unfortunately remains a matter of speculation.

c. Methodist Youth Programs

The *Donauschwaben*’s Protestants were not merely associated with the Lutheran or Calvinist Churches. Indeed, since the end of the nineteenth century, smaller *Donauschwaben* Methodist congregations had been established across Vojvodina, especially in the Batschka. The first Methodist preachers had reached the region in the late nineteenth century, largely through the initiative of the German and Austrian (especially Viennese) Methodists. From 1900 onwards, German-speaking Methodist pastors were sent primarily from Vienna to Werbass, from where they then extended their activities to other Batschka towns, such as Feketitsch and Sekitsch. By 1907, an official Methodist “District” (termed “Vienna-Budapest-Batschka”) was established. In 1911, this district was incorporated into a broader framework of the Austro-Hungarian Methodist Church. While there are no statistics on the size of these congregations, it nonetheless seems that there were enough Methodists in Vojvodina by 1921 to warrant the construction of a separate Methodist house of worship. In 1922, the Batschka’s first (and only) Methodist church opened its doors in Werbass, following its consecration by an American Methodist bishop that year. Over the following years, the majority of Methodist pastors continued to come from abroad and were mainly German-speaking; even after 1920, when Yugoslavia’s Methodists received a status as an independent “missionary conference” (“*Missionskonferenz*”), only a small minority of Methodist leaders were “natives” (“*einheimisch*”).²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Friedrich Lotz, *Werbass 1785-1975. Zur Geschichte der Doppelgemeinde Alt- und Neuwerbaß* (Stuttgart: Werbasser Heimatausschuß, 1975), 118.

Not many sources have survived on the *Donauschwaben* Methodists. Based on available materials, however, the *Donauschwaben* Methodists, too, established their own choirs, women's groups, and Sunday schools from the early 1900s onwards.²⁶⁸ Interestingly, the main collection of primary sources that has survived to the present day are the German-language youth papers compiled by Yugoslavia's Methodist Church. In July 1933, the "*Jugendbund der Bischöflichen Methodisten-Kirche in Jugoslawien*" ("Youth Union of the Bishopric Methodist Church in Yugoslavia") began publishing its own youth journal, the *Jugendfreund: Monatsblatt der methodistischen Jugend Jugoslawiens*. Edited by preacher and "youth secretary" A. Drumm in Mramorak (Banat) and preacher L. Stahl in Crvenka (Batschka), the *Jugendfreund* was printed in Crvenka on a monthly basis until at least the end of 1936.²⁶⁹ According to its first issue, the *Jugendfreund* was not simply meant as an addition to all of the other youth papers that were now being circulated in the region; rather, its establishment had arisen from a "deep-felt need" ("*tieferes Bedürfnis*") on part of the Methodist youth authorities to provide youth with a unified means of communication. Especially considering the current "time of grand upheavals in *Weltanschauung*," it would be crucial to provide Methodist youth with a publication that would strengthen their activities and comportment "as a Christian youth strong ... in faith and in community against evil."²⁷⁰ To an extent, the paper was to provide reading material and instruction for local youth chapters (the "*Jugendbünde*"). However, it was also designed to maintain communication between Methodists across Yugoslavia (such as between young Methodists in military service or away for studies), and as a means for reporting on local Methodist activities. As with the *Donauschwaben* Catholic youth press, young readers themselves were encouraged to send reports and articles for publication in the magazine.

As with the *Donauschwaben* Methodists in general, there are no statistics on the Methodist "*Jugendbünde*." However, as reports in the *Jugendfreund* suggest, the Methodist youth groups remained quite small during the 1930s. The *Jugendbund* in Petrovgrad (Betschkerek, Zrenjanin), for instance, reported in 1936 that it had counted

²⁶⁸ *Werbass 1785-1975*, 118.

²⁶⁹ *Jugendfreund: Monatsblatt der methodistischen Jugend Jugoslawiens*, vol. 1, no. 1 (7.1933), 4. For a mentioning of Drumm in secondary literature, see: *Werbass 1785-1975*, 118. For reasons that are unclear, the *Jugendfreund* collection at the Belgrade National Library (and in the Serbian national library system in general) stops after December 1936.

²⁷⁰ "*Wir leben in einer Zeit großer Umwälzungen auf dem Gebiete der Weltanschauung ... Wir haben also das Verlangen, als christliche Jugend stark zu werden im Glauben und in der Gemeinschaft wider das Böse.*" "Zum Geleit," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 1, no. 1 (7.1933), 1.

some sixty-two members since its inception eleven years ago. Currently, Petrovgrad's *Jugendbund* had fifteen participants. Similarly, the *Jugendbund* of Stari Bečej/Óbecse/Altbetsche (Batschka) reported in 1936 that it had recently assembled a youth chapter consisting of ten youth. Despite its small size, its members had apparently "developed a good program and the courage to come out into the public even with their weak force."²⁷¹ Sonta/Szond/Waldau (Batschka), similarly, had seen a growing Methodist youth movement: following four years of youth recruitment, its *Jugendbund* counted some twenty members in 1936.²⁷²

Despite such modest numbers, it seems that Yugoslavia's Methodist authorities, too, developed a diverse youth program during the mid-1930s. Methodist youth thus not only met with the *Jugendbund* from their own congregations; they also attended regional week-long "*Jugendfreizeiten*" (youth leisures), in which they prayed, listened to religious lectures, participated in small excursions, played games, and shared meals.²⁷³ Some *Jugendbünde* formed their own "guitar choirs," with which they toured the countryside.²⁷⁴ Conventions for Methodist Sunday school teachers were held.²⁷⁵ Annual meetings for youth leaders and members, primarily held in Novi Sad, were called to life.²⁷⁶ The *Jugendbünde* of various towns organized joint festivities for events like Easter, Christmas, and mother's day.²⁷⁷ Youth were encouraged to proselytize and distribute Methodist literature and objects, like the *Friedensglocken*, in their own communities.²⁷⁸ Using Germany's Methodist youth groups as a model, membership cards, statutes, and a unified vow ("in trust in the strength of my Lord") were introduced.²⁷⁹ And, like all the

²⁷¹ "... auch ein gutes Programm entwickelt. Sie wissen, worum es geht und haben den Mut, auch mit ihren schwachen Kräften vor die Öffentlichkeit zu treten." *Jugendfreund*, vol. 4, no. 7 (7.1936), 54.

²⁷² *Jugendfreund*, vol. 4, no. 7 (7.1936), 4.

²⁷³ "Jugendfreizeit in Novi Sad," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 1, no. 3 (9.1933), 3-4; "Freizeit in Novi Sad," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 2, no. 9 (9.1934), 2-3. In 1933, 22 youth reportedly had attended this event (statistics for later years are not mentioned).

²⁷⁴ "Die Crvenkaer Jugend," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 1, no. 6 (12.1933), 4.

²⁷⁵ "Achtung Sonntagsschullehrer!," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1.1934), 3.

²⁷⁶ "Unsere diesjährige Jugendbundkonvention," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 2, no. 3 (3.1934), 3; "Unsere Jugendbundkonvention," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 2, no. 5 (5.1934), 3-4; "Jugendbundkonvention," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 2, no. 7 (7.1934), 2-3; "An die Jugend des Batschkaer und Banater Distriktes," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 3, no. 5 (5.1935), 6.

²⁷⁷ Consider, for instance: "Berichte," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 2, no. 6 (6.1934), 3-4.

²⁷⁸ "Wer will Sport treiben?," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 1, no. 4 (10.1933), 2.

²⁷⁹ "Im Vertrauen auf die Kraft meines Herrn." "Aus dem Jugendbund Novi Vrbas," *Jugendfreund*, vol. 1, no. 4 (10.1933), 3.

other *Donauschwaben* Churches, confessional summer camps for youth were organized on the Fruška Gora.²⁸⁰

While Yugoslavia's Methodists had both a historic and an ongoing connection to the German-speaking world during the interwar period, it would be a stretch to ascribe a nationalist program to their youth groups. Indeed, it seems like the Methodist *Jugendbünde* were at least partially designed as a reaction to the increasingly politicized and organized extra-curricular youth arena. Even according to the *Jugendfreund*, it would only be through specifically Methodist youth literature and activities that future generations would be able to safely navigate the current landscape of political and confessional fracture.²⁸¹ However—unlike various Catholic and Lutheran formations—the aim of educating children and youth within the spirit of a particular “*Gemeinschaft*” (community) did not assume, or even much engage with, nationalist frameworks. Even in late 1935—when the (national) politicization of most other youth organizations had become apparent—the Methodist youth program's official paper still explained how their Church's goal was simply the complete “integration” (“*Einordnung*”) of youth into the “larger aims of the [Methodist] community” and the fostering of their “belief in God.”²⁸² As such, all Methodist youth were supposed to remain not only conscientious about their participation in the Methodist *Gemeinschaft*, but also wary to the utmost about their interactions with any “worldly comrades,” who would simply bring “distraction” and conflict into their congregations' lives.²⁸³

The Methodist youth groups, at least in their publications, propagated a moral exclusivity that was, though strict, not necessarily nationally-based. The Methodists understood the problem of youth in terms of a more general decay in religious faith and morale. Activities like sports—especially on a Sunday—were, for instance, to be avoided completely, as such events would distract from youth's true duties, such as attending religious services and distributing religious literature.²⁸⁴ That other youth

²⁸⁰ “Achtung!,” *Jugendfreund*, vol. 4, no. 4 (4.1936), 32; “Auf zur Freizeit in der Fruschka Gora!,” *Jugendfreund*, vol. 4, no. 5 (5.1936), 47.

²⁸¹ “Zum Geleit,” 1.

²⁸² “*Er [der Jungendbund] muß sich im Gegenteil dem Gemeindeleben einordnen und unterordnen, wie ein Kind der Familie ... Er muß das Gesamtziel der Gemeinde mit allen Kräften fördern ...*” “Einmütigkeit und Zusammenhalt im Jugendbund,” *Jugendfreund*, vol. 3, no. 12 (12.1935), 2-3.

²⁸³ “*Wenn von einzelnen Jugendbundmitgliedern Freundschaft mit weltlichen Kameraden gepflegt wird, so tragen sie Zwiespalt und Störung in den Verein ... Vermeiden wir grundsätzlich jede innere Ablenkung und Zersplitterung durch unangebrachte, schadenbringende weltliche Freundschaft.*” “Einmütigkeit und Zusammenhalt im Jugendbund,” 3.

²⁸⁴ “Wer will Sport treiben?,” 2.

groups— which in these sources are never explicitly named— might contribute to immoral behavior is implied in these papers. However, at least until the disappearance of any trace of the Methodist youth groups and their papers in late 1936, it seems that the Methodists never sought to launch an overtly politicized or nationalized battle over youth.

D. Conclusion

Over the course of the interwar period, *Donauschwaben* youth became not only the focus of increasingly nationalized (and inter-nationalized) education campaigns, but also a bone of contention for extra-curricular youth mobilizers. Following frustrations within the minority school system, as well as a growing emphasis by various political, social, and ecclesiastical actors on the need to educate and train youth outside of the classroom, Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben* communities after 1918 became the site of an increasingly variegated landscape of minority-specific youth activities. Young people, who had been loosely organized in ecclesiastical or vocational associations, began facing not only traditional sources of youth activity centered around the Church, the school, the apprenticeship, and the home; rather, they found themselves at the center of escalating national and political debates.

While, during the 1920s, *Donauschwaben*-specific extra-curricular youth groups were somewhat disparate, and fluctuated depending on particular social or geographic settings, current state law, confession, and the enthusiasm of individual youth leaders and educators, attempts were nevertheless made to formulate more comprehensive and competitive pedagogies for Yugoslavia's ethnic German youth. One crucial actor here, as we have seen, was the *Kulturbund*. Driven especially by attempts at "solidifying" and "salvaging" the "German" culture and language in the region, *Donauschwaben* youth could take advantage of the *Kulturbund*'s German-language extra-curricular activities especially from the early 1930s. The aim of such activities was clear: not only were *Donauschwaben* youth to be "enlightened" about their linguistic and cultural heritage, and instilled with a certain national pride (though the precise content of this "national" heritage was initially quite ambiguous). Rather, through their participation in *Kulturbund* youth groups, *Donauschwaben* youth would also become instrumental in shaping a "*Volksgemeinschaft*," first within Yugoslavia's German-speaking minority, and then within the greater German-speaking world.

In its attempt to gain the loyalty of *Donauschwaben* youth, however, the *Kulturbund* faced major challenges over the course of the 1930s. Some of these challenges were “external” to the *Kulturbund*: the *Donauschwabens*’ situatedness within a “foreign” host state with a fluctuating relationship to the question of minority rights, the *Donauschwaben*’s feeble awareness that they were even part of a German “*Volk*” (in some cases, even an inability on their part to speak German), and a larger, mounting contestation over the same youth by non-*Kulturbund* actors, such as the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Perhaps some of the greatest struggles, however, arose within the *Kulturbund* itself. For much of the 1930s, the *Kulturbund* was torn between more conservative “old guard” *Kulturbund* members— previously loyal to the Habsburg Empire, and generally now loyal to the Yugoslav state— and the increasingly ambitious, right-wing radical, and *Reich*-supported “*Erneuerer*.”

Youth groups quickly became the main target of the *Erneuerer*, so that, by 1935, they had almost entirely usurped control of the *Kulturbund*’s youth groups. However, following various institutional skirmishes between the *Kulturbund* and the *Erneuerer*, a parallel system of youth mobilization was created from 1935 onwards. The “*Erneuerer*-free” culture-oriented *Jugendstelle* became the official head of youth mobilization within the *Kulturbund*, while the *Kulturbund*’s *Erneuerer*-dominated *Volksdeutsche Sportstelle* became the center of youth physical education. While these two branches officially remained separate, their tactics, events, and ideology increasingly intermingled, as they targeted the same youth, who presumably participated in the activities of both. Both organizations, moreover, were at least indirectly financed and “inspired” by the *Reich*. In 1939, with the *Erneuerer*’s VoMi-orchestrated “*Machtergreifung*” (“seizure of power”) of the *Kulturbund*, these two tracks were finally entirely abolished. The now “unified” and openly National Socialist *Jugendamt* thus became the predominant youth organizer, and an association which— at least according to inflated Nazi statistics— already boasted a membership of between ninety-seven and one hundred percent of the region’s *Donauschwaben* youth by November 1940.²⁸⁵

In these mobilizational efforts, however, the *Kulturbund* was not alone. The various churches’ traditional involvement in the raising of the future generations did not abate during the interwar period. On the contrary: especially during the 1930s, as the

²⁸⁵ Cited in: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 166.

Kulturbund's youth chapters began establishing a monopoly over Yugoslavia's ethnic German youth, all of the *Donauschwaben* confessions developed increasingly elaborate youth programs in response. Following patterns formed already in the 1920s school debate, especially the Catholic and Lutheran Churches launched nationally and confessionally-specific youth groups and programs, many of which were subsidized and followed quite closely by the *Reich*'s ecclesiastical authorities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *Donauschwaben*'s major confessional youth programs began engaging in a nationalized discourse. By the late 1930s, this seems to have had a decisive and somewhat ironic effect. Those ecclesiastical youth programs that did not engage enough with (or even assume) the symbolism and debates of the *Kulturbund*'s youth groups— such as the Calvinist, Methodist, and some Catholic formations— lost much of their relevance among the *Donauschwaben* youth, becoming largely obsolete as a potential German-specific avenue of youth activity. Those youth programs that heavily assumed the *Erneuerer*'s framework— such as the *Deutsch-Evangelischer Jugendring*— were largely dissolved by the late 1930s in favor of the “*Deutsche Jugend*.” Only the (numerically strong) Catholic Church seems to have been able to mobilize considerable resistance against the pro-National Socialist formations. However, even its importance among youth continuously diminished until 1944.

By 1940, it appeared that the “unification” of all of Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben* youth under the (now *gleichgeschaltet*) *Kulturbund*'s umbrella might be possible. Youth were now— fully uniformed— not only marching *en masse*, attending “cultural” and athletic events, and cobbling together a “*Volksgemeinschaft*” according to National Socialist principles from *Donauschwaben* village to *Donauschwaben* village. As the mass mobilization of youth for service in Semlin and Prahovo's “relocation camps” indicates, they could now also be enlisted by the thousands for war-related tasks. The illusion of the *Jugendamt*'s progress towards a unification of all *Donauschwaben* youth, however, would soon be shattered. With the April 1941 Axis invasion of Yugoslavia— and Yugoslavia's rapid dissolution— the recently *Erneuerer*-led *Kulturbund*, too, collapsed. As Yugoslavia's territories were parceled out among the victorious states, the *Donauschwaben* suddenly found themselves separated across various “foreign” territories once again. Nazi-driven youth organizations, however, were rapidly re-established across these borders and flourished as never before.

PART II

THE WESTERN BANAT, 1941-1944

Chapter 3

Youth Mobilization in the Western Banat, 1941-1944

A. Introduction

While recent years have seen the publication of initial studies on the Western Banat, including histories of the *Volksgruppe* and its administration of the territory from 1941 to 1944, virtually no research has been conducted on the *Volksdeutsche*'s mobilization of youth. Any inquiries into the establishment of organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend* in the Banat have remained cursory, and have treated the *Deutsche Jugend* either as epiphenomenal to the larger formation of a *Reich*-led, centralized ethnic German administration, or as one of the most pertinent illustrations of the *Volksgruppe*'s turn to a “totalitarian,” National Socialist mode of government.¹ Regardless of particular historiographical interpretation, however, almost all studies are based on very little understanding of how the mobilization of youth even occurred, what its legal, political, and military foundations were, or how this mass recruitment of the *Donauschwaben*'s children and youth was attained, implemented, or perceived in the Western Banat.

This chapter will first set the historical stage, introducing the violent creation of an Axis-occupied, *Volksdeutsche*-administered Western Banat in April 1941, and presenting its basic military, economic, and administrative structures, as they were installed by the *Reich*. From the first days of the occupation, as we shall see, the *Kulturbund* transformed itself from an (officially) exclusively cultural association into one of the region's key political actors. Turning to the Western Banat's *Donauschwaben* children and youth, this chapter will then investigate the legal and administrative basis for the mass mobilization of ethnic Germans into the Banat's *Deutsche Jugend*. After presenting some of the organization's activities, propagandistic tactics, and ideology— as analyzed through a plethora of “home-grown,” early 1940s German youth literature— this chapter will

¹ For the former interpretation, consider: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 195-199, 202-203; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 98-99. For the latter, see: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 164-168, 277-279.

finally turn to oral history. Through original oral history interviews and related micro-level materials (such as personal memorabilia, memoirs, and photographs), the subjective, individual, and communal effects of the Western Banat's youth mobilization will be explored. Like in pre-1941 Yugoslavia, National Socialist youth projects were not uncontested in the post-1941 Western Banat. However— and largely through the installation of an increasingly all-encompassing and unforgiving *Volksdeutsche* administration— service in extra-curricular Nazi groups became unavoidable for all children and youth deemed “German.” Henceforth, youth groups no longer existed primarily as a supplement or reaction to other bodies of authority, such as the school, the church, or the state. Rather, under *Reich* tutelage, these spheres either meshed with the *Volksgruppe* and its aims, or fell away almost entirely from children's and young people's lives and consciousness as a viable alternative. Ultimately, very little room— even in the religious arena— was left for non-National Socialist interpretations of what it meant to be “German.”

B. The Formation of the Semi-Autonomous Western Banat and the Establishment of the *Volksgruppe*

1. *The Invasion and Occupation of Yugoslavia*

Following its rapid occupation of much of the European continent, the Third Reich, by late 1940, turned its militaristic gaze towards Southeastern Europe. After a series of failed international negotiations, Germany drafted plans to occupy Greece from December 1940 onwards. On March 2nd, 1941, German troops were stationed in Romania and Bulgaria— the two newest Axis states— and became poised and ready for a swift take-over of Northern Greece. Yugoslavia, which had previously followed a policy of neutrality, suddenly found itself in the midst of international military conflict. In order to gain another ally in the region— as well as a seamless passage between Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece— Hitler entered into negotiations with Yugoslavia, assuring the government that Yugoslavia would not be required to provide military aid to the Axis if

it simply joined the alliance. On March 25th, 1941, Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković signed the Tripartite Pact, making Yugoslavia an official Axis power.²

Yugoslavia's status as an Axis power, however, lasted a mere two days. On March 27th, 1941, Yugoslav Air Force General Dušan Simović staged a coup d'état, occupying Yugoslavia's government quarters by military force in the early morning hours, and proclaiming the underage Prince Peter as king and Simović himself as head of government.³ Germany's response was swift. That same day, the *Reich's* Foreign Office, the VoMi, and various military agencies began planning their retaliation, and opened negotiations with Hungary for aid in their newest military venture.⁴ Lured by the promise of reclaiming its former territories in Yugoslavia (such as the Batschka and the Banat), Hungary agreed to send troops into the region as well.⁵ On April 6th, 1941 the German *Luftwaffe* began their attack on Belgrade under the name "*Operation Strafgericht*" ("Operation Criminal Tribunal"). On April 11th, *Honvédség* ("Magyar Királyi Honvédség," or "Royal Hungarian Army") troops entered the Batschka; by April 14th, the Batschka's occupation was completed.⁶ Three days later— and following the *Wehrmacht's* occupation of most of Belgrade— the Yugoslav government surrendered unconditionally.⁷

Immediately after Yugoslavia's defeat, the Axis powers divided its territories. The northern and eastern parts of Slovenia became part of the *Reich*, while southern Slovenia and parts of Dalmatia became Italian. Montenegro became an Italian "protectorate," Kosovo was incorporated into an Italian-controlled "Greater Albania," Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were turned into the fascist, Ustaša-controlled "Independent State of Croatia" (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, or NDH), while much of Macedonia and a small part of southern Serbia became Bulgarian territories.⁸ Vojvodina, too, was split up. Following a series of tense negotiations between Hungary and Romania— which both laid claim to the entire Banat, including its western section⁹— Vojvodina was divided so

² Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 83-84.

³ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 84; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 619.

⁴ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 155-156; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 13-17.

⁵ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 85.

⁶ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 620.

⁷ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 158.

⁸ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 158-159.

⁹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 17-33; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 89-90.

that the Baranja and the Batschka became Hungarian territories, the Eastern Banat remained Romanian, Syrmia joined the newly created Independent State of Croatia, and the Western Banat would, after its “provisional” occupation by Germany, eventually join Hungary (this last plan, however, never materialized).¹⁰ What remained of Serbia was, after August 1941, governed by a largely Axis-controlled puppet government under Prime Minister Milan Nedić.¹¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this period of government transfers and coups, war, invasion, military occupation, and the division of territories was, even from a German perspective, highly chaotic and—in line with more general theories that the *Reich*’s policies towards the Balkans were led both by affect and by a lack of concept—exceedingly haphazard.¹² Yugoslavia’s *Volksdeutsche*, by then already thoroughly militarized and *gleichgeschaltet* “from below,”¹³ vacillated quite broadly in their activities during this time. Local German militias (“*Bürgerwehren*”) helped “secure” German villages across Vojvodina. These were led by none other than youth leader Jakob Lichtenberger who had, in the fall of 1940, completed SS training as “SS-Obersturmführer” in the *Reich*.¹⁴ The *Bürgerwehren* freed many of the hundreds of German hostages that were taken by Yugoslav forces in the early days of the occupation, exercised violence towards local Serbian populations, and occupied militarily significant locations, such as Semlin’s military airport.¹⁵ However, partially due to Hitler’s late communication with local German authorities, approximately seventy percent of Yugoslavia’s ethnic German men who were liable for military service (“*wehrpflichtig*”) actually joined the Yugoslav forces, so that ethnic Germans frequently ended up as prisoners of war in German military camps. After their release under orders by VoMi

¹⁰ Zoran Janjetović, “Die Donauschwaben in der Vojvodina und der Nationalsozialismus,” *Der Einfluss von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus auf Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa*, edited by Mariana Hausleitner and Harald Roth (Munich: IKGS Verlag, 2006), 229-231; Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 120-121; Wehler, *Nationalitätenpolitik in Jugoslawien*, 40-45; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 159.

¹¹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 39.

¹² Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 621.

¹³ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 617. In Bethke’s words (translated by the dissertation’s author): “The phase of the political mobilization of the German minority according to the National Socialist ideology, in any case, had already largely been completed by the time of the military coup on 27.3.1941.”

¹⁴ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 611.

¹⁵ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 156-157; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 93-94.

chief Werner Lorenz, many of these *Volksdeutsche* soldiers were then accidentally locked into Hungarian prisons instead.¹⁶

Organizationally, politically, and ideologically, responses by Yugoslavia's ethnic Germans, in March and April 1941, were rather confused. Attempting to seem loyal to the Yugoslav state, *Kulturbund* leaders Franz Hamm and Sepp Janko suspended the SDKB's activities on March 28th, 1941. There is no evidence from this early period that Yugoslavia's ethnic Germans sought or welcomed the possibility of war.¹⁷ Once the war started— especially as reports of the upcoming arrival of German troops reached a frenzy in the local German-language press— most ethnic Germans, however, changed their strategy and, at least outwardly, their comportments as well. By mid-April, the *Deutsches Volksblatt's* main banner was adorned with a swastika. According to its celebratory articles, it had only taken nine German soldiers to capture Belgrade. Belgrade's parliament was then rapidly draped in National Socialist symbols.¹⁸

The ethnic German population had prepared for the German troops with some diligence by April 1941, sewing swastika flags and preparing welcome receptions for the *Reich's* forces. On April 11th and 12th, when *Wehrmacht* and SS troops took over most of the Western Banat, these soldiers apparently were greeted with an enormous “euphoria.” Façades in towns like Franzfeld, Karlsdorf, and Werschetz were adorned with hundreds of swastika flags, and large crowds gathered to cheer for the *Reichsdeutsche*, admire their uniforms, and thank them for “liberating” the local ethnic Germans.¹⁹ In the Batschka, news of the *Reichsdeutsche* troops' arrival in the Banat was met with similar enthusiasm. In joyful anticipation of being reconnected to the “motherland,” entire towns in the Batschka were draped with Nazi flags and swastikas to greet the incoming soldiers. Unlike the Banat, which was “liberated” by the *Wehrmacht*, however, the Batschka was taken over a few days later by the Hungarian *Honvédség*. Its troops hence marched through the Batschka's streets, perplexed at the display of National Socialist imagery, and surrounded by a confused German population.²⁰

¹⁶ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 86.

¹⁷ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 619.

¹⁸ *Deutsches Volksblatt: Tageszeitung der Deutschen Jugoslawiens*, vol. 23, no. 6634 (18.4.1941), 5.

¹⁹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 99, 105-107; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 195.

²⁰ See several reports by eyewitnesses in the following documentary film: *Schicksal der Donauschwaben*, produced by Astrid Beyer and Günter Czernetzky (Stuttgart: Südostdeutscher Rundfunk, 1998). Also see: Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 286.

Despite such quasi-comedic scenes surrounding the Batschka's take-over, the military occupation of Yugoslavia was conducted with an almost unfathomable brutality. Both in the Batschka and the Western Banat, several years of intensive violence and ethnic cleansing ensued, in which local *Volksdeutsche* governments— propped up by Axis support— mobilized local populations, hatreds, and opportunisms to help fulfill *Reich* imaginations of a socially, politically, economically, and “racially” “reconstructed” Southeastern Europe. Youth, as will become apparent, once again became a key ingredient to such activities, both ideologically and in manpower. Almost nowhere in Southeastern Europe were *Reich* ambitions realized as comprehensively as in the Western Banat.

2. *The Creation and Administration of the Western Banat*

Following Yugoslavia's official dissolution on April 17th, 1941, the Western Banat's status was still unsure. Not only was the entire Banat coveted both by Hungary and Romania; Germany, too, sought to extend control over the region and establish a “*Reichsfestung*” (“*Reichs-bastion*”) in Belgrade, led largely by Vojvodina Germans, through which Germany could defend its stance in Southeastern Europe.²¹ Local ethnic German leaders, furthermore, dreamt of the establishment of a “*Donaustaat*” (Danube State), in which the Batschka, the Banat, Transylvania, and the Baranya would be unified as a German protectorate.²² None of these plans came true. Rather, on April 20th, 1941, the *Reich* installed a “*Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien*” (“military commander in Serbia”) who, via instructions from the *Wehrmacht*'s Southeastern European office (located, after April 1942, in Athens), gained control over the administration of the Western Banat and what was left of Serbia (in this case, drawn according to Serbia's 1912 boundaries). While he had no independent military powers of command, the *Militärbefehlshaber* nevertheless officially controlled *Wehrmacht*, police, (some) political, and economic activities in the occupied Western Banat and Serbia from then on.²³

As most historians of the Western Banat agree, the Banat's administration— as that of the rest of Serbia— was chaotic. Even *Reich* officials termed Serbia under Axis

²¹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 120.

²² Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 121-123; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 71-73.

²³ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 128.

occupation “the land of the seven inert” (“*das Land der sieben Reglosen*”), as the various Foreign Office, economic, military, and other *Reich* and *Volksdeutsche* offices in charge not only failed to coordinate among themselves, but actually worked against each other in regional operations.²⁴ What it lacked in organization, however, the *Reich* made up in force. Various posters from the period thus attest to the manner in which *Reich* forces employed violence (and the threat thereof) to crush any resistance. One trilingual (German, Serbian Cyrillic and Serbo-Croatian Latin) poster from April 13th, 1941, for example, announced the occupation of Yugoslavia’s territories, and publicized laws according to which all radio transmitters and weapons were to be handed in to the local (German) authorities, any hoarding of goods or aid to non-German military personnel was to be illegal, and any anti-German proclamations and demonstrations (even simple insults against the *Wehrmacht*) were to be considered criminal offenses. Theft and looting, furthermore, would be punishable by death.²⁵

Urging particularly the local German populations to act with loyalty to the new “fatherland,” other posters made the implications of treason and non-“Germanness” apparent. Starting in early April 1941, German forces started taking thousands of non-German hostages across Serbia and the Western Banat. Every time a German was harmed, dozens, even hundreds, of these hostages— including women, children, and infants— were simply executed.²⁶ Every few days, posters circulated in Belgrade, Pančevo, and other cities announcing the mass shooting of hundreds of hostages. On April 15th, 1941 alone, three hundred hostages were shot to avenge the killing of thirty German military personnel by bombing in Belgrade the previous day.²⁷ Such tactics continued over the following years. Increasingly targeted specifically at supposed Partisans and Chetniks (denoted as “Draža Mihailović followers” in this propaganda²⁸), it is estimated that by

²⁴ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 127.

²⁵ Poster, “Bekanntmachung für das besetzte jugoslawische Gebiet” (13.4.1941), National Library of Serbia, Special Collections, PI 196/27. (Henceforth: NLS/SC)

²⁶ See: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 313-343.

²⁷ Poster, “Bekanntmachung” (14.9.1941), NLS/SC PI 196/17. For similar examples, consider: Poster, “Bekanntmachung” (3.1942), NLS/SC PI 184/32; Poster, “Bekanntmachung” (21.11.1942), NLS/SC PI 198/43; Poster, “Bekanntmachung” (25.12.1942), NLS/SC PI 184/33; Poster, “Bekanntmachung” (31.12.1942), NLS/SC PI 184/13.

²⁸ For more on the German campaign against Partisans and Chetniks in the region, consider: Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 170, 229-235; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 343-382. In Serbia, most anti-Axis resistance— albeit with very different aims— was staged both by the Chetniks (a Serbian nationalist and monarchist paramilitary organization with initial roots in anti-Ottoman resistance) and, significantly, the Partisans (communist forces centered around Josip Broz Tito). “Partisan” is capitalized in cases where the term refers to the Yugoslav National

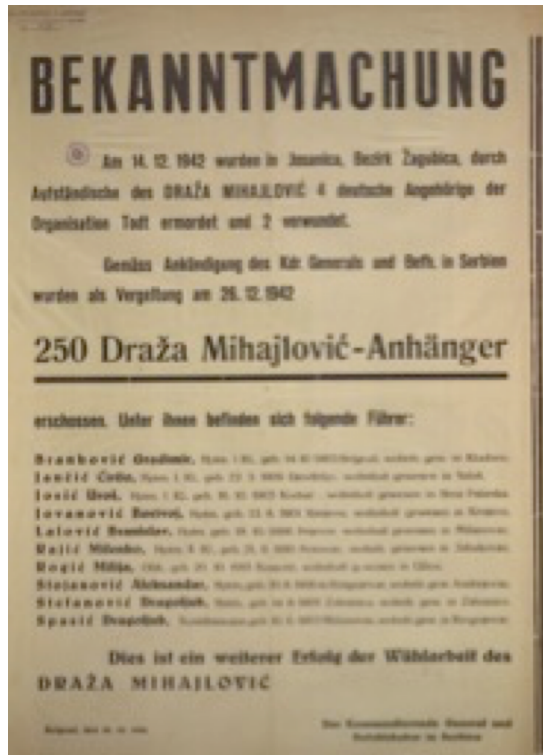


Fig. 3.1 Poster Announcing “Retaliative Actions” by German Military Forces, December 1942. Source: National Library of Serbia, Special Collections.

1944, some 1,356 individuals had been shot, hanged, and otherwise killed in such public “retributive actions” in the Western Banat alone.²⁹

It was not merely alleged military or political enemies who were targeted during the occupation, however. Rather, anti-Semitic policies and activities were carried out with such brutality and expediency in occupied Yugoslavia that the Western Banat became the first European region to be formally proclaimed “free from Jews” by *Reich* officials.³⁰ Even before the official introduction of Germany’s anti-Semitic measures into the region, various ethnic German villages across the Western Banat erupted in anti-Semitic violence in April 1941, expropriating especially wealthy Jewish families and forcing them to wear a yellow star.³¹ In Betschkerek, members of the *Deutsche Mannschaft* (DM)— a

Liberation Army, also known as the National Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, the National Liberation Partisan and Volunteer Army of Yugoslavia, and the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia.

²⁹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 342. This figure, of course, does not include the casualties murdered in the Western Banat in less publicized activities, which numbered in the many thousands. In the town of Jabuka/Apfeldorf/Torontálmás alone, some 10,000 Jews, Roma, Serbs, and other individuals may have been killed (primarily by shooting) over the course of the occupation (Shimizu, 253).

³⁰ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 253-255; Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 264, 269.

³¹ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 165.

Bürgerwehr à la Lichtenberger— arrested 480 Jewish men and twenty Jewish women in one day, destroyed the Jewish cemetery, expropriated the entire Jewish population, and publicly hanged one of the town’s wealthiest Jewish men, Viktor Elek (director of the local sugar refinery), “according to the war tribunal’s verdict.”³² Such activities were soon followed by anti-Semitic legislation by the *Militärbefehlshaber*, which forced all Jewish shops to be marked as such, compelled all Jews to register with the local authorities, froze Jewish bank accounts, introduced a curfew, forced Jewish individuals to stand behind “citizen-Aryans” (“*Bürger-Arier*”) in any kind of queue, restricted their access to public markets and fountains, and enforced their wearing of a yellow star.³³ As officially circulated, bilingual posters from late April 1941 warned, any Jews who did not follow these policies would be “sent to a concentration camp.”³⁴

By August 1941, the majority of the Western Banat’s Jews had been arrested. Most men were sent into forced labor or a prisoners’ camp near Belgrade, while women and children were deported, in part by *Volksdeutsche* police and *Deutsche Mannschaft* forces, to a concentration camp in Semlin.³⁵ On August 20th, 1941, the Western Banat was declared officially “*Judenfrei*.”³⁶ Despite such measures, it seems that *Reich* officials became increasingly impatient. In early September 1941, SS leader Edmund Veesenmayer and *Reich* ambassador to Belgrade Felix Benzler sent telegrams urging the *Militärbefehlshaber* to “secure and remove at least all male Jews” in Serbia, as they supposedly had been too active in “sabotage” and partisan agitation. Where these at least eight thousand individuals would go was still unclear, as the appropriate concentration camps were still being constructed.³⁷ However, according to Veesenmayer and Benzler,

³² Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 245-251. There were 1,269 Jews in Betschkerek according to the 1931 Yugoslav census (Shimizu, 245).

³³ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 251-252. See also: Poster, “Kommandaturbefehl” (28.7.1941), NLS/SC PI 198/29; Poster, “Verordnung” (25.4.1941), NLS/SC PI 198/8.

³⁴ “*Nach Gutdünken werden sie auch in Konzentrationslager geschickt werden.*” Poster, “Verordnung” (25.4.1941), NLS/SC PI 198/8.

³⁵ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 252.

³⁶ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 253.

³⁷ Felix Benzler was the German ambassador in Belgrade during this period. Edmund Veesenmayer was an SS officer in charge of the *Reich* Foreign Office’s Irish affairs between 1940 and 1944, though he also became instrumental to the *Reich*’s occupational policies in Croatia and Serbia during this period, and was named the *Reich* ambassador to occupied Hungary in March 1944. Together with Benzler, Veesenmayer helped carry out the Holocaust in Serbia. Veesenmayer later helped coordinate Hungary’s Holocaust as well. Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 158, 168, 171-173, 209, 303; Igor-Philip Matić, *Edmund Veesenmayer: Agent und Diplomat der nationalsozialistischen Expansionspolitik* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), 9, 157-172.

it might be possible provisionally to simply send these Jewish men down the Danube in freight ships and into Romania.³⁸ Such plans, as far as is known, never materialized. However, by March 1942, Jews were routinely gassed in mobile vans, disguised as Red Cross ambulances. Thousands were shot and buried in mass graves— frequently under the excuse that they had been “saboteurs” and partisans— while thousands more died in concentration and forced labor camps. By August 29th, 1942, officials in Berlin declared that the “Jewish problem” in Serbia was “solved.” Almost all of Serbia’s seventeen thousand Jews, by then, had been killed.³⁹

The Western Banat’s Roma communities, too, experienced severe cruelties after the German military’s arrival. In April 1941, German forces immediately arrested dozens of Roma and forced them to aid the *Wehrmacht* with its mass “retributive” executions. Placed under the coerced supervision of a seventy-year-old “Gypsy prince” (“*Zigeunerfürst*”), these men dug mass graves, undressed and buried deceased reprisal victims, and carried out mass hangings. Some Roma themselves were shot during these activities. On May 31st, 1941, the Banat’s Roma communities then came under the region’s newly proclaimed “Decree Regarding the Jews and Gypsies.” Thereafter, Roma were forced to wear an armband labeled “Gypsy” (“*Zigeuner*”) and, like the Jews, were prohibited from walking on sidewalks. Unlike the Banat’s anti-Semitic policies, however, the region’s anti-Roma policies were not carried out to their full and horrendous completion. As Shimizu explains, in towns where ethnic Germans had traditionally maintained close relationships with their Roma neighbors (becoming each other’s children’s godparents, for instance), the local civilian authorities occasionally successfully negotiated Roma prisoners’ release with the German military authorities. Nevertheless, over the following three years, hundreds of Roma were arrested, attacked, forced into labor and internment camps, and arbitrarily deported and killed.⁴⁰

It was in this climate of violence, ethnic cleansing, and complete political and social upheaval that the Western Banat became a semi-autonomous territory. Officially under the control of Serbia’s *Militärsbefehlshaber*, the Western Banat received a special status

³⁸ Telegrams, signed by Veesenmayer and Benzler (8.9.1941 and 11.9.1941), PA AA, R 29664.

³⁹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 252-254.

⁴⁰ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 295-299. Precise statistics (except for the number of victims of certain incidents) are unfortunately unavailable in relation to the Roma communities. Shimizu also explains that Roma were seen as an important source of (forced) labor, which is why they were not all murdered.

as an autonomous territory in April 1941. At the end of 1941, when all of Serbia was rearranged according to new, and smaller districts, the Western Banat further became its own “*Kreis*” (district), with headquarters in Betschkerek.⁴¹ At the head of the local government was an ethnic German organization: following the withdrawal of the majority of Germany’s troops from the Banat on May 16th, 1941, the region’s *Kulturbund* leadership reformulated itself as the “*Volksgruppe*,” a *volksdeutsche* administrative authority under Sepp Janko’s control.⁴² Therafter, it was the *Volksgruppe* that— through *Reich* aid and decree— helped Germany assert control over the Western Banat militarily, economically, and administratively.

One of the *Reich*’s first concerns in the Banat became its military “securing” by Germany. As described above, the Banat’s military situation was highly complex. Initially, most of the Banat was controlled by SS leaders, such as *SS-Gruppenführer* Harald Turner, who were under orders of the *Militärbefehlshaber* and the “*Stab des Generalquartiermeisters im Oberkommando des Heeres*” (or OKH, the *Reich*’s highest military command authority). Orders from these sources were generally channeled through local Serbian authorities or various smaller (German) military formations and civil authorities, like the independent “*Kreiskommandatur*” (district command authority) in Betschkerek, and enforced by local military or police forces.⁴³ Such local military, paramilitary, and police forces mushroomed across the Banat after April 1941. Especially crucial was the “*Deutsche Mannschaft*” (DM), which was established in mid-April 1941 on the foundation of the *Kulturbund*’s sports groups, as well as the more impromptu “*Bürgerwehren*” and “*Selbstschutz*” groups that had been initiated by Lichtenberger and other SS-trained *Volksdeutsche* leaders. Seen as a mandatory, post-*Deutsche Jugend* exercise for all men who had not yet been mobilized on the front, the DM served as a supplementary, *Reich*-controlled police force in the region that, by February 1st, 1942,

⁴¹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 69.

⁴² Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 124. As early proclamations by the *Volksgruppe* indicate, the “*Deutsche Volksgruppe*” was to be led by a “National Socialist *Weltanschauung*” and foster explicit and free ties to the “German motherland.” “Die Neuorganisation der deutschen Volksgruppe in Serbien,” transcription from *Volksdeutscher Ruf*, no. 11 (1941), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 8.

⁴³ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 128-131.



Fig. 3.2 Rally in Front of Betschkerek (Zrenjanin) Town Hall. Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection. Banners: “*Dieses Land war und bleibt Deutsch! Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer!*” (“This land was and remains German! One *Volk*, one *Reich*, one *Führer!*”)

already had four thousand members.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the regular police was henceforth only trained by *Reichsdeutsche*, and consisted of either ethnic German or Hungarian personnel.⁴⁵

Following a restructuring of local police offices in January 1942, the office of the “*Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer*” (HSSPF, “Higher SS- and Police Chief”) was established. Thereafter, the HSSPF— for most of the Banat’s occupation, an office held by *SS-Gruppenführer* August Meyszner— received orders from Heinrich Himmler directly, and had powers within the Banat and Serbia equivalent to those of Himmler within the *Reich*. The HSSPF took charge of all local SS and police forces. Dozens of new police stations were established across the Banat, which employed a total of over one thousand *Volksdeutsche* men.⁴⁶ Betschkerek became its own *Kreis-Kommandantur* (regional command).⁴⁷ In February 1942, furthermore, the *Banater Staatswache* was

⁴⁴ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 206. More on the DM, and its relationship to the DJ, later in this chapter.

⁴⁵ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 207.

⁴⁶ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 148-153.

⁴⁷ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 74.

established, which— due to its black uniforms and permanent stationing in military barracks— was termed the “black police” (“*Schwarze Polizei*”). The *Staatswache* formed part of the larger “*Serbische Staatswache*” (SSW, or Serbian State Guard), a police force in charge of defense against the Partisans. It was under direct orders of the *Reichsdeutsche*-controlled *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). This *Sicherheitsdienst*, finally, was also in charge of the German secret service (“*Geheimdienst*”) in the Western Banat from 1942 onwards.⁴⁸

Considering the economic centrality ascribed to this agriculturally rich region by the *Reich*, it is perhaps hardly surprising that, as soon as the Banat was more or less “secured” militarily, its economic assets, too, were immediately placed under German control.⁴⁹ On April 20th, 1941, the *Reich* installed a “*Generalbevollmächtigte für die Wirtschaft*” (GBW, “Chief Authorized Representative of the Economy”) in Serbia, whose task it was to tie Serbia’s economy seamlessly into *Reichsmarschall* Göring’s economic and military four-year plan for the *Reich*.⁵⁰ One of the first measures taken by the GBW was the large-scale “aryanization” of Serbia’s Jewish properties. Exceeding some 334,834,925.49 dinars in value in the Western Banat alone, over eighty percent of this property flowed directly into *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* hands and organizations, including, quite significantly, the Banat’s *Deutsche Schulstiftung* (school foundation).⁵¹ Additional significant economic measures were taken. By May 1941, crucial communications services, such as the post, telegraph, telephone, and railway had been placed under German administration.⁵² The Banat’s economic production, especially in the agricultural sector, came under the control of the GBW (and thus the *Reich*), while

⁴⁸ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 158-165, 211-215.

⁴⁹ As discussed in the dissertation’s introduction, Southeastern Europe was coveted by the Third Reich primarily for its agricultural assets, as well as its relatively large, mobilizable military and labor force. In relation to Southeastern Europe in general, consider: Sachse, ed., “*Mitteleuropa*” und “*Südosteuropa*” als *Planungsraum*. On borderlands like the Batschka and the Banat specifically, see: Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 323-351; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation*, 120-123, 383-340, 444-445; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 20, 67, 251-255.

⁵⁰ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 135.

⁵¹ In comparison, a regular agricultural day-laborer’s salary on the “free market” (not regulated by forced labor or other regulations) was approximately 100 to 150 dinars per day. Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 423. Other statistics from: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 135, 255-295; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 176-178. The other twenty percent apparently largely went to the local Hungarian minority and administration.

⁵² “Abschrift zu D VIII 903/41,” p. 4, PA AA, R 100550, fol. 306-310; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 175.



Fig. 3.3 Rally in Front of Werschetz Town Hall
Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.

trade and consumption were restricted depending on the *Reich's* needs.⁵³ According to published warnings even in the German-language press, any activities deemed contrary to such economic aims would be severely punished, even by death.⁵⁴ Furthermore, starting in August 1941, labor service became mandatory for all (non-Jewish and non-Roma) men between seventeen and forty-five years of age who did not have a “fulltime occupation.” By mid-1943, some sixteen thousand men were thereby “employed.”⁵⁵ Especially following the large-scale military mobilization of the Banat’s *Volksdeutsche* men, furthermore, this labor service was extended to ethnic German women and youth,

⁵³ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 385-418.

⁵⁴ See, for instance: “Kundmachung” and “Einführung der Prügelstrafe in Serbien,” *Deutscher Volksfreund*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1.1.1942), 7-8.

⁵⁵ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 419-420. Jews and Roma, as we have seen, came under different (and much more severe) laws.

who, in the framework of youth and women's organizations, donated hundreds of thousands of dinars and tens of thousands of kilos of food and supplies to the German war effort each year.⁵⁶

These military and economic activities, increasingly, were overseen by the local *Volksdeutsche* administration, the organization of which only seems to have taken place after the main military and economic provisions had been made. As with the rest of the Banat's administration, the *Volksgruppe's* role, status, and official structure were quite chaotic, and difficult to reconstruct based on the archival record.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, according to legislation enacted on May 29th, 1941, the Banat's administrative head became the "*Vizebanus*" ("vice governor"), whose office was to be located in Betschkerek. The *Vizebanus*— a role played by Joseph Lapp for the duration of the Banat's occupation— had to be a *Volksdeutsche*. Furthermore, he was to be appointed by the head of the local ethnic German administration, the *Volksgruppe*. The office of the *Vizebanus*— a semi-autonomous branch of Serbia's *Reich*-controlled "*Banschaft*" (territory) government— further consisted of eight ministries (of internal affairs, education, communications, justice, food, social policy and health, economy, and construction). Each of these ministries' heads, again, was to be appointed by the leader of the *Volksgruppe*.⁵⁸ At least theoretically, non-Germans could become ministers. However, as the *Volksgruppenführer*— in this case, Sepp Janko— chose all officers, this did not happen. Only the *Vizebanus's* deputy, Béla Botka, was Hungarian. Furthermore, the Banat's judges and notaries were to be German ("*deutscher Volkszugehörigkeit*"); any members of court were again to be chosen by the *Volksgruppe*.⁵⁹ Most town mayors were replaced with ethnic Germans.⁶⁰ Next to Serbian, German became the official language of administration— a rule to which only certain exceptions were made, as some Banat towns introduced a third administrative language, Hungarian, over the course of the following years.⁶¹ Finally, most of the Banat's previous (Serbo-Croatian) town names

⁵⁶ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 422-423; "Kriegseinsatz der Volksgruppe," 1943, fol. 93-96, PA AA, R 100550.

⁵⁷ For more in the difficulties involved in reconstructing the intricacies of the Western Banat's administration, see: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 21, 127.

⁵⁸ "Abschrift zu D VIII 903/41," PA AA, R 100550, fol. 306-310.

⁵⁹ "Abschrift zu D VIII 903/41," PA AA, R 100550, fol. 306-310; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 75.

⁶⁰ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 187.

⁶¹ "Abschrift zu D VIII 903/41," PA AA, R 100550, fol. 306-310. For more on information on Hungarian as a language of administration in the Western Banat, consider: Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-*

were replaced with German ones, first by *ad hoc* administrative practice, then, after March 1943, by Serbian ministerial decree.⁶²

Installed in a leadership position by the *Reich* as a way to delegate some of the local authority and responsibilities of occupation, Sepp Janko and the *Volksgruppe* attained almost complete control of the Western Banat by mid-1941.⁶³ Henceforth, the Banat's ethnic Germans could not only carve out the autonomy that they had sought for so long. Rather, they also employed those governmental tactics towards minorities that they had complained most about under Habsburg and Yugoslav rule, multiplied them exponentially, and— through the *Reich's* backing— reorganized, mobilized, and “cleansed” their territory almost as they pleased.⁶⁴ The education and organization of youth, once again, crept to the forefront of the *Volksgruppe's* concerns. However, this time— and unlike in the Batschka— very few restrictions remained as to how the National Socialist training of ethnic German youth might take place.

C. The Banat's *Deutsche Jugend*: The Founding, Organization, and Proliferation of a Local “*Hitler-Jugend*”

1. *The Reconfiguration of Kulturbund Youth Groups into the Deutsche Jugend*

Not much has been preserved in the archival record on the *Volksgruppe's* administration. However, those fragments that have survived to the current day— mainly in the form of published “*Verordnungsblätter*” (“Regulations Circularies”) by the “*Volksgruppenführung*” (*Volksgruppe* leadership)— indicate that the organization of ethnic German youth became one of the *Volksgruppe's* main priorities as soon as it attained “independent” authority over the Western Banat in May 1941. Even in its first *Verordnungsblatt* from May 1941, the organization of youth attained a prominent position. According to Sepp Janko's first decrees on May 21st, 1941, for instance, the

1944, 79. Town-based debates on turning Hungarian into an official administrative language can also be found in the archival record. Consider: IAZ, Fond 133, doc. 3846/43, letter (11.3.1943).

⁶² AMV/KB 6831 el. 3., “Staatliche Verordnungen,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 19 (31.3.1943), final page; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 80.

⁶³ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 177-184; Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 70-71.

⁶⁴ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 176.

Volksgruppe would be split into three main branches: the “*Deutsche Mannschaft*” (DM) for the “manly *Erziehung* and bodily training” of “genetically healthy, racially and ideologically satisfactory men over 21”; the “*Frauenschaft*” (“women’s group”) for “genetically healthy, racially and ideologically satisfactory women and girls over 21”; and the “*Deutsche Jugend*” (DJ) for the sons and daughters of *Volksgruppe* members.⁶⁵ The *Deutsche Jugend*’s members were to be between ten and twenty-one years old; girls would further form their own “*Deutsche Mädelsbund*” (MB) within the DJ.⁶⁶

Following these more basic provisions, several additional May 1941 articles clarified the *Deutsche Jugend*’s set-up, role, and administration. According to the new *Landesjugendführer*, Franz Germann, all “*Führer* and *Führerinnen*” of the local youth branches— as they had been established under the *Kulturbund*’s youth program— were to continue their work as smoothly as possible despite novel conditions.⁶⁷ Youth leaders would be personally responsible for rousing more enthusiasm than ever (“*eifriger denn je!*”) for youth sports competitions, classes, and similar events in the Banat’s towns. In preparation for “today’s momentous time” (“*der heutigen grossen Zeit!*”), moreover, youth leaders were to send a report to the *Landesjugendführung* enumerating all of their members and activities as soon as possible, so that all youth activities across the Banat could be coordinated once again.⁶⁸ In the meantime, the *Deutsche Jugend* would be split into an “*Allgemeine DJ*” (“general DJ”) for all DJ members, and a “*Stamm DJ*” (“core DJ”) for members who attended every single event (“*Dienst*”). The DJ, furthermore, would be composed of the “*Deutsche Jungvolk*” (JV) for ten- to fourteen-year-old boys, the “*Deutsche Jungmädelschaft*” (JM) for ten- to fourteen-year-old girls, and the “*Mädelsbund*” (MB) for fourteen- to twenty-one-year-old girls. Imitating its *Hitler-Jugend* model in Germany, the DJ was further split into “*Kameradschaften*,” “*Scharen*,” “*Gefolgschaften*,” “*Stämme*,” “*Jungenschaften*,” “*Jungenzüge*,” and “*Fähnlein*,” depending

⁶⁵ “... die Deutsche Mannschaft (D.M.), in der erbgesunde, rassisch und weltanschaulich einwandfreie Männer über 21 (in Ausnahmefällen über 18) Jahre zwecks mannhaftlicher Erziehung und körperlicher ertüchtigung zusammengefasst werden.” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat, Serbien und Ostsyrmien*, no. 1 (5.1941), p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Verordnungsblatt* (5.1941), 3. See also: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 279-283.

⁶⁷ Franz Germann was appointed *Landesjugendführer* by Janko in May 1941. Previously, he had been a leading youth educator among the *Erneuerer*. Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 279, 286, 322.

⁶⁸ “An alle Führer und Führerinnen der DJ,” *Verordnungsblatt* (5.1941), 4.



Fig. 3.4 1942 *Deutsche Jugend* Membership Card. Source: Zrenjanin National Museum, Regular Exhibition.

on the size, gender, age, and hierarchical categories of the particular youth group.⁶⁹ For the time being, furthermore, the *Deutsche Jugend*'s main administrative districts ("Banne") would be divided according to the Banat's six administrative regions ("Kreise"). Every DJ *Bann* was then composed of smaller units (a "Stamm"), each of which received an individual, Habsburg-inspired name (such as "Prinz Eugen," "Adam Müller-Gutenbrunn," and "Graf Mercy").⁷⁰

Provisions and legislation on the *Deutsche Jugend* continued to be published every few weeks after the *Volksgruppe* came to power. In August 1941, some of the *Deutsche Jugend*'s geographic units were reshuffled, presumably to reflect the general redrafting

⁶⁹ Roughly translated: "Kameradschaften" ("comradeships"), "Scharen" ("flocks"), "Gefolgschaften" ("entourages"), "Stämme" ("tribes"), "Jungenschaften" ("youth clubs"), "Jungenzüge" ("youth platoons"), and "Fähnlein" ("little flags").

⁷⁰ "Vorläufige Organisationsbestimmungen der DJ" and "Einteilung des DJ-Bannes, Mittelbanat," *Verordnungsblatt* (5.1941), 5. For more on the ways in which Habsburg names and symbols were implemented by the Banat's National Socialist administration— particularly in military matters— to create the semblance of long-standing tradition, consider: Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 213-214, 267-268, 346. Adam Müller-Gutenbrunn (1852-1923) was one of the most famous *Donauschwaben* writers and one of the first to be concerned openly with the *Donauschwaben*'s "national" heritage.

of administrative authorities in Serbia and the Banat that month.⁷¹ The *Deutsche Jugend*'s administration was henceforth also divided into thematic branches, each of which was led by a different, *Volksgruppenführer*-appointed officer. Including the “*Organisationsstelle*” (organizational branch), as well as the offices of culture, ideological training (“*Weltanschauliche Schulung* [sic]”), sports (“*Leibesübungen*”), social questions (“*Sozialstelle*”), and personnel, each of these branches had separate representatives for the male and female youth organizations.⁷² In November 1941, the *Deutsche Jugend*'s financial basis, too, became regulated. According to this newest legislation, all DJ members had to pay a monthly membership fee (“*Mitgliedsbeitrag*”). This fee was to be paid by the tenth of each month to the group leaders, who were required to forward eighty percent of this money directly to the *Volksgruppenführung*. Seventy-five percent of this sum, in turn, would be channeled directly to the *Landesjugendführung*. The other twenty-five percent flowed into the *Volksgruppe*'s local administration.⁷³ Finally, youth leaders at every echelon of the *Deutsche Jugend*'s structure were appointed by Germann and Janko personally—any appointments, promotions, and demotions were then announced each month in the *Verordnungsblätter*.⁷⁴

By late 1941, it seems that the *Volksgruppe* had determined most of the *Deutsche Jugend*'s structural and organizational matters. However, it was only in early 1942 that its purpose—especially in a military sense—was properly disclosed. In January 1942, the *Volksgruppenführung* published an agreement that had been made between the *Deutsche Jugend* and the *Deutsche Mannschaft* that month. According to the agreement, all male DJ members would be festively turned over to the DM on the 9th of November (anniversary of Hitler's “Beer Hall Putsch”) following their eighteenth birthday.⁷⁵ The local DM authorities would receive a list of the appropriate DJ members on August 1st. Over the following months, these teenage boys would be inspected medically by a DM-

⁷¹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 129-130.

⁷² AMV/KB 6841 el. 3, *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 3 (8.1941), 5.

⁷³ AMV/KB 6841 el. 5, *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 5 (11.1941), 7. The amount of this membership fee is not specified here.

⁷⁴ Consider: “Aus der Landesjugendführung- Ernennungen,” *Verordnungsblatt* (11.1941), 7; AMV/KB 6841 el. 6, “Landesjugendführung- Ernennungen,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 6 (12.1941).

⁷⁵ The law represented a revision to the DM's previous twenty-one-year age limit. November 9th has been a significant date in German history on many occasions. In this case, November 9th probably referred to the anniversary of the Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch in 1923. In 1938, November 9th also became the date of the “*Reichskristallnacht*.”

appointed doctor and obliged to attend to various administrative matters (such as signing the appropriate DM paperwork). Secondary and vocational school students would be exempt from DM service prior to their graduation, even if they were older than eighteen. Furthermore, former DJ leaders were to be given DM leadership positions upon their transition into the latter organization. As such, they were to serve as youth instructors as well if the *Volksgruppenführung* deemed such a measure necessary. Exclusion from the DM, however, was also possible. Thus, if a young man was found guilty of a crime—ranging in the *Verordnungsblatt*'s demotion list from public drunkenness to theft to marrying a Jewish woman—he would be publicly removed from their DM post.⁷⁶

The *Deutsche Jugend*'s military purpose became increasingly apparent over the course of 1942. In October 1942, the *Volksgruppenführer* proclaimed the “pre-military training” of “all German male youth between the ages of fifteen and eighteen” as mandatory. Henceforth, all *Donauschwaben* youth, whether or not they were official DJ members, were required to participate in paramilitary training. The aim of these activities, according to Janko, was to “awaken” within youth that “militaristic outlook” (“*Wehrgedanke*”) and “soldiers’ spirit” (“*Soldatengeist*”) that had already “given their ancestors their soul.” Only then would youth become “more complete members of our *Volksgemeinschaft*,” and be prepared for their time as soldiers.⁷⁷ As elaborated upon in the October 1942 *Verordnungsblatt*, furthermore, the Banat’s *Landesjugendführer* had the ultimate authority over the DJ’s “pre-military training.” Any DJ member who did not follow his command was to be punished according to DJ regulations. Any individual who helped a youth not obey these provisions, similarly, would be prosecuted by the *Volksgruppe*’s “*Volksgerecht*” (“people’s tribunal”).⁷⁸

It was not merely the *Donauschwaben*’s boys who were mobilized according to the *Volksgruppe*’s military needs, however. Girls, too, were to contribute to Germany’s war effort. Like their male counterparts, females were forced to serve in the *Arbeitsdienst*. According to legislation signed on April 30th, 1942, all *Volksdeutsche* girls would be required to complete *Arbeitsdienst* service. Any activities deemed contrary to this

⁷⁶ AMV/KB 6841 el. 7, “Abkommen getroffen zwischen der Führungsstelle der DM und der Landesjugendführung der DJ” and “Aus der DM wurden ausgeschlossen,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 7 (1.1942).

⁷⁷ “Zweck dieser Ausbildung ist, in unserer Jugend den Wehrgedanken wachzurufen und den Soldatengeist zu wecken, der ihre Vorfahren beseelte, um sie dadurch zu wertvolleren Mitgliedern unserer Volksgemeinschaft zu machen und sie auf ihre spätere Soldatenzeit vorzubereiten.”

⁷⁸ AMV/KB 6831 el. 1, “Vormilitärische Ausbildung der DJ,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 14 (15.10.1942), 1.

Fig. 3.5 The Banat's "BDM."

Source: *Banater Beobachter: Kampfblatt der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien*. Vol. 4, No. 942 (13.4.1944). p. 1. Caption: "*Banater Mädels bei einer Kundgebung: Sie sehen der Zukunft fest ins Auge. Für sie gibt es keine rechnerischen Überlegungen. Sie werden einst die Frauen Deutschlands sein.*" ("Banat girls at a rally: They look into the future with determination. For them, there are no calculative contemplations. They will once be Germany's women.")



requirement would be punished, and any girl whose location was not known during her term of service would be searched for by the *Volksgruppe*'s authorities. As these girls were primarily called upon to work in agriculture or as domestic maids, those girls who already worked in a "German" agricultural household were exempted.⁷⁹ Lasting up to several months at a time, this service was designed to compensate for the manpower that had been drained as a result of the *Volksgruppe*'s mass mobilization of men. To a degree, this manpower replacement had already occurred through the forced labor of "other nationals [sic]," which, by early 1943, counted at least five thousand individuals according to the *Volksgruppe*'s statistics. Thousands of *Donauschwabens* girls, however, also served during those years. In 1942, for instance, 383 girls helped bring in the Banat's harvest. By 1943, this number had increased to 1,057.⁸⁰ The DJ, along with the *Deutsche Frauenschaft*, were so effective in their agricultural service, donation drives, and other economic pursuits that, during the Banat's first two years of occupation, the *Volksgruppe* channeled some 80 million dinars (circa 4 million *Reichsmark*) in cash and 102 million dinars (circa 5 million *Reichsmark*) in goods into the *Reich*, creating a per capita average that—as the *Volksgruppe* boasted—was higher than that of the *Reichsdeutsche* itself.⁸¹

Such activities, perhaps unsurprisingly, were always also accompanied by ideological declarations. As Sepp Janko himself exclaimed in a 1943 speech that closed an "*Arbeitsmaiden-Lager*" ("work maiden camp") in Franzfeld, these girls' service

⁷⁹ AMV/KB 6841 el. 10, "Arbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend," *Verordnungsblatt*, no. 10 (5.1942), 3.

⁸⁰ "Kriegseinsatz der Volksgruppe," pp. 2-3, PA AA, R 100550, fol. 94-95.

⁸¹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 200.

represented a “battle.” The first battle to be celebrated that day was the one being fought by the *Volksgruppe*’s “men, sons, and brothers who, like their borderland-ancestors, rushed to the weapon and thereby tied into an old tradition.”⁸² The second battle was the one being fought “by our women, who in absence of their men are doing all the work that is otherwise completed by [their] husbands, fathers, brothers, son-in-laws or farm hands.” According to Janko, this work served multiple purposes. Especially youth, in their joint service, could “truly” forge a “*Volksgemeinschaft*.” Furthermore, it was only through such “sacrifice” on the home front that the military front—the supposed arena of liberation from centuries of “oppression”—would succeed. Finally, as Janko explained, the local “*Volksgenossen*” had not been able to prepare and “develop” themselves as thoroughly as the *Reichsdeutsche* due to “previous circumstances.” Now, however, was the *Volksgruppe*’s moment to show Germany how well they could do their “duty.” Now, it was possible for the *Donauschwaben* to join the *Volk*’s “chain” and to help secure “the existence of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of Germans.”⁸³

2. *The Deutsche Jugend Press*

As Janko’s speeches illustrate, the physical mobilization of youth in the Western Banat was to be both accompanied and accomplished by their ideological formation. As the Banat’s youth authorities lamented in 1942, an at times difficult transition had taken place in April 1941. While the *Erneuerungsbewegung* previously had brought “the best material, a selection” of youth to the *Deutsche Jugend*, after April 1941, “a mass, both good and bad” of largely disorganized and undisciplined youth were suddenly forced to join the organization. It therefore became the *Deutsche Jugend*’s utmost priority to “organize, tighten, and weld together” the Banat’s ethnic German youth physically, morally, and ideologically.⁸⁴ To that effect, it would not suffice to merely formally

⁸² “*Erstens sind unsere Männer, Söhne und Brüder, wie einstens ihre Grenzer-Ahnen, alle unter die Waffe geeilt, und haben somit an eine alte Tradition angeknüpft.*” Sepp Janko, “Zum Abschluss des Arbeitsmaiden-Lagers (1943),” *Reden und Aufsätze* (Betschkerek: Druckerei der Volksgruppenführung, 1944), 153.

⁸³ Janko, “Zum Abschluss des Arbeitsmaiden-Lagers (1943),” 154.

⁸⁴ “*Ein Unterschied jedoch: Was früher mit dabei war, war bestes Material, war Auslese — denn nur die tüchtigen [sic] kamen ... Was nach dem April 1941 dazukam, war Masse, war gut und schlecht — und diese Masse musste nun zunächst organisatorisch erfasst, gestrafft und zusammengeschweisst werden.*” Georg Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues und der Bewährung* (Betschkerek: Die ‘Deutsche Jugend’ im Banat und in Serbien, c. 1942), 20.

incorporate thousands of youth into the *Deutsche Jugend*; rather, their moral formation was also to be fostered through an ideological education, supported to a major extent by an ethnic German-specific youth press.

Prior to 1941, *Donauschwaben* youth in the Western Banat had already been exposed to a German-specific, generally pro-National Socialist youth press. Some of this press, as we have seen, had been imported from the *Reich* by school teachers and youth educators. Other publications, such as *Schaffende Jugend*, had arisen from within the *Donauschwaben*'s own, predominantly *Kulturbund*-based press landscape. After 1941, some reformulations of the Western Banat's youth press began to take place. As during the interwar period, certain publications were officially imported from the *Reich* under the Western Banat's German administration. These publications included magazines like "*Hilf mit*" and "*Jugendburg*."⁸⁵ Furthermore, under the tutelage of the *Volksgruppe*'s press and propaganda office ("*Abteilung für Presse und Propaganda*"), the *Schaffende Jugend* continued to be published after July 1941 as the official "voice" of the Western Banat's *Landesjugendführung*. Containing essays on "questions of youth education," reports on youth events, special columns on girls' activities, social work, and sports, as well as a variety of photographs and illustrations, the *Schaffende Jugend* was sent to every *Deutsche Jugend* member as soon as they had paid their monthly youth membership contribution.⁸⁶

After the establishment of the semi-autonomous Western Banat, however, the National Socialist youth press experienced a considerable expansion. In order to support the *Volksgruppe*'s "central managing and monitoring of the entire schooling in worldview," the *Volksgruppe*'s propaganda agency began publishing "educational materials" to be used for *Heimabende*, youth training camps, and privately.⁸⁷ Special brochures and booklets on topics such as "January 30th, 1933" (the date Hitler became Chancellor of Germany), "Race and Heredity" ("*Rasse und Vererbung*"), "'Praise for Mother' (for Mothers' Day)" ["*Lob der Mutter' (zum Muttertag)*"], "The Peasantry in German History" ("*Das Bauerntum in der deutschen Geschichte*"), and the Nazi hero Horst Wessel were printed by the *Volksgruppe*'s official publisher, the *Banater Druckerei*

⁸⁵ *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen unserer Heimatfront* (Betschkerek: Presse- und Propagandaamt der Volksgruppenführung, Banater Druckerei, 1943), p. 24, PA AA, R 100380-4.

⁸⁶ *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues und der Bewährung*, 75.

⁸⁷ "*Die gesamte weltanschauliche Schulungsarbeit wird von hier aus zentral gelenkt und überwacht.*" *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen*, 18-19.

in Betschkerek, and distributed across the Western Banat over the following years. According to the *Volksgruppe's* propaganda office, by 1943, some 46,800 copies had been distributed to its local branches, at *Heimabende*, and during “educational” lecture tours.⁸⁸

In order to accommodate the growing ethnic German school system, the *Volksgruppe's* propaganda office further launched a monthly magazine for ethnic German schoolchildren. Entitled *Kinderland: Zeitschrift für Schule und Elternhaus* (“Children’s Land: Magazine for School and Parental Home”), the publication appeared from April 1943 onwards. Simultaneously published as an “A” edition for older children and youth with longer texts and smaller fonts, and a “B” edition with shortened, simplified versions of the same texts for younger children, *Kinderland* focused on those topics so prevalent in National Socialist literature as a whole. As with interwar (youth) publications, one of *Kinderland's* main themes was the *Donauschwaben's* history and identity. The June 1943 issue, for instance, opened with a photograph of an “*Ansiedlerhaus*” (a settlers’ home from the time of Maria Theresa) and a saying on the plight of the first *Donauschwaben* settlers— repeated across the 1930s and early 1940s German-language press, current *Donauschwaben* historiography, as well as interviewees’ memories:

*Die Ersten fanden den Tod,
Die Zweiten die Not,
Die Dritten erst hatten Brot.*⁸⁹

Drawing on a mythologized past of the brave, culture-bearing settler, these publications presented the Banat’s *Donauschwaben* as the carriers of a particularly “German” work ethic, of a deep emotional connection to the (Banat) “homeland,” and— as with the Banat poet Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn— of culture.⁹⁰ This specific Banat

⁸⁸ *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen*, 19.

⁸⁹ *Kinderland: Zeitschrift für Schule und Elternhaus* (Belgrade: Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien, Hauptamt für Schulwesen, Druckerei ‘Prinz Eugen’), vol. 1, no. 4/A (6.1943), 1. “The first [generation] found death; the second hardship; only the third had bread.” The saying refers to the harsh conditions faced by the initial *Donauschwaben* settlers who established agriculture and villages on previously largely uninhabited swamp territories. For other mentionings and recitations of this saying, consider: Fritz Wetter*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (23.3.2014); Anne Wirth*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (28.3.14); Franz Riedl, *Nachbarland Ungarn*, edited by Landesgruppe der Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP in Ungarn (Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags-AG, 1944), 57.

⁹⁰ Nikolaus Britz, “Heimat,” *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 4/A, 3; “Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn,” *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 4/A, 8; “Nach vollbrachter Arbeit lässt sich gut ruh’n,” *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 11/A (11.1943), 1.

heritage, however, would not preclude the Banat's *Donauschwaben* from being "Germans" in blood, in longing, and in sacrifice to the *Reich*. As one September 1943 article explained, the "German fate" as a whole was never one of "gracious abundance" ("*gnadenreicher Üppigkeit*"), but one of scarcity ("*Kargheit*"), struggle, and war. The German mind and soul—as carried through the "German blood"—had therefore always been characterized by "heavy storms" and belligerence. Such characteristics, however, were not necessarily negative. Indeed, there was only one way in which the Germans, including the *Donauschwaben*, would finally fulfill their longing and their destiny: by learning "that true hate is as noble as true love."⁹¹

Exposed to essays on the life and "heroism" of Hitler—from his birth, to the 1923 *Putsch* at Munich's *Feldherrnhalle*, to his current position as Germany's *Führer*—as well as pledges to "Germandom," supposed letters from the front, and portraits of NSDAP functionaries like Baldur von Schirach, the Banat's children and youth became inundated with teachings that their "Germanness" was tied intricately to a belief in National Socialism and a service to the *Reich*.⁹² Even children and youth were implored to raise "the sword and plow [to] secure the victory of the German people."⁹³ One day, the publications suggest, they too would fight and die for Adolf Hitler and his idea, and for a "Germany which has become big and strong ... under the sign of the swastika."⁹⁴

Youth literature was not only expanded for the school and home, however. Existing extra-curricular publications, like *Schaffende Jugend*, were extended, while entirely new publications, like male and female-specific editions of *Führerdienst der DJ* (a magazine intended primarily for youth leaders) and *Der Pimpf* (aimed at the youth leaders of the younger male cohorts) began appearing between 1942 and 1943. *Schaffende Jugend*, started in September 1938 by Yugoslavia's *Kulturbund*, especially flourished under the *Volksgruppe*'s leadership, taking its previously already pro-National Socialist sentiments to new heights. One 1943 poem, entitled "*Volk ans Gewehr!*" ("People to Arms!"), for

⁹¹ "... dass der echte Hass so edel ist wie die echte Liebe." Kurt Eggers, "Vom Deutschen," *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 7/A (9.1943), 3.

⁹² "Der 9. November" and "Der Marsch zur Feldherrnhalle," *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 10/A (11.1943), 2-3; "Adolf Hitlers Rede vor dem Volksgericht am 24. März 1924" and "Gelöbnis," *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 10/A, 4; "Die Mutter des Führers," *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 1/B (4.1943), 4; "Baldur von Schirach," *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 2/A (5.1943), 8.

⁹³ "Das Schwert und der Pflug sichern dem deutschen Volk den Sieg." *Kinderland*, vol. 1, no. 9/A (10.1943), 1.

⁹⁴ "Der 9. November," *Kinderland*, 2.

instance, encouraged youth to help “murder the enemies of German freedom!”⁹⁵ Other issues distributed the now common odes to Hitler’s “glory” and pledges of “faith to you [Hitler], as you are the nation, ... Germany.”⁹⁶ “Commandments” for German youth, imploring them to have no “faith” and no “honor” beyond that of the “Fatherland,” no aims and no concerns besides a “victorious Germany,” and a heart rife with “hatred for [their] enemies,” similarly adorned *Schaffende Jugend*’s pages.⁹⁷ Ultimately, young people’s voices were to unite in one giant chorus: “*Führer*, we belong to you!”⁹⁸

In an attempt to support their ideological messages with episodes from “reality,” *Schaffende Jugend*’s publishers circulated regular reports and praise on the *Deutsche Jugend*’s undertakings within the Western Banat. According to one early 1943 article, the year 1942 had teemed with success: over eight hundred boys and girls had helped bring in the harvest in their *Landdienst*, over six thousand books had been collected for German soldiers at the front, countless tons of paper and fabric had been gathered and recycled, membership statistics rose steadily, and the “pre-military training of the older boys” had given them “a soldierly, guarding stance” (“*soldatisch-wehrhaften Haltung*”).⁹⁹ Other issues reported on the *Deutsche Jugend*’s Christmas performances, consisting of the same pseudo-pagan, Christian mixture established during the 1930s; various youth leadership camps (“*Führerschulungslager*”); girls’ and boys’ “*Heimabende*” and excursions; and the very well-publicized 1943 DJ agricultural and trade competitions (“*bäuerliche Berufswettkampf*” and “*Berufswettkampf*”) for youth in apprenticeships and employment.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ “*Wir wolln [sic] die Feinde deutscher Freiheit morden!*” From poem by Baldur von Schirach, “Volk ans Gewehr,” *Schaffende Jugend: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Jugend im Banat und in Serbien* (Belgrade: Landesjugendführung im Banat und in Serbien, Druckerei ‘Prinz Eugen’), vol. 2, no. 1-2 (1943), 1.

⁹⁶ “*Ich glaube an Dich, denn Du bist die Nation.*” From poem by Baldur von Schirach, *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 5-6, 9.

⁹⁷ “Gebote an die Jugend,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 3, 10.

⁹⁸ “*Führer, dir gehören wir!*” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1944), 6.

⁹⁹ Hans Rasimus, “Ein Jahr Einsatz unserer Jungen und Mädels: Kurzer Rückblick auf die Arbeit der DJ,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 1-2.

¹⁰⁰ “Vorweihnachtliche Feier der DJ. in Werschetz,” “Weihnachtliche Wekaustellung des DMB,” and “Die Werschetzer Spielschar macht Dorfabende!,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 7-8; Hans Rollinger, “Stets die Treuesten der Treuen: Führerschulungslager der DJ,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 9; Greti Gösser, “Aus der Arbeit der Jungmädels,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 16; Elly Herzog, “Pimpfe und Jungmädels auf Fahrt!,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 17; “Der bäuerliche Berufswettkampf 1943 der DJ. im Banat,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 5-6, 14-16; “Pimpfe des Bannes ‘Nord’ Spielen” and “Zum Berufswettkampf der ‘Deutschen Jugend’ 1943,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 5-6, 26-27.

The *Schaffende Jugend* further highlighted the *Deutsche Jugend*'s military aims. In 1944, for example, a lengthy report with photographs was published on the “*WE-Lager*” (“*Wehrtüchtigungslager*,” or military training camps) that the SS had organized for the Banat’s DJ members that past winter. “Rarely does our rural youth travel beyond the Banat’s borders; even more rarely does one of us go to the mountains,” the article opened. However, thanks to a cooperation between the *Landesjugendführung* and the *Ersatzkommando Süd-Ost* of the *Waffen-SS*, a handful of boys from the Banat were now being sent to Austria, to Carinthia or Styria’s mountains, every four weeks for military training. Meeting first in Betschkerek, the *Deutsche Jugend* members then traveled by train to the “motherland,” where they attended lectures, learned how to shoot and ski, and gained a few kilograms in preparation for their service on the front. As the article concluded, through their training, these youth had “experienced the *Reich* of Germans”; as a result, “they now know Germany and love it all the more.”¹⁰¹

In a pattern already established during the interwar period by youth publications—Christian and National Socialist alike—the *Schaffende Jugend* framed itself during the early 1940s as an interactive paper, eager for the reports and articles of actual youth. One stunning example of this kind of activity is a “*Preisaußschreiben*” (prize competition) launched by the *Landesjugendführung* and the *Schaffende Jugend*. In early 1943, LJF official and youth press editor Hans Rasimus published a call for essays in the *Schaffende Jugend*, urging children and youth to send “essays and narratives” about “the events of the March and April days in 1941.” Focusing on their “own experiences”—or those of their friends, families, or even entire villages—youth were to submit stories “entirely based on truth” of the changes that occurred during those eventful weeks. The fifteen best essays would be honored with a book prize and with publication in an LJF magazine. A selection of suggested topics, too, was included. The range of these is both wide and shocking: articles on “the grand parades and drunkenness of the Serbs” prior to their defeat were sought, as were ones describing the smashing of Chetnik forces, the public burning of Serbian (school) books, the “disappearance” of Serbian administrators and postmen, the raising of swastika flags, and the hanging of Hitler portraits in German homes after the “German victory.” Other suggestions revolved around the sudden experience of mobilization, including “My Big Brother is Becoming a Soldier” (in the *Waffen-SS*); “My

¹⁰¹ “*Sie haben ... das Reich der Deutschen erlebt ... Sie kennen nun Deutschland und lieben es umsomehr.*” Klaus Roth-Wagner, “Banater Jungen in WE-Lager der HJ,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 3, no. 3, 8-10.

Father is Becoming a German Soldier”; “The Brave *Bürgerwehr*”; “*Heil! Heil! The Germans Have Come!*”; “Mother! A Letter from the Front Arrived!”; and “Peter Fell on the Eastern Front.” Even the Holocaust— though certainly not explicitly named or described— made an appearance in these essay topics. One suggested essay, entitled “Isak is Finally Working,” thus urged young writers to reflect on the manners in which “the Jew, whether Isak, Moses, or Kohn,” who had previously only “offered high sums for the *Führer*’s head” and engaged in illegal deals with Serbian officers, now finally “worked under supervision.” Another essay topic, entitled “Rebekka with the Star,” encouraged youth to submit a description of how “Rebekka”— “whom everyone knows”— must now “wear her identifier, the star of Zion, and walk in the middle of the road.”¹⁰²

Based on available 1940s editions of *Schaffende Jugend*, it is unclear whether any such essays, if submitted for the competition, were ever published in the magazine.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, essays elicited by this competition seem to have appeared in a new youth publication, started in 1942, for the *Deutsche Jugend*’s younger (ten- to fourteen-year-old) cohort: *Der Pimpf: Zeitschrift des Deutschen Jungvolks im Banat-Serbien*.¹⁰⁴ *Deutsche Jugend* members submitted several short essays published in *Der Pimpf* in mid-1943, including one of the individuals interviewed for this dissertation. Focusing primarily on topics like the *Landdienst*, DJ games, summer and weekend camps, a sports camp in Pančevo, and pranks played by *Pimpfe*, none of the essays address those topics requested by Rasimus.¹⁰⁵ The reasons for this are not entirely clear. Perhaps children and youth had not submitted essays on topics as sensitive (or, up to that point, as removed from their life worlds and/or intellectual consciousness) as the falling of fathers and brothers on the front, or of the public humiliation and rounding up of Jewish neighbors.

¹⁰² “Preis Ausschreiben,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 20-23.

¹⁰³ While certain essays framed as a young reader’s contribution appeared in this and similar magazines, it is unclear whether these essays were really penned by youth, or were simply contributed by the magazine’s editors and authors. Any potential censorship of these essays is difficult to determine based on the available material. This publication’s surviving collections, furthermore, are incomplete.

¹⁰⁴ On the founding of *Der Pimpf*, see: “Kameraden! Kameradinnen!,” *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Consider: “Der erste Tag im Einsatz,” “Ein Erlebnis bei einem Geländespiel,” “Ein Sommerlager,” “Wochenendschulung im Lager,” “Im Sportlager zu Pantschowa,” “Drei Tage im Sportlager,” and “Pimpfenstreich,” *Der Pimpf: Zeitschrift des Deutschen Jungvolks im Banat-Serbien* (Werschetz: Landesjugendführung im Banat-Serbien, Banater Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt), vol. 2, no. 5-6 (1943), 12-20.

Perhaps, too, the *Landesjugendführung* and the *Schaffende Jugend*'s publishers deemed the responses they received on such issues unsuitable for publication within their journal.

Regardless, the onslaught of National Socialist youth propaganda continued through other channels. Representing a more professionalized version of those “*Arbeitsbriefe*” (instructional letters) sent out to Yugoslavia’s *Kulturbund* leaders during the mid-1930s, a monthly (or bi-monthly) *Führerdienst der DJ* (“The DJ’s Service to the *Führer*”) publication was launched, in separate issues for the male and female youth groups. Unlike *Schaffende Jugend*, the *Führerdienst* publications were intended to be seen not by all youth group members, but only by the leaders of local DJ and DMB (“*Deutscher Mädelsbund*”) chapters. Designed as an instructional manual to be passed on from generation to generation of youth leaders, the *Führerdienst* magazine disseminated both practical advice and ideological content.¹⁰⁶ Dedicated to two or (by 1944) one month at a time, each *Führerdienst* issue contained a detailed “*Dienstplan*” (schedule) of the topics to be highlighted in the youth groups’ *Heimatabende* and other activities each week. A list of the month’s “*Gedenktage*” (“memorial days”)— including, in April 1944, Otto von Bismarck and Adolf Hitler’s birthdays, the 1940 occupation of Denmark and Norway, the death of the Habsburg Prince Eugen, and the 1941 start of Nazi Germany’s war against Yugoslavia— further opened each new issue. These particular dates, themes, and characters were then further described in each issue, in short texts to be read aloud at youth meetings. Finally, instructions on youth activities were given: for girls, these included singing, folk dancing, athletic exercises, and Easter crafts, while boys were to dedicate themselves mostly to sports, map reading, survival skills, and pre-military training (“*Wehrausbildung*”).¹⁰⁷

The *Führerdienst*’s most prominent aim— besides offering a month-by-month manual for youth meetings— was to prepare the DJ and DMB members for their “*Leistungsabzeichen*,” a badge certifying the successful passing of an elite series of annual tests. For both boys and girls (above the age of twelve), these tests included sports examinations in running, high jump, long jump, and swimming. For boys, however, the

¹⁰⁶ *Führerdienst der DJ: Ausgabe für Jungmädels* (Betschkerek: Landesjugendführung im Banat-Serbien, Banater Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt), vol. 3, no. 4 (4.1944), 51.

¹⁰⁷ See *Führerdienst der DJ: Ausgabe für Jungmädels* (4.1944); *Führerdienst der DJ: Ausgabe für Jungen* (Betschkerek: Landesjugendführung im Banat-Serbien, Banater Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt), vol. 2, no. 2 (3/4.1943).



Fig. 3.6 Girls' Group in Weißkirchen (Bela Crkva) in 1941
 Source: *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weißkirchen im Banat*. Salzburg: Verein Weißkirchner Ortsgemeinschaft, 1980. Appendix.

required times and distances were more challenging, and the examinations also included cycling, chin-ups, and club throwing (*“Keulenweitwerfen”*). Furthermore, boys were to demonstrate certain achievements in their pre-military training, including in air rifle shooting, marching, map reading, camouflage, basic communications and reporting, and orientation. Girls, on the other hand, were to go on a “day’s excursion” (*“Tagesfahrt”*) of fifteen kilometers, be able to identify the major tree and grain species, and know the text of at least three mandatory DJ songs.¹⁰⁸

However, for both boys and girls, such athletic, pre-military, and basic cultural competencies were insufficient. Indeed, both DJ and DMB members were also to demonstrate certain ideological understandings. In order to receive their *Leistungsabzeichen*, both boys and girls were required to be able to recount facts from the life of Adolf Hitler and other Nazi “heroes,” the basic structures of the *Volksgruppenführung*, the history of their region and the “Germans’” role in its purported economic and cultural flourishing, the NSDAP party program, and the ongoing war. Here, too, not much was left to chance: for each topic, the *Führerdienst* printed a selection of

¹⁰⁸ “Prüfungsbedingungen für das Jungmädelleistungsabzeichen,” *Führerdienst der DJ: Ausgabe für Jungmädels*, vol. 2, no. 2 (3/4.1943), 4-5; “Prüfungsbedingungen für das Leistungsabzeichen der Deutschen Jugend in Bronze,” *Führerdienst der DJ: Ausgabe für Jungen*, vol. 2, no. 2, 6-7.

texts, to be read aloud and memorized at youth meetings, on the purported struggle, destiny, and glory of the Germans under Adolf Hitler.¹⁰⁹

This intermingling of practical training and ideological assessment could also be found in areas beyond the *Heimabend* and the *Leistungsabzeichen*. In 1943, for instance, DJ chief Franz Germann launched a “*Berufswettkampf*” (vocational competition) for those youth already in apprenticeships and employment. Excellence in a youth’s particular trade, however, would only be recognized if the youth also demonstrated an understanding of the National Socialist “*Weltanschauung*.” The precise content to be comprehended and regurgitated was distributed in a sixty-one-page pamphlet entitled “*Berufswettkampf der DJ. im Banat und in Serbien 1943— Weltanschaulicher Teil*.” Like the *Führerdienst* issues, this pamphlet highlighted topics such as the history of German settlement in the Banat, World War I and World War II, the life of Hitler, the importance of the agricultural class, and the *Volksgruppe*’s administrative structures. However, particularly striking in this publication is its explicit discussion of anti-Semitism. In a section entitled “Why Are We Fighting the Jews?” (“*Warum bekämpfen wir das Judentum?*”), Jews were described as a “foreign race in Europe” that is “nomadic,” “dirty,” “deceitful,” and characterized by “rapacity, greed, speculation, and the purse.”¹¹⁰ Due to “his racial, blood-based constitution,” “the Jew cannot become an honest, hardworking person.” Therefore, “only through the force of the whip, as the Germans are, for example, doing it now in the East, can he be led to a fruitful vocation.”¹¹¹

According to the *Berufswettkampf* publication, anti-Semitism was “the fight against the Jews,” as it “has existed for as long as there have been Jews on earth, and as it will exist for as long as there are Jews.”¹¹² Ultimately, the entire current war was being fought

¹⁰⁹ See previously cited *Führerdienst* issues.

¹¹⁰ “*Das Judentum ist ein fremdrassiges Volk in Europa. Es gehört zu den Nomaden ... Das Judentum kennt nur ein Ziel: Die Raffgier, die Habsucht, die Spekulation und den Geldbeutel. Es ist unehrlich, schmutzig, hinterlistig und schleicht sich überall dort ein, wo es Vorteile für sich erwartet.*” “*Warum bekämpfen wir das Judentum?*” *Berufswettkampf der DJ. im Banat und in Serbien 1943: Weltanschaulicher Teil*, edited by Hedi Behr (Betschkerek: Landesjugendführung der DJ in Banat und in Serbien, Banater Druckerei, 1943), 56.

¹¹¹ “*Denn der Jude kann aus seiner rassischen, blutmässigen Veranlagung heraus einfach kein ehrlicher, arbeitsamer Mensch werden. Nur durch den Zwang mit der Peitsche wie das die Deutschen jetzt z.B. im Osten machen, kann er einer fruchtbaren Arbeit zugeführt werden.*” *Berufswettkampf*, 56.

¹¹² “*Den Kampf gegen das Judentum nennen wir den Antisemitismus. Dieser besteht nicht erst seit der Machtergreifung durch den Führer 1933, sondern er besteht schon, seitdem es überhaupt Juden auf der Welt gibt, und er wird bestehen solange es Juden geben wird.*” *Berufswettkampf*, 57.

against “the Jewish world domination” and its pawns, England, America, and Russia. Or, as stated in a section on the justification of the ongoing war:

As long as a single German still lives, the fight will continue; as long as a single German still fights, there will be victory. This time, the *Führer* will lead the German *Volk* to the greatest victory of its history, liberating it conclusively from the danger that has been brought to it by the Jews and their accomplices.¹¹³

The *Deutsche Jugend*'s members, ultimately, were not only to contribute their bodies to agricultural labor, pre-military training, and the *Reich*'s war effort; rather, they were also to mold their minds according to National Socialist tenets of German national and racial superiority, anti-Semitism, and the need for total war.

According to the *Volksgruppe*'s statistics, almost ninety percent of the Banat's youth— or 16,044 individuals— were officially enrolled in the *Deutsche Jugend* and its subsidiaries by May 1943. Some 3,764 youth had joined the *Deutsche Jugend* by then, comprising ninety-one percent of their *Donauschwaben* cohort by age group and gender. A further 3,764 had joined the *Deutsches Jungvolk* (representing another ninety-one percent of their age and gender category), while 5,070 joined the *Deutscher Mädelsbund* (86.09%), and 3,446 became *Deutscher Jungmädelsbund* members (99.16%).¹¹⁴ At least outwardly, it seems like the *Volksgruppe* successfully maintained the *Donauschwaben*'s pre-1941 levels of youth mobilization, drawing the vast majority of ethnic German children into unified, highly ideologized National Socialist youth organizations.

These statistics, however, say little about the manner in which such a large-scale recruitment of ethnic German youth actually took place; what these young people did besides agricultural service, *Heimabende*, and pre-military training; what initially attracted individuals to these groups; what the interplay between mass coercion and individual enthusiasm may have been; or the ways in which such youth mobilization may have fed into and exacerbated pre-existing communal tensions. It is to an elucidation of such questions that this chapter now turns.

¹¹³ “Solange aber noch ein Deutscher lebt, wird gekämpft, solange noch ein Deutscher kämpft, wird gesiegt werden. Der Führer wird diesmal das deutsche Volk zum grössten Siege seiner Geschichte führen und es endgültig befreien von der Gefahr, die ihm bisher durch das Judentum und seiner Helfeshelfer gebracht hat.” *Berufswettkampf*, 30.

¹¹⁴ Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 283.

3. *The Donauschwaben Youth and the Deutsche Jugend: Activities, Ideologies, Conflicts (Micro-Level Perspectives)*

a. *Former Youth Recall the Deutsche Jugend*

Considering the scale of extra-curricular youth mobilization during the late 1930s and early 1940s, it is hardly surprising that all former *Donauschwabern* children and youth with memories of this period remember the *Deutsche Jugend* formations that entered their communities' lives. Asked about the presence of youth groups in their towns, all interviewees recalled the *Deutsche Jugend*, and how— in its various age and gender-specific arrangements— the “*Kulturbund*” youth groups became a mandatory organization for them, their siblings, and their friends. The manner in which individuals recalled their own experiences with the DJ of course varied. As we shall see, some interviewees barely spoke of their or their peers' involvement with the *Deutsche Jugend*, claiming simply that it was an obligatory exercise, frequently evaded, that carried no weight with the *Donauschwabern* politically, ideologically, or psychologically. Others, still proud of their achievements within the *Deutsche Jugend*, reflected in great detail on the organization, activities, and (personal) significance of the DJ. This divergence undoubtedly has a variety of origins: differences in personal experiences and viewpoints during the late 1930s and early 1940s— fostered at least in part by varieties in age, gender, religion, family and peer environment, and hometown. These would fracture infinitely during the postwar period, as realizations of the horrors of National Socialism and prevalent taboos retrospectively shaped individual reflections and informed the narratives (not) divulged.

Past experiences were explained in light of current opinions, in context of interviewer-interviewee dialog and intersubjectivity, and in an at times emotionally pained setting in which silences constructed around prevailing taboos were broken through narratives of personal trauma, postwar disillusionment, and loss.¹¹⁵ Despite their

¹¹⁵ Methodological and theoretical aspects of this oral history work are discussed in more detail in the dissertation's introduction. Briefly stated, this project of course does not presume that oral histories lead to historical “truths” in a conventional, empirical sense. Rather, it operates under the theories put forth by Alessandro Portelli, Luisa Passerini, and others that oral history narratives reveal truths on a different epistemological plane— at the level of what interviewees “... wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” 50). This work also takes into consideration the problems associated with the intersubjective, dialogic, and intertextual nature of oral history, and the problems of speaking about a topic that has been (for almost three generations now) rendered taboo. For a selection of sources that have inspired the oral history portion of this work,

highly subjective and emotional nature— or, perhaps, precisely because of it— the interviews conducted offer crucial insight into the “effects” of the mass-scale mobilization of ethnic German youth in the Western Banat. Also thanks to their variety, they not only allow for insight into how such events are reflected on today, but also offer glimpses into how the *Deutsche Jugend* was received by the very children and youth whom it targeted.

As oral history interviews show, the *Deutsche Jugend* indeed became a fixture in every *Donauschwaben* town and village in the Western Banat during the early 1940s. Even these groups’ “pre-history” are prominent in *Donauschwaben* memories. Those students and youth groups who had been sent from the *Reich* to the Banat’s ethnic German towns during the 1930s also were noticed and remembered by the region’s *Donauschwaben* children and youth. Michael Bucherer*, born in 1929 in Molidorf/Molin/Mollyfalva, for example, recalled how students visited his hometown in 1933 or 1934. Michael’s mother had been born in Detroit, as his grandparents had emigrated there from the Banat, returning to Molidorf during the early 1920s.¹¹⁶ Following the economic crash in 1929, his uncle and older cousins— previously employed by Detroit’s Ford factory— returned to Molidorf in 1932 for two years. During this time, explained Michael, a group of students came from Germany and “sang and played guitar.” As he was still young, he did not remember much, and did not have much direct contact with these youth to begin with, as they were “already ... seventeen, eighteen.” His older relatives, however, remembered these German youth very well. “Also in the Batschka, they stayed with families, and always maintained contact with [them]” afterwards, he described. His older cousin from Detroit “apparently even fell in love with” one of the students— a Bruno from Karlsruhe— as she explained even many years later how “she always thought of him.”¹¹⁷

Max Becker*, born in Groß Kikinda/Nagykikinda/Velika Kikinda in 1925, similarly explained how “several students” were sent, “probably deliberately [...] by the VoMi,” to spend their summer holidays in the Banat during the mid- and late 1930s.

please see the “works cited” section (including: Camppt, Passerini, Portelli, Rosenthal, Slim, Thompson, Yow).

¹¹⁶ As many interviewees from both the Batschka and the Banat recalled, many *Donauschwaben* had emigrated to North America at the turn of the twentieth century, as economic crisis and reduced chances of acquiring land and property (due to restrictive marriage and inheritance practices) drove many to seek opportunities abroad.

¹¹⁷ Michael Bucherer*, telephone interview with Caroline Mezger (9.10.2014).

“Even before the arrival [‘*Einmarsch*’] of German troops,” these “German students” spent weeks at a time at local *Donauschwaben* homes, receiving “the best food possible, fruit, everything!” and breathing “country air.” His aunt and uncle also hosted two young girls (over two summers) at the family’s vineyard (“*Weingarten*”), where they stayed for up to four weeks at a time. Though he wasn’t sure anymore, “perhaps [the exchange] ran over this pre-military [organization].” Regardless, both Max and his two female cousins were impressed by the girls from Germany. “They admired [those girls] because they spoke such a nice German and, what do I know [chuckles], and were blond!”¹¹⁸ He himself did not interact much with the girls, as he was only about ten or eleven years old, and “what could he start there with such a goddess? [laughs].”¹¹⁹ His cousins, however, maintained epistolary relationships with the visitors for many years, visiting them in Germany, and ultimately departing on their own VoMi-sponsored trip to Germany during the late 1930s.¹²⁰

These visitors from the *Reich*, it seems, were merely a harbinger of what was to follow as soon as German troops entered the Western Banat. As Elmar Müller*, born in 1933 in Modosch/Módos/Jaša Tomić, explained, after 1941, “there was a German administration that was ... directly controlled [‘*gesteuert*’] by Germany.” As a result of the rising “dictatorship,” especially the lives of the local Germans changed. “If there was some kind of national holiday ... a German national holiday ... for example, even for Hitler’s birthday! That was a major holiday ... all Germans *had to* [sic] hang the swastika flag in front of their house,” Elmar elaborated. “No! Other! No Serb, no Hungarian, or whatever, had to do that, but if a German didn’t do that, then he was punished!” The Banat’s ethnic German population, now under the authority of the Banat’s “German military authorities” (“*deutsche Militärverwaltung*”)— a “Nazistic” (“*nazistisch*”) organization backed by the *Banater Staatswache* and similar police forces (“*Polizeigewalt*”)— henceforth had no choice but to at least outwardly conform to National Socialism.¹²¹

Such pressure to conform also affected youth. As Elmar described, the “*Hitler-Jugend* [...], the *Pimpfe*, and how they were all called” were “coercively introduced”

¹¹⁸ “*Die haben sie bewundert, weil sie so schönes Deutsch sprechen und was weiss ich [chuckles], und blond waren!*” Max Becker*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (15.8.2014).

¹¹⁹ “*Und da ist ja neben dran äh ... äh 10-jähriger Lausbub [...] was kann der da mit der äh Göttin anfangen, ned? [laughs]*” Becker, interview.

¹²⁰ Becker, interview.

¹²¹ Elmar Müller*, telephone interview with Caroline Mezger (25.6.2014).

(“*zwangsweise einführt*”) to the Banat after 1941. Never “a great athlete” nor one to be interested in mass events, Elmar “absolutely didn’t like” those meetings (“*Versammlungen*”) and activities introduced by the DJ. “I was a little recalcitrant [*widerspenstig*],” Elmar explained, as he despised that he had “to be there then, on command, from that time to that time” and engage in activities he did not enjoy. Two or three times, Elmar recalled, he was “picked up” by classmates. “Come along! You must be there! There’s no choice!,” they told him. However, Elmar “wanted to be at home and [...] have [his] peace.” After a while, even his classmates gave up, so that Elmar was no longer forced to attend the *Pimpfe* meetings. His older brother, born in 1929, apparently was an introverted person and similarly despised “group things” (“*Gruppensachen*”). Although he was threatened and beaten on several occasions, he “did not go [to DJ meetings] a single time.” The motivations that Elmar and his brother had were not necessarily political; they simply did not like the sports, excursions, marching in uniform, and other activities that for others “would not have been uninteresting.” “I would not say that I was against the political direction,” Elmar stressed. “No! I did not understand that! As a child, one had no idea what ... stood behind it.”¹²²

As Elmar emphasized, the degree of coercion employed to “motivate” participation in *Volksgruppe* organizations depended heavily on the “so-called superiors” (“*sogenannten Vorgesetzten*”). In towns where youth leaders and town authorities were “more radical,” it would have probably been harder to “remove oneself” from the youth groups. Some social pressures certainly existed even in his village. Considering the amount of daily work that the local population— generally composed of farmers and small landowners— had, “nobody would have had the idea to also, what do I know, now also regularly attend sports events and such things!” As a result, these activities frequently had to be “forced upon” people, with “methods” that depended on the particular leader. Many went to sports and similar events simply “so that they could have their peace— ‘Fine, [they thought], I’ll go and jump around a bit [...] and then I’ll have my peace.’”¹²³ However, since his town’s youth and political leaders were not so “radical,” it was

¹²² “*Es war nicht, dass ich jetzt sagen will ich bin ... gegen die politische Richtung gewesen. Nein! ... Das war, das hab ich gar ned verstanden! Das äh als Kind hat man da gar nicht gewusst, wie ... was dahinter steckt.*” Müller, interview.

¹²³ “*Da war keiner auf die Idee gekommen, jetzt auch noch, weiss ich, da gross Sportveranstaltungen und so besuchen oder sonst ... Das musste alles ähm mehr oder weniger, wie gesagt, erzwungen werden, wenn ... und da die Methoden waren eben sicher abhängig von dem ... Zuständigen [...] Manche haben auch nur mitgemacht, damit sie ihre Ruhe haben [...] Na ja, gut, geh ich doch mal dahin und turn mal ein bisschen rum und dann hab’ ich meine Ruhe.*” Müller, interview.

comparatively easy to withdraw from such activities, so that few of the *Volksgruppe*'s organizations— besides the military— formed a massive presence in his town.¹²⁴

A similar image of reluctant participation is painted in other interviewees' accounts. As Michael Bucherer stated, youth “did notice the war” because suddenly they were “placed in the Youth [groups] as a matter of course.” “National feelings” and similar sentiments, clarified Michael, were not important, as “few were enthusiastic.” Due to the mandatory nature of youth groups like the “*Jungvolk*,” they had become a “normal thing” in his town. While people “joined because they should have ... or had to,” “coercion” (“*Zwang*”) was not exerted in a militaristic sense, or with brute force. Nevertheless, “somehow one wasn't free” as “there was neither left nor right.” Almost everyone therefore joined organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend* at least officially.¹²⁵

Michael, like his peers, was enrolled in his local youth organization. As he explained, much of this was coordinated through his school and dorm.¹²⁶ Together, the school's boys and girls engaged in sports activities, Michael recalled, though “there wasn't anything militaristic about it [...] everything proceeded calmly!”¹²⁷ Michael did not elaborate much on his experiences within the youth group. Nonetheless, he described in more detail the pre-1941 youth formations, in which he had, according to his own description, never participated. Starting around 1938, his town's youth became “interested” in the folk costumes (“*Trachten*”), dances (“*Tanzkränzchen*”), music, and theater of the *Kulturbund*. People over the age of twenty “did not participate at all,” he insisted. It was thus primarily the very young who participated in plays, theater performances for children, traditional songs (“*Volkslieder*”), and other cultural programs. However, as Michael emphasized, “they were not interested in politics.”¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Müller, interview. Reasons for why the National Socialist leadership in some Banat towns was less “radical” are also explored in the following chapter.

¹²⁵ “*Des war die, ähm, es war ja eine normale Sache! [...] Dass die Jugend ... organisiert war in ... Jugendgruppen ... Wie Jungvolk oder so! ... Und die Mädels ja auch, des war mal so, da ... da gab's ja kein links und kein rechts ... keine n'aber! ... Also ob die Leute begeistert waren oder ned, die haben halt eben mitgemacht, weil sie mitmachen ... sollt-, mussten eigentlich [...] Ich meine, s'war keen Zwang, dass das irgendwie militärisch gehandhabt wurde ... Des war's ned ... Aber ... irgendwie war's doch irgendwie uns ... äh man war ned ... frei ...*” Bucherer, interview.

¹²⁶ More on the interplay between schools, dormitories, and the DJ in the following chapter.

¹²⁷ “*Aber irgendwie, dass des ... äh im militärisch oder was war, da war nix drin! ... Das war alles ruhig verlaufen ...*” Bucherer, interview.

¹²⁸ “*Mit Politik haben die [...] ned viel am [...] Hut gehabt ...*” Bucherer, interview. Once again, the cultural here stands in for the political.

In retrospect, it is difficult to reconstruct how much “enthusiasm” (“*Begeisterung*”) individuals had for organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend*, or for National Socialism. More detailed descriptions of personal involvement in the *Deutsche Jugend* and its subsidiaries almost always were couched either as “hearsay” (“*Hörensagen*”), or were told from the perspective of colleagues who either participated in these programs themselves, or observed the interviewees’ engagement with the youth groups. Fritz Wetter*, born in Karlsdorf/Nagykárolyfalva/Banatski Karlovac in 1931, for instance, explained— like Elmar and Michael— that he joined the local “*Hitler-Jugend*” as it was a requirement. Unlike in other parts of the interview, in which he expressed a continued admiration for Hitler, however, Fritz stopped short of explicitly stating his feelings towards his DJ service. Instead, he recounted a story in which he was teased by a peer— a memory trigger/narrative device also used by other interviewees, as we shall see. One day during the early 1940s, Fritz explained, his “*Hitler-Jugend*” brigade received an order to clean up his town’s military barack’s yard. “I worked with rake and shovel,” Fritz described, “and then this, this Seppi Volg [Josef Volg] came [...] towards me, [...] laughed, and said: ‘[Fritz] is working so hard, one would believe it was his own [yard]!’”¹²⁹

As Fritz stated, “Hitler Youth” was “only a name,” as, “in truth, nothing really happened there.”¹³⁰ Every once in a while, he recalled, his youth group had to clean the local military barracks. They had “*Heimabende*” at which they played and sang songs like the “*Horst-Wessel-Lied*.” Both boys and girls (in their “BDM”) held regular meetings in groups of twenty or thirty, at which the girls wore traditional dresses (the “*schwäbische Volkstracht*”) and boys donned a uniform with a “brown shirt and black tie” and a “dagger” (“*Dolch*”). Everyone “felt very proud” in that uniform, Fritz explained, as it was a “*reichsdeutsche* uniform” modeled on the Hitler Youth’s garments. Hitler, elaborated Fritz, “was very, very prominent and recognized back then.”¹³¹ Hitler was “the most famous man in the world,” and his Germany “venerated.”¹³² Indeed, following their “oppression during the Yugoslav time [...] it was a liberation for people to finally ...

¹²⁹ “*Ich hab doch mit de Schaufel und Rechen gearbeitet, und dann kommt dieser ... dieser Seppi Volg hier ... und hier [points at him on a group photograph] ... den da ... Kommt auf mich zu und sagt ... sa äh lacht und sagt ... ‘Der Hans arbeitet so fleissig, wie wenn es das seine wäre!’*” Wetter, interview.

¹³⁰ “*So ... die Jugendgruppen, aber ... m, des war, war mehr da, da der Name ... in Wirklichkeit hat sich da nichts getan.*” Wetter, interview.

¹³¹ “*Hitler war damals sehr, sehr angesehen und anerkannt.*” Wetter, interview.

¹³² “[*Hitler*] war damals [...] der bekannteste Mann der, der Welt [...] Des Deutschland ist sehr verehrt worden.” Wetter, interview.

[sing] German songs.” During the early 1940s, Hitler had simply attempted to “bring order into the Southeastern European countries [...] according to the German point of view.” While “not everyone liked it,” especially the local Germans, in their position on the “peripheral territories,” were “impressed by Hitler, and [by the fact that] the *Reich* took an active interest in them.”¹³³

In some cases, such fascination with Germany and the National Socialists sufficed to inspire the Western Banat’s youth to join the *Deutsche Jugend* and excel within its ranks. Max Becker, for example, spoke for several hours about his personal involvement with the *Deutsche Jugend*. Born in 1925 to a family of landowners, Max’s upbringing had always been a privileged one, as his father—the owner and director of a chain factory—ensured that Max, though not necessarily his female relatives, would receive the education and attention worthy of the family’s only “male heir” (“*Stammhalter*”).¹³⁴ Eventually enjoying an elite German education, Max had been active in the *Deutsche Jugend* since at least the late 1930s. Already in the summer of 1940, Max worked as a volunteer in Semlin’s relocation camps for Bessarabian Germans. “It was during the summer holidays,” Max explained, and his *Deutsche Jugend* district centered in Werschetz “had a kind of ... summer action plan [*‘Sommereinsatzplan’*].” The youth mobilized “wore uniforms ... erected tents ... in the Danube sand, on the shore,” and greeted the Bessarabian Germans who arrived in Semlin by ship. The boys then “emptied out” the ships and moved the “resettlers’” luggage from their horse-drawn waggons onto train cars. “I don’t know what they did with the [...] farmers’ waggons,” Max said; “perhaps they gave them to the [local] farmers.” In any case, “all of the horses were confiscated by the *Wehrmacht*.” As Max stated, it was interesting to speak to the Bessarabian Germans: “they also spoke German [...] a chopped up [German] with Russian, right? ... But ... In principle, German, like us in the Banat.”¹³⁵ Many of the

¹³³ “*Wir sind halt nämlich in der jugoslawischen Zeit auch sehr unterdrückt worden und das war dann ... für die Leute ... auch irgend so eine Befreiung, so endlich ... Deutsche Lieder, des is’ immer halt so in diesen ... Randgebieten, dass wenn dann die Deutschen wieder ... als ... Hitler sehr beeindruckt sind [chuckles lightly] wenn sich das Reich ... um sie annimmt und ...*”; “*Sein [Hitlers] Ziel war ja auch in, in diese Länder, in diese ... äh Südosteuropäischen Länder, Jugoslawien, Rumänien, Ungarn ... und nach ... der deutschen Sicht Ordnung ... hineinzubringen [...] aber die haben doch alle nicht so gerne ...*” Wetter, interview.

¹³⁴ Becker, interview.

¹³⁵ In keeping with citation standards, square brackets—or, [...]—were not used to frame an ellipsis when citing written sources in this dissertation. However, as I use “...” to indicate pauses in speech in oral history quotations, I have used the symbol [...] to indicate my own omissions when quoting oral history interviews. “*Mir haben mit den Leuten natürlich g’sprochen, die haben ja au Deutsch ... äh g’sprochen,*

Bessarabian Germans were apparently also desperate for money, selling items (“*was [...] verkitschen*”) whenever they could to the local population. As a result, Max purchased an MG 08/15 weapon “from Austria” from a Bessarabian German man who had used it during World War I— “he was quite happy that he doesn’t need the weapon anymore,” Max chuckled.

In April 1941, Max’s father was picked up from his home twice: once to be taken as a hostage by “Serbs,” who locked “rich” or “prominent” ethnic German men with a *Kulturbund* “function” into the Petrovaradin fortress during the German invasion; once several weeks later to be appointed mayor of Kikinda.¹³⁶ It was in the middle of April, right after Germany started taking over the Banat, and just after his father had returned from being a hostage, Max recalled, when one day he opened the front door to “three ‘black’ men” looking for his father. “They were presumably the ‘civil SS’ [...] with black uniforms,” he explained. Initially shocked, Max relaxed as soon as he realized the men “were *Banater* [...] with a *Donauschwab* dialect.”¹³⁷ Feeling he could trust them, he relayed their message to his father, that he was to report immediately to the townhall (“*Rathaus*”). To the townhall his father went, returning, much to his own surprise, as “civilian” mayor of Kikinda a few hours later.

However, his father’s appointment only lasted for a few months. One very hot August day, Max remembered, a Jewish woman— who had owned the local corner shop— came to his parents in tears, imploring his father to speak to the military authorities. As it was already the end of the working day, Max’s father promised the woman that he would speak to them the next morning. Though he did meet them, Max’s father could not do much. He came home “after negotiating for two hours,” Max explained, filled with “frustration [...] and rage.” Apparently, they had simply rejected his father after a few phone calls with “higher officers,” claiming that “it was military orders and [...] he was only responsible for civilians.” Protesting against his inability to “protect [...] the innocent civilians [...] who have committed no crime,” his father

ned? Also, verhacketes, mit diesem Russisch, ned? ... Aber ... grundsätzlich Deutsch, wie mir im Banat ja auch.” Becker, interview.

¹³⁶ For more on these hostages in the Petrovaradin/Pétervárad/Peterwardein fortress, see: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 94. Max emphasized that his father did not have a “function” within the *Kulturbund*, and that his father was simply taken because he was wealthy.

¹³⁷ “*Jetzt’ müssen das junge Männer gewesen sein ... Banater ... Denn sie haben mich angesprochen, ich hab natürlich, bin erschrocken a biss’l, die ja ... die äh ned? Äh ja äh ... Sie suchen meinen Vater ... Donauschwäbische Dialekt! ... N’da is’ schon mal ... der Stein vom Herzen g’falle, ned?*” Becker, interview.

resigned as mayor that day.¹³⁸ Shortly thereafter, Kikinda's approximately five hundred Jews were "rounded up in two groups" on a Saturday and a Sunday, locked into the town's synagogue, and transported by train over two days to Belgrade, and then to Semlin. The barracks previously used for Bessarabian German "resettlers" were now used as the "Endlager" [sic] for Jews. "There, supposedly! I cannot prove it, that's how it is with the Serbian [history] books! ... They were transported with gas vans ["*Vergasungsautos*"] and gassed along the way."¹³⁹

Such scenes did not seem to have fazed the fifteen-year-old Max very much. Like before, he continued his involvement with the *Deutsche Jugend*, both within and beyond the framework of his dorm and school activities. Although he did not particularly appreciate the frequent drills ("*Exerzieren*")—"Stand still! Turn Right! And so on ..."—organized by his youth group, he enjoyed and excelled in sports. As a result, he became *Bannsportwart* (regional sports leader) for the *Bann* (administrative region) centered in Werschetz at age sixteen. "Back then, one could only [do that job] at age eighteen," Max elaborated; "however, as all eighteen-year-olds had to join the military, I received a string on my uniform as 'provisional *Bannsportwart*.'"¹⁴⁰ Instead of being a purely red string, his was tied with an additional white color. Nevertheless, he was proud of his position. There were only four or five DJ *Banne* in the Western Banat (including Kikinda, Werschetz, Pantschowa, and Betschkerek), Max explained, and they were all slightly larger than the administrative *Banne* drawn by the *Volksgruppe*. In this position, his task was not merely to give *Deutsche Jugend* members sports instructions; rather, "the main thing was that I would teach shooting with small caliber weapons." Indeed, as Max claimed, he was one of "the first educators [...] that was educated in Germany!"¹⁴¹ for that purpose.

¹³⁸ "Und dann hat mein Vater, so hat er's mir erzählt ... ihnen geantwortet ... ned? Er also Bürgermeischer ... Und für die Zivilisten, für seine unschuldigen Bürger die Verantwortung trägt ... Nicht ... Sie beschützen kann! Die unschuldigen Leute! Also beschützen kann ... Die nichts verbochen haben ... Dann ... fühlt er sich nicht ... als Bürgermeischer." Becker, interview.

¹³⁹ For more on the deportation of the Banat's Jews (especially women and children) to Semlin, consider: Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 264; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 252-253. According to Shimizu, local *Volksdeutsche* police and *Deutsche Mannschaft* forces carried out the deportations to Semlin. In March 1942, the first mobile gas chambers, camouflaged as Red Cross vans, arrived there; by June 1942, most of these prisoners had been gassed under HSSPF Meyszner and SS-*Oberführer* Schäfer's command.

¹⁴⁰ "Durch meinen guten Sport [...] wurde ich in jungen Jahren ... *Bannsportwart*! ... Aber des konnte man nur ... ab 18 Jahr ... werden ... Und der ... 18-Jährige musste einrücken, so etwa [chuckles] ... Hab ich eine Schnur getrage an der Uniform ... Als kommi, Art kommisarische *Bannsportwart*." Becker, interview.

¹⁴¹ "Die Sache bestand damals ... Hauptsächlich darin ... Ich äh dass ich ihnen Kleinkaliber-Schiessen ... ich war der einzige ... äh ... oder äh s'waren ... in dieser Zeit! ... Die erste Ausbilder ... äh die Erste, die ausgebildet wurden in Deutschland!" Becker, interview.



Figs. 3.7 and 3.8 Sports Competition and Public Procession, Early 1940s.
Source: Private collection, Max Becker*.

During the summer of 1943, Max was sent on a—presumably *Reich*-sponsored—trip through Germany. The goal of this journey, Max explained, was primarily to receive sniper training and certification at a *Hitler-Jugend*-organized shooting school in Zella-Mehlis (Thuringia). However, as it appeared to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see all of those sights in Germany that he had heard about so much, Max decided to travel through the *Reich* for several weeks thereafter. He spoke at great length and in detail about his trip, in stories that seemed like they had been told many times before. Starting his narrative with his train trip to Germany, it appears that even this initial journey made an impression on him. As Max recounted, he had packed substantial provisions for his trip, including a “fifteen kilo ham!” and several loaves of bread—food that he was only able to pack due to the continuing agricultural abundance in the Banat. Taking the train to Vienna, he first unraveled his provisions at the city’s *Westbahnhof*. “Clueless as I was, [...] I unpacked [my food] and began eating,” Max elaborated. As soon as the people around him—mainly workers on their way back home to Vienna’s suburbs and St. Pölten—saw him, “their eyes grew large [...] and their mouths started watering.” Embarrassed, Max “cut off a 100, 200-gram piece for everyone” in his compartment. Choking up, Max described how his fellow passengers then asked whether it would be fine if they took the ham home to their families. “I was like someone [...] who came from a different star to them!” Max recalled.

Following his unexpected witnessing of hunger within the *Reich*, Max arrived at the shooting school in Zella-Mehlis. “The others arrived on a Sunday, because the school started on a Monday, and they all came from Germany”; however, due to his long journey, Max had already arrived on Saturday. After choosing a bed in the dormitory and giving the shooting instructor a large slice of ham, Max departed on a hike with the instructor and his family. “It was like paradise for me!,” Max exclaimed: “Mountains! ... A murmuring stream! ... And me from a flat, burned-out *puszta* environment!”¹⁴² The following day, the other participants arrived. “They were all ... huge [guys from] Hamburg! And Bavaria! Well, from all over Germany ... all *Führer* who were ... trained ... athletically ... to be leading HJs.”¹⁴³ Some of them were “giants, two meters! Two meters, five [centimeters tall]!,” most of them with impressive “ribbons and medals.” “And [there was me] from the Balkans, or from the border territories ...,” Max laughed.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² “*Puszta*” is a Hungarian term for the region’s steppe landscapes.

¹⁴³ “*Und es waren ... grosse Hamburger! Und Bayern! Und so weiter, ned? Also aus ganz Deutschland ... Alle Führer, die da ... äh ... sportlich ... zu Spitzen- ... HJs ausgebildeten worden, ich war halt der einzige DJtler.*” Becker, interview.

¹⁴⁴ “[...] und der Balkanes oder de [laughs] Randprovinzler ...” Becker, interview.

Despite apparent differences in stature and qualifications between him and the HJ members from Germany, he purportedly turned out to be the strongest and most athletic participant. At the sports examination on the first day—which included doing squats with a gun in hand and outstretched arms—Max beat even the sports instructor. At the ensuing handball game, he shot the most goals. “I was the *Wunderkind!*,” exclaimed Max. Most of the other HJs had been “arrogant— [like people from] Northern Germany,” always attempting to “dominate,” calling him a “*Balkanes*,” and setting up a “hierarchy” (“*Hackordnung*”) with brute force. As Max reflected, he had “instinctively never liked those *Reichsdeutsche* and their big mouths.”¹⁴⁵ It was thus with great pleasure that he beat all of them in the sports activities.

After two weeks, the course was over. Max had become “the first sniper from the Banat! Or *Auslandsdeutsche* [sniper], maybe I can say that too.”¹⁴⁶ That same year, two other DJ members from Betschkerek apparently finished the course; nevertheless, Max had the satisfaction of being first. After receiving a rifle and ammunition from the shooting instructor as a gift, Max departed on his independent tour through Germany. His first stop was Berlin. As Max explained, his aunt had “illegally emigrated” to Germany, and was now “leading a home [‘*Heim*’] for French female workers by the Alexanderplatz” (one of Berlin’s main squares). He hence went to visit her and her daughter, who was studying at Berlin’s university. “I wanted to go to the *Reichsführer!* ... The highest in Germany! Of the HJ!,” exclaimed Max. So to the HJ headquarters he went: after registering at the entrance and explaining why he was carrying a weapon, “two high officers” (“*hohe Chargen*”) picked him up, asked him about his activities, and finally gave him additional ammunition and “a pile of money.” For every day of his planned trip, he received 25 *Reichsmark*— “I swam in money!,” Max beamed. With funding in hand, as well as with ration cards he (illegally) picked up in every city in which he arrived, Max traveled through Germany over the following weeks. “I wanted to see the cities [...] because I learned [about them] at school,” he explained. He traveled to Munich to see the *Feldherrnhalle* (the site of Hitler’s 1923 ‘Beer Hall Putsch’), to Hamburg’s port, and finally to Schwabmünchen, the hometown of one of his friends from the shooting school.

¹⁴⁵ “*Balkanes, oder irgendwie, von ihrer Arroganz, Norddeutschland, ned? War’n die sowieso ... Und ich hab des instinktiv, diese Reichsdeutschen nimmer leide könne dort, und diese gross’ Gosche, ned, da sowieso, ned?*” Becker, interview.

¹⁴⁶ “*Der erste Scharfschütze vom Banat! [laughs] ... ned? ... Oder Auslandsdeutsche, kann ich vielleicht auch sage, ned?*” Becker, interview.

Upon his return to the Banat, Max continued his secondary school studies, remaining active in the *Deutsche Jugend* in a variety of capacities. Labor service (“*Arbeitsdienst*”), too, became mandatory for him. As he was studying to become a teacher, however, Max was able to avoid the agricultural labor service (“*Erntediens*”) enforced upon most of his peers. Instead, he was supposed to spend several weeks in the spring and summer of 1944 in Jabuka/Torontálmás/Apfeldorf, a small town in the Banat’s Pančevo municipality.¹⁴⁷ “Ninety to ninety-five percent of Jabuka was Serbian, and there were only approximately eight [German] families” there, Max explained. Since not enough German-speaking children lived there to warrant a German-language school, teaching apprentices from the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* were sent to Jabuka instead to teach the children German. Most of Jabuka’s ethnic German children, according to Max, were from “mixed families” (German-Serbian) and had very little opportunity to speak German even with their peers. As a result, most of them spoke a “pidgin German” (“*Kauderwelsch*”). Some of the “Germans” in the town, as Max emphasized, were not necessarily “German,” but opportunists, who attempted to gain “privileges,” “positions,” and better food “during the period of German occupation.”¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the German authorities feared that these children would “slip away” (“*entgleiten*”) from “Germandom” and from the “*Volkstum*.” “One said ... in summer, we must ... see to it that [these children] are not lost for Germandom,” Max explained.¹⁴⁹

His service in Jabuka, however, was interrupted almost immediately by the approach of American bombers. Shortly after his arrival (presumably in April 1944), U.S. Air Force bombs began dropping onto nearby Belgrade.¹⁵⁰ With the Allied Balkan offensive and Partisan activities mounting, dread swept through Jabuka’s ethnic German population. The families who were called upon by Jabuka’s mayor to send their sons and

¹⁴⁷ During the occupation years, the town’s official name became “Apfeldorf” (the German equivalent of Jabuka/Torontálmás). However, even the German-speaking population barely adopted the name, calling the town “Jabuka” instead. In October 1941, Jabuka became a site of mass murder: between October 27th and 29th, some 2,200 Jews and Roma were shot by the *Wehrmacht* on a street leading to Jabuka. Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 267.

¹⁴⁸ “*Während der deutsche Besatzungszeit haben sie Vorteile g’habt, well sie zu Essen ‘kriegt haben und was weiss ich, was ... Ned? Posten ... Und [...] Dann sind die plötzlich Deutsche worde!*” Becker, interview.

¹⁴⁹ “*Na jetz’ hat mer g’sagt ... in, im Sommer müsse mir ... Kucken, dass die dem Deuschtum nicht verlore geh’n.*” Becker, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Max did not specify when exactly this occurred, only that he was in Jabuka during the summer of 1944. The U.S. Air Force bombed Belgrade on April 16th and 17th, 1944 (during the Orthodox Easter holiday), and again on September 6th and 8th. According to Max, he was back in Kikinda by early September, as that is where he received his call to join the SS— more on this in the following chapter.

daughters to Max's classroom refused, fearing for the safety of their children and potential retributive actions. Panic and conflict erupted, and finally Max decided to leave. "I thought, it's not worth it here! ... I am only poisoning the town's atmosphere [...] I would say, I was only half of a Nazi! In that sense [chuckles] ... Not a blind idealist!"¹⁵¹ Max therefore traveled back to Betschkerek, met with the *Deutsche Schulstiftung's* head, Adam Maurus, and received a clerical position within the *Schulstiftung* for the remainder of his service.¹⁵²

b. National Alternatives

As Max's narrative implies, "Germanness" was a complex concept even for those *Donauschwaben* who—at least during the postwar period, and presumably even before—considered themselves to be "German." At the very least, "German" was split into "*reichsdeutsche*" and "*volksdeutsche*" (or "*auslandsdeutsche*") categories for all interviewees. Max, for instance, recalled with pride how the *Wehrmacht* set up a sports competition in his hometown approximately two weeks after their 1941 entry into the Banat. Thinking that they would "shine" ("*brilliere*") in relation to the local *Donauschwaben*, it was in fact the *Donauschwaben* who then won most of the prizes. For Max, this was a moment when his "Swabian self-confidence was set alight" ("*schwäbisches Selbstbewusstsein entflammt ist*"). The *Reichsdeutsche* were "arrogant," "big-mouthed *Reichsgermanen*" who claimed that they "are the kings of the world!" "We hated that!" Max explained. Max and his peers therefore watched with great "*Schadenfreude*" as the Banat's ethnic German athletes proved that "we are not the dumb ... little ... stupid ... *Volksdeutsche*."¹⁵³

Other interviewees, like Fritz Wetter, distinguished between "*Reichsdeutsche*" and "*Volksdeutsche*" more positively, in that the "*Reichsdeutsche*," in their slightly "more perfect" ways, provided an example worthy of emulation to him as a child.¹⁵⁴ Still other

¹⁵¹ "Also ich würd sage, ich war ja nur halber Nazi! In dem Sinn [chuckles] ... Also kei' blinde Idealischt." Becker, interview.

¹⁵² Becker, interview.

¹⁵³ "Die waren eingebildet, ned? [...] 'Wir sind die Herren der Welt!' ... Und das [emphasis] haben wir also gehasst! ... Die Eingebildete und ... Und äh wie g'sagt, des Sportfest war ja nix anders ... Wie'n Art Schadenfreude ... Dass mer ned die dummen ... kleinen ... blöden ... Volksdeutschen sind! ... Wo die Reichsgermanen, die grossschneutige da von Berlin ... 'Mir sind die Herren der Welt!' da gekommen sind ..." Becker, interview.

¹⁵⁴ Wetter, interview.

interviewees described how “*Reichsdeutsche*” and “*Volksdeutsche*” in the Banat were mutually “fascinated” by each other. According to Elmar Müller, the *reichsdeutsche* soldiers who came into the Banat were initially “extremely surprised that everyone spoke German [in our towns], as they apparently did not know anything about that before.” “We were almost like aliens to them,” he elaborated.¹⁵⁵ After Elmar had overcome his own initial astonishment about the *reichsdeutsche* soldiers’ presence, however, he was then even more surprised to learn that Germany also had children. One day during the early 1940s, a distant relative from Germany traveled through the Banat and visited Elmar’s family. “He came from Germany!,” Elmar exclaimed, “That’s why I remember it! [...] He was in any case the first child! That I saw from Germany! It was of course interesting for me to see, for once, that there are also children there ... otherwise we only saw the [*reichsdeutsche*] soldiers who ... marched through [our towns].”¹⁵⁶

Differences between *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* were not the only variable in concepts of “Germanness.” Almost all interviewees hence explained, or at least implied, that the Banat’s “Germans” were different from the Batschka’s “Germans” (the latter being wealthier and more confessionally mixed), and that “Swabian” dialects differed from town to town. Nevertheless, certain cohesive factors existed. For all of the interviewees, at least some of the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* “Germanness” was derived from their mother tongue (a German dialect) and their imagined common heritage of Habsburg Monarchy-initiated “*Donauschwaben*” settlement in the region.¹⁵⁷ In some cases, however— as Max’s discussion of his service in Jabuka’s school illustrates— more racialized conceptualizations seem to have entered even young people’s minds by the early 1940s as well. At least some National Socialist conceptions of the (racial) “German” hence ingrained itself into childrens’ and young people’s thoughts, allowing for a

¹⁵⁵ “*Sie waren jedenfalls äusserst erstaunt ... dass bei, überall Deutsch gesprochen wurde, das haben sie anscheinend gar nicht gewusst.*” “*Wir waren [...] für sie erst mal [...] fast so wir Ausserirdische!*” Müller, interview.

¹⁵⁶ “*Der kam aus Deutschland. De, deswegen hab ich’s in Erinnerung! Sonst ... das war, äh, es war ja sowieso das erste Kind! Das ich aus Deutschland geseh’n hab! [chuckles] Der war natürlich für mich ein, er war, mal interessant zu sehen, dass es da ja auch Kinder gibt, sonst haben mir ja nur die Soldaten gesehen, die ... äh, äh ... durch marschiert waren.*” Müller, interview.

¹⁵⁷ When asked to describe their towns, all interviewees at some point mentioned this “*Ansiedlungszeit*” (settlement period), even mentioning which precise ancestor first moved to the region and when, if possible. Wetter, Becker, Müller, Bucherer, interviews.

posteriori discussions of the supposed threat that “mixed marriages” (“*Mischehen*”) posed to the “*Volkstum*.”¹⁵⁸

Considering such variations in conceptualizations and vocabulary related to “Germanness,” it is surprising to see how little the “Germanness” of individual youth and children in the Western Banat seems to have been questioned during the early 1940s. While interviewees like Elmar and Michael emphasized their reluctance towards *Deutsche Jugend* service, not one interviewee from the Banat challenged their “belonging” to such groups in the first place on grounds of nationality or ethnicity. Admitting to a national “ambiguity,” certainly, has been rendered very difficult for these individuals during the postwar period, as much of their postwar fate (expulsion) and current identity (German citizen) was built upon the foundations of their (generally authentically and earnestly felt) “Germanness.” Nevertheless—and unlike in the case of the Batschka—no interviewees from the Western Banat recalled experiencing a “national” contestation within their communities over which youth “belonged” to which national (youth) group.

However, there were “national” alternatives to the *Deutsche Jugend* in the Western Banat. As we have seen, prior to 1941, a range of confessional and state-based youth groups existed in the region, most of which—at least theoretically—were also open to *Donauschwaben* youth. In light of its mandatory nature, the Sokol in particular formed a presence in the *Donauschwaben* towns. Indeed, before meandering into the National Socialist sports formations, Max himself had participated in Sokol activities. To partake in its events all year (including during the winter), “one had to be a registered member,” Max explained, “and the Germans did not do that.” Nonetheless, one of his sports teachers in schools “recommended” the Sokol’s summer activities, so he spent several days camping with them during the late 1930s. “It was interesting for me,” he elaborated, “to raise a tent ... and sleep in the tent ... as it was an adventure.”¹⁵⁹

By 1941, the Sokol movement had floundered and largely collapsed in Yugoslavia’s borderland regions, disappearing entirely during the Axis occupation.¹⁶⁰ One of the most significant non-German youth formations in the Western Banat thereafter

¹⁵⁸ As Bergen shows, the term “*Mischehen*” changed in meaning after the Nazis’ ascent to power to connote “mixed marriages” in a racial, and not a confessional sense. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 84-85.

¹⁵⁹ Becker, interview.

¹⁶⁰ Jakir, “Die Sokol-Bruderschaft zwischen den Weltkriegen in Dalmatien.”

became the Hungarian national youth organization, the “*levente*.”¹⁶¹ Little has been written on the Western Banat’s *levente*. Furthermore, unlike in the Batschka— where, as we shall see, *levente* membership became obligatory for all ethnic German youth— the *levente* does not seem to have played a significant role for the territory’s *Donauschwaben*. In the Banat, the *levente* was organized in cooperation with the region’s “Banat Hungarian Cultural Association” (*Bánáti Magyar Közművelődési Szövetség*, or BMKSz), a *Volksgruppe*-approved, Hungarian version of the “*Kulturbund*.” Unlike the *Volksgruppe*’s organizations, the BMKSz still rested largely on principles of voluntarism after 1941; nevertheless, the BMKSz achieved a high mobilization rate during those years, including with its youth groups.¹⁶² Officially termed “*A BMKSz Fiók Ifjúsági Alosztálya*” (“BMKSz youth subgroup”), the Banat’s “*levente*” was not an official branch of Hungary’s *levente*, as the organization was officially illegal in the Banat. Nevertheless, the groups adopted the *levente*’s ideology and uniforms, attracting at least two thousand “fully enthusiastic” youth in Betschkerek alone by March 1943.¹⁶³

The *Volksgruppe*’s relationship to the Hungarian youth groups seems to have been quite complex. In its annual report printed in 1942, the *Deutsche Jugend* lamented how the mobilization of “German” youth was not complete, as “for the time being, it is not to be expected that the part of the hereby counted German youth, which is German by blood and Magyar by disposition, and which stands in the rows of the Hungarian youth, will come to us.”¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the *Volksgruppe*’s authorities seem to have not only tolerated, but also approved, the BMKSz’s activities. As documents salvaged from Betschkerek’s *Volksgruppe* mayor’s office attest, for instance, the BMKSz, its youth groups, and its own “*Schulstiftung*” successfully applied for usage of the town theater for fundraisers with the same, pre-printed (German) forms as the *Deutsche Jugend*.¹⁶⁵ Other documents— including one “*Heil Hitler!*”-signed letter from 1943— granted permission

¹⁶¹ For more information on the *levente*, see the chapter on the Batschka’s youth organizations.

¹⁶² Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 101-109. As Völkl explains, the BMKSz claimed to have 100,505 members by 1943, out of a total number of 121,452 “Hungarians” (including “*Bekennnis-Ungarn*,” or “self-proclaimed Hungarians” who may have spoken a different mother tongue, but self-identified as Hungarian).

¹⁶³ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 105.

¹⁶⁴ “*Es ist vorderhand nicht zu erwarten, dass der blutmässig deutsche, gesinnungsmässig madjarische Teil der hier gezählten deutschen Jugend, der in den Reihen der ungarischen Jugend steht, zu uns kommt.*” The numbers referred to are the mobilization percentages of German youth in the DJ, as cited also by Böhm (above). *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues und der Bewährung*, 29.

¹⁶⁵ IAZ Fond 133, no. 5439/43; IAZ Fond 133, no. 6456/43; IAZ Fond 133, no. 3713/43.

to “Hungarian *Kulturbund*” (“*ungarische Kulturbund*”) groups from around the Banat (including Pančevo) to perform in Betschkerek’s theater.¹⁶⁶

At least officially, the “*levente*” was therefore a presence in the Western Banat, positing a potential competition with the *Deutsche Jugend*. Interestingly, however, almost none of the interviewees recalled the Hungarian youth groups. Only Elmar Müller, when asked specifically about Hungarian youth formations, elaborated on their existence. In his small town, Modosch, Elmar had not noticed a Hungarian youth group, as there were very few Hungarians, and they all apparently were fairly poor, living on the town’s fringes. However, when he visited his aunt in Betschkerek— “an enormous city!” and “extremely impressive” for him then— he remembered seeing “a few Hungarian youth, in a specific uniform ... and some kind of insignia” marching around on Sundays.¹⁶⁷ According to Elmar, the Hungarian youth groups “were maybe a bit political, but not somehow radical.” Ultimately, “they bothered nobody, and nobody bothered them.”¹⁶⁸

The Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* youth, though exposed at least in theory to a variety of (national) influences even under *Volksgruppe* administration, seemingly remained untouched by their presence. For all interviewees, it was clear that they were uncontestedly “German,” although variations in the definition of “Germaness” existed even during their childhood. Such representations are at least in part an effect of the *Donauschwaben*’s postwar narrative and memorial framework, in which explanations of their traumatic experiences as “*Vertriebene*,” inclusion into expellee organizations, and their current state of residence and citizenship depend on self-identifications as “German.” However, the absence of narratives of national contestation— so sought after by historians— cannot always be explained through mechanisms of postwar reconstruction. Indeed, those *Donauschwaben* from the Batschka who experienced a similar fate after 1944 were, for the most part, much more aware of “national alternatives,” delving— as we shall see— more deeply into narratives of conflicted national and political identities.

¹⁶⁶ IAZ Fond 133, no. 4895/43.

¹⁶⁷ “Für mich, ja vom, vom Dorf da ... war Betschkerek natürlich schon eine Riesenstadt! Eine, es war eine äusserst ... beindruckend! ... Und da hat man natürlich manches gesehen, was man sonst nicht sieht ... Eben auch, dass auf der Strasse mal ... paar ungarische Jugendliche waren, die eine bestimmte Uniform ... hatten oder irgend ein Abzeichen oder was ...” Müller, interview.

¹⁶⁸ “Die haben niemand gestört und ... sie wurden von niemand gestört ... es ... es waren vermutlich, ich weiss nicht, ich hab’s, es war vielleicht schon etwas politisch, aber es war nicht äh irgendwie radikal ...” Müller, interview.

D. Conclusion

When *Reich* forces entered the Western Banat in April 1941, they left not only harrowing destruction in their wake, but also a fully installed, and partially autonomous *Volksgruppe* administration. Comprised initially of those opportunists who, since the interwar period, had sought rank and recognition through National Socialism, the *Volksgruppe*'s military leaders perpetrated mass displacements and ethnic cleansing, while its political heads re-shuffled the balance of power from the largest regional court to the smallest mayoral office. At least officially, labor, social services, and education were all to come under the purview of National Socialism, and be dispensed according to measures of racial composition, ideological devotion, and national worth. Within this scheme, youth—once again—was to play a crucial role. In their forced inclusion into the *Deutsche Jugend*, young people were not merely to carry out war-related services towards the Third Reich's victory. Rather, in their physical and ideological training, they were to re-define what it meant to be a "German" in the region, conveying the National Socialist cause for many generations to come.

The *Volksgruppe*'s bombastic aims were only partially realized, however. As oral history interviews suggest, children and youth incorporated into the *Deutsche Jugend* and its subsidiaries hardly formed the monolithic, racially "pure," and ideologically fervid body of disciples that it had hoped for. Rather, the range of experiences that the Western Banat's ethnic German children and youth had in relation to the *Deutsche Jugend* was considerable. The variety of current reflections on these experiences, furthermore, is almost innumerable. Ranging from laconic explanations of the mandatory nature of their youth service to rich narratives of personal excellence within the Nazi youth organizations—told, retold, and undoubtedly embellished over a lifetime—the interviews collected may testify more to individual mechanisms of "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*" ("coming to terms with the past") than to the actual deeds and perceptions of *Donauschwaben* youth between 1941 and 1944. Nevertheless, the interviews do allow for the occasional astonishing insight into the manner in which National Socialist youth groups infiltrated every last *Donauschwaben* town during those years. Forcing themselves into the lives of all ethnic German children and youth in the region, the *Deutsche Jugend*'s organizations were seen by some individuals as venues of great personal opportunity, and retained in memory as an ongoing source of pride. For others, the DJ became a burden, to be shouldered during the early 1940s through an

unwanted and unpleasant service in pre-military formations, and carried into the present through personal recollections and self-doubt.

The *Deutsche Jugend*, however, did not exist only within the extra-curricular sphere. Rather, as we shall see in the following chapter, the *Deutsche Jugend* derived much of its “success” during the early 1940s from the way in which it became incorporated into a larger organizational framework. Especially after April 1941, the curricular, extra-curricular, and— ultimately— military domains merged under the *Volksgruppe*’s leadership, leaving the Banat’s *Donauschwaben* youth with very little room to squirm away from the National Socialists’ grip. Alternate state-based or religious youth groups and classrooms disappeared under the *Volksgruppe*’s rule during those years, forcing ethnic German youth to engage in Nazi programs if they wished to continue speaking in their mother tongue and avoid the ill-treatment doled out to the Banat’s “non-German” minorities.

Chapter 4

Beyond the *Deutsche Jugend*?: *Donauschwaben* Youth in the Western Banat's Schools, Churches, and Military

A. Introduction

Between 1941 and 1944, almost all of the Western Banat's *Donauschwaben* youth were incorporated into the *Deutsche Jugend*. In some cases, *Deutsche Jugend* membership was a formality, imposed by legal decree and sealed by social pressure. In some cases, membership in Nazi youth groups ascended from an obligation into a venue of personal opportunity, lived, consumed, and remembered with enthusiasm. Regardless of individual experience and comportment, however, the *Deutsche Jugend* was transformed from a fringe organization into the mass-lived norm during those years, becoming a force to be reckoned with for all *Donauschwaben* children and youth after 1941. Through the position granted to them within the *Volksgruppe*'s framework, children and youth became not just politicized, but political: in their attitudes and choices, they all confronted and—to a degree—answered questions of “identity,” “belonging,” and “duty,” as extra-curricular groups, the press, state structures, and educators came to target them for their “Germanness.”

The *Deutsche Jugend*, however, did not act alone. Going beyond the National Socialist youth group, this chapter explores how other social domains, such as the school, the religious organization, and the military, interacted in the youth and childhood arena between 1941 and 1944. As this chapter indicates, spheres like the extra-curricular youth group, the classroom, the dormitory, and the army intertwined deeply during this period, making it almost impossible for ethnic German children and youth to avoid engaging with National Socialism. Ultimately, the burgeoning National Socialist presence came at a cost not only to “traditional” (including religious) sensibilities, but also—in its mass military mobilization—to the *Donauschwaben*'s very lives.

B. *Gleichschaltung* and the Western Banat's School System

1. *Recasting the Western Banat's German-Language Educational System*

With the occupation and dissolution of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the re-organization of schools quickly became a priority for both *Reich* and *Donauschwaben* authorities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the arrival of troops and redrawing of boundaries caused some confusion, as the legal and administrative framework for both public and private, and “state majority” and minority schools required re-negotiation. According to one 1943 *Volksgruppe* report, however, even this initial transition period represented a triumph over the “denationalizing” yoke of prior Hungarian and Yugoslav rule: thanks to the “burial” of the “South Slavic state,” the Banat was now “free and German.”¹ As such, the path to an independent and unrestricted German school system within the Banat had also finally been paved.

In light of the tortuous and largely unsuccessful interwar struggles to establish a German-language school system, the Banat's German authorities wasted no time: by mid-April 1941, the German military authorities had placed ethnic German teachers at the head of the various district educational commissions, and appointed the teacher Nikolaus Jost as the temporary head of the Banat's educational institutions (including the minority schools of all ethnicities). At least officially, the previous Yugoslav school laws still applied. However, in almost all Banat towns with a considerable ethnic German minority, local German authorities and teachers began taking over previous Serbian-language (German minority) schools and classrooms, transforming them into (military-supported) German-language units.² In April 1941, some sixty-one “*Volksschulen*” in the Banat already educated over ten thousand German-speaking children.³ Many of these pupils were in parallel minority school sections, and frequently also in classrooms led by non-German teachers with little access to German-language school materials.⁴ One of the first

¹ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat* (Betschkerek: Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien, Hauptamt für Schulwesen und Schulstiftung der Deutschen im Banat, c. 1943), 7, 9, 16.

² *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 16-17. This measure is indicative of the intertwining of military and social services in the Banat's wartime society, as will become apparent over the course of this chapter.

³ In these sources, “*Volksschulen*” generally refers both to primary and early-stage/lower-level secondary education.

⁴ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 147; *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen unserer Heimatfront* (Betschkerek: Presse- und Propagandaamt der Volksgruppenführung, Banater Druckerei,

priorities for the newly established *Volksgruppe* hence became not only the expansion of German-language education in the territory, but the full “removal” of “everything foreign in *Volk*” (“*fremdvölkisches*”) from German schools, so that a “new [National Socialist] spirit” would “settle into” the German classrooms.⁵

In order to achieve such a restructuring of the school system, a *Hauptamt für Schulwesen* (“Head Office of Education”) was established in Betschkerek in conjunction with the *Hauptamt für Kultur* (“Head Office of Culture”) on May 1st, 1941. Sepp Janko appointed the previous LBA teacher and *Schulstiftung* functionary Dr. Adam Maurus as its head. A Franz Dottermann became its executive director (“*Geschäftsführender Vorsitzender*”). Twelve ethnic German school inspectors were appointed (under Jost’s leadership) to help “reform” the Banat’s schools over the following months, according to directives which— though not yet anchored within an official legal framework— had at their core the principle that only “German teachers” were to teach “German children” in the “German spirit.”⁶ Temporary German secondary schools— comprising the students of now dissolved German-language *Bürgerschule* and *Realgymnasium* sections— were established in Betschkerek, Werschetz, Pantschowa, Kikinda, and Weisskirchen/Bela Crkva that month. German-language Kindergartens— largely illegal under the previous Yugoslav school system— were opened across the Banat. Furthermore, over the following months, twenty-five new German schools were established, creating a total of eighty-six German-language schools in the Banat by late summer 1941.⁷

New German-language educational institutions would, of course, also require additional German-language teachers. Realizing that the prevalent dearth of ethnic German teachers in the Banat would only worsen due to the ongoing military recruitment of male instructors, the *Volksgruppe* initiated a series of training camps for the Banat’s teachers and auxiliary teaching personnel that summer.⁸ In a pattern already established during the interwar period, however, such training did not arise purely from local *Donauschwaben* initiatives; rather, the *Reich* became a critical driving influence once again. Documents now archived in Berlin’s *Bundesarchiv* indicate that at least twenty-three *Reichsdeutsche* teachers were sent to the Western Banat between July and

1943), p. 24, PA AA, R 100380-4. According to this report, only 159 out of 218 German minority classroom teachers were “German.”

⁵ *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen*, 24.

⁶ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 17-18.

⁷ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 18; *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen*, 24.

⁸ *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen*, 24.

September 1941 for the “schooling of *Volksdeutsche* teachers in the Banat.”⁹ Called to service by the *Reich*’s *NS-Lehrerbund* (“National Socialist Teacher’s Union”), these male and female instructors hailed from across the *Reich* and its occupied territories, including from larger German cities like Dresden and Kassel, small German towns like Bernkastel (Rheinland-Pfalz), the now Polish Szczecin/Stettin, and the Czech Sebusín/Sebusein.¹⁰ They were then stationed in *Donauschwaben* educational centers like Pančevo, Werschetz, and Betschkerek. Staying for several weeks (occasionally several months) at a time, these teachers not only trained current and future ethnic German Kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school teachers; they also conducted training camps, distributed books, pamphlets, and photographic materials, and embarked on independent “*Volks*-political” and “research” excursions to smaller Banat towns.¹¹ In all of their pursuits, these teachers were financed directly by Berlin’s *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, which sponsored everything from their train tickets and hotels to maids’ and porters’ services, and from photographic and writing materials for educational camps to breakfasts and personal international correspondence.¹²

In October 1941— following the “legalization” of the *Deutsche Volksgruppe*— such unofficial attempts at “Germanizing” the Western Banat’s ethnic German school system were given a legal framework. According to the “*Verordnung über die Schulen der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat*” (“Regulation of the Schools of the German Minority in the Banat”) implemented on October 3rd, the Banat’s ethnic Germans would henceforth have complete autonomy over their educational affairs. Under the auspices of the *Deutsche Schulstiftung im Banat* (a reconstitution of Yugoslavia’s *Deutsche Schulstiftung*), all German schools were to become private. These “schools”— including day care centers, Kindergartens, primary schools, middle and secondary schools

⁹ “*Reisespesen-Abrechnung*” collection by *NS-Lehrerbund, Reichsverwaltung, Hauptamt für Erzieher*, BArch NS 12/644/d.

¹⁰ The teachers were not necessarily originally from these places, and it seems that their previous place of residence (“*Wohnort*”), as listed on the VoMi forms, might have been acquired in combination with previous teaching missions among Eastern and Central Europe’s “*Volksdeutsche*.”

¹¹ See, for example, those files by Maria Jordan and Alfred Ritter, BArch NS 12/644/d. Unfortunately, not many sources are available that give insight into these teachers’ precise thoughts or activities. Additional, potentially highly relevant, teachers’ files located in Berlin’s *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes* (including: PA AA, R 63831; PA AA, R 63837; PA AA, R 63829a), furthermore, will remain inaccessible for many years to come due to Germany’s privacy protection laws. This stands in contrast to the primary source base of books like Elizabeth Harvey’s *Women and the Nazi East*, which include personal reports by women actually sent from the *Reich* to Europe’s “East” (see: BArch R 49/3052).

¹² NS 12/644/d.

(“*Hauptschulen*,” “*Bürgerschulen*,” and “*Mittelschulen*”), vocational schools, technical schools, and teacher training colleges— were to have all the rights and accreditations of the regular state schools. Teachers’ salaries at the level of regular Serbian state employees were to be supplied by the state in the form of an annual grant to the *Schulstiftung*. Supplements to these teachers’ salaries, as well as other school-related expenses, were further to be paid by the *Schulstiftung*. German became the official language of instruction, and only children of German ethnicity (“*deutscher Volkszugehörigkeit*”) were given the right to enroll. School books from the *Reich*, furthermore, could now officially be used.¹³ A “school tax” (“*Schulsteuer*”), comprising twenty percent of the regular taxes levied on the Banat’s ethnic Germans, was introduced.¹⁴ Finally— and in a policy that echoed very heavily the Yugoslav state’s nationalization of school properties in 1920— all school buildings and inventories that had housed German-language schools and classrooms prior to April 1941 were confiscated without compensation and handed over to the *Schulstiftung*.¹⁵

Perhaps predictably, gains made in favor of the Banat’s ethnic Germans in the “school question” came at a cost to the territory’s other ethnicities (or ethnically “ambiguous” Germans). Officially, state schools were maintained. Furthermore, while minorities like the Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, and Bulgarians never attained complete autonomy in school-related questions, they nonetheless were able to sustain their own minority schools, classrooms, and educational organizations within the parameters of the existing (Yugoslav) school laws.¹⁶ However, as archival documents also attest, by 1943, at least fifty-nine non-German teachers (including thirty-five Serbian, nine Hungarian, three Czech, and two Jewish) had been “cleansed” from the German-language school system.¹⁷ Teachers who could not prove their “Aryan descent” to the newly-established “*Bund deutscher Erzieher im Banat*” (“German Educators’ Union in the Banat”), and who did not “coordinate” their teaching with “the National

¹³ For the full statutes, see: “Die rechtlichen Grundlagen des neuen deutschen Schulwesens,” *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 19-21; “Das deutsche Schulwesen im Banat,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (10.10.1941), BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 60.

¹⁴ AMV/KB SL List 6841 el. 12, “Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien,” vol. 1, no. 12 (1.7.1942), 1.

¹⁵ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 19-21; BArch R 57/neu/1070 Bd. 60.

¹⁶ According to Völkl, during the 1942/43 academic year, 37 Romanian, 7 Slovak, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Czech, 1 Russian, and 126 Serbian schools existed in the Western Banat. Between 1941 and 1944, especially the Hungarian minority successfully maintained, and even expanded, its minority schools. Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 149-154.

¹⁷ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 13.

Socialist worldview,” were barred from service.¹⁸ At least nineteen (previously multinational) school buildings and dorms, including five in Werschetz, two in Betschkerek, and several in Weisskirchen, Kikinda, Pančevo, Modosch, and other small towns, were confiscated in favor of the *Schulstiftung* in 1941.¹⁹ And, perhaps most hauntingly of all, sales of Jewish properties seized during the summer of 1941 helped finance the *Schulstiftung*, ethnic German teachers’ salaries, libraries, and youth vocational training workshops.²⁰

Thanks to the legal, financial, and political securing of German-language education in the Western Banat, *Donauschwaben* educational initiatives flourished over the next three years. By 1942, almost every town with at least fifteen “German” children had a German-language primary school, which came under the authority of either the “North Banat” (“*Nordbanat*”) or “South Banat” (“*Südbanat*”) school administrations. An independent *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* was established in Werschetz in 1941, and had an enrollment of 162 by the 1942/1943 academic year. An economic secondary school (“*Wirtschaftsoberschule*”), designed to “educate” the region’s “future higher economic and trade officials,” was opened in Betschkerek. Academic-track “*Oberschulen*” and trade-track “*Hauptschulen*” were established across the Banat, so that approximately half of the students who finished the fourth or fifth grades— and who had proven their “suitability in body, character, and spirit”— could continue their German-language education at one of these institutions. Between 1941 and 1943, furthermore, the number of German-language Kindergartens increased from thirteen to seventy-eight. German dormitories in Werschetz, Betschkerek, Kikinda, Pantschowa, and elsewhere both hosted and “fostered the unification in *Weltanschauung*” of some 1,502 pupils by 1942. Training courses for female Kindergarten teachers and teaching assistants were expanded. Finally, any students who could not afford to participate in such programs could— in light of the “National Socialist worldview’s” priority on education— apply for loans and scholarships from the *Volksgruppe*. By the 1941/42 school year alone, 190 students had taken advantage of this option; in 1942/43, this number rose to 581.²¹

¹⁸ “Bund deutscher Erzieher im Banat,” *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 35-37.

¹⁹ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 22-23.

²⁰ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 272, 276.

²¹ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 32, 23-27, 14.

In light of the precipitous expansion of Banat-specific ethnic German education, the *Volksgruppe* began adopting a highly self-congratulatory tone in its publications.²² As its official, swastika-clad 1943 school report exclaimed:

The German educator of the Banat in past has stood in the battle over the preservation of the German school; after the liberation [in April 1941], he fought joyfully and optimistically to overcome the obstacles that lay on the path towards the German school. The German educator then stepped into the ranks of those warriors who are struggling out there on the battle fields for the freedom and great future of the German *Volk*, and who are contributing to the only goal that we are all to strive toward today: the German victory!²³

Educating “German” children in the Western Banat had no longer become a matter merely of providing a mother-tongue, and perhaps even a “national,” education. Rather, the Western Banat’s German-language schools had converted into a means for transforming the local German population into devout National Socialists. According to the *Volksgruppe*’s own publications, the “German school and education” were to be coordinated officially according to the “National Socialist worldview.” School curricula mirrored those of the *Reich*, while the VDA directly supplied school books, instructional films, pamphlets, maps, and similar materials to the Banat’s German educational institutions.²⁴ Teachers were both to provide an “Aryan identification” card, and to submit to a close “monitoring” to ensure that their work and “comportment” aligned with the tenets of Nazism. Due to their responsibility for “forming children morally and spiritually,” teachers became required to participate in monthly training sessions led by *Schulstiftung* functionaries.²⁵ Furthermore, teachers from the Banat could now travel to the *Reich* directly for training. As correspondence by the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* archived at the German Foreign Office illustrates, by 1942, especially women traveled to

²² Most of Yugoslavia’s German-language, post-primary educational institutions had been located in the Batschka, so that the Banat’s *Volksgruppe* was forced to establish many of these institutions from scratch after April 1941.

²³ “*Der deutsche Erzieher des Banates stand in der Vergangenheit im Kampf um die Erhaltung der deutschen Schule, er kämpfte nach der Befreiung freudig und zuversichtlich, um die Schwierigkeiten zu überwinden, die am Wege zur deutschen Schule vorhanden waren. Der deutsche Erzieher trat dann ein in die Reihen der Kämpfer, die draussen auf dem Schlachtfelde um die Freiheit und grosse Zukunft des deutschen Volkes ringen und die bereit sind, ihr Bestes zu opfern, um mitbeizutragen zu dem einzigen Ziele, dem wir heute alle zu dienen haben: dem deutschen Sieg!*” [emphasis in original]. *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 4.

²⁴ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 33-36; *Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen*, 25.

²⁵ “Pflichtausbildung der deutschen Lehrerschaft in Pantschowa,” *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 4, no. 913 (5-6.3.1944), 4.

academies in Bad Schandau (Saxony), Graz (Austria), Munich, and Berlin.²⁶ Funded by the VoMi, these women spent up to one year at a time in the *Reich*, preparing for their future positions as Kindergarten teachers and sports instructors.²⁷

It is difficult to prove that these teachers returned from the *Reich* with a glowing and public enthusiasm for National Socialism. However, one can at least surmise that upon their return to the Banat, they carried with themselves not only new impressions of the *Reich*, but also a very specific kind of literature. Indeed, some of the largest costs incurred by the original VoMi-delegated *reichsdeutsche* teachers (who had been sent to the Banat during the summer of 1941) were related to the transportation and distribution of books.²⁸ As one teacher explained on his VoMi travel reimbursement form, most of the books he had brought to the LBA in Werschetz remained there upon the request of the local teachers.²⁹ According to a confirmation signed by the LBA director personally, almost all of these books were recent German instructional works on “racial biology,” “racial sciences,” “heredity and race,” and similar topics.³⁰

School books— previously a hodge-podge of Habsburg, (frequently illegally) imported interwar German-language, and Yugoslav-issued volumes— indeed changed considerably after April 1941. One striking example is provided by *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, a history textbook for secondary schools printed in Frankfurt in 1942. Located in the archive of the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* today, the precise origins of this book are unclear. Nevertheless, as it was found among those sources salvaged from the ruins of previous *Donauschwaben* churches and libraries, it is highly likely that the book had reached the hands of local instructors sometime during the early 1940s.³¹ Edited

²⁶ These women’s male peers had mostly already been mobilized into the military.

²⁷ Letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, “Hinreise der Kameradin Friedericke Gettmann aus Werschetz zwecks Ausbildung” (12.9.1942), PA AA, R 100380-1; letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, “Sportausbildung von Lehrerinnen aus dem Banat” (18.11.1942), PA AA, R 100380-2; letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, “Zusätzliche Schulung von Kindergärtnerinnen aus dem Serbischen Banat” (3.6.1943), PA AA, R 100380-3; letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, “Einreisegenehmigung für Volksdeutsche aus dem serb. Banat” (17.9.1943) PA AA, R 100380-4.

²⁸ “Bemerkung zu der Gesamtrechnung, Einsatz Banat und Kroatien” (1942), BArch NS 12/844/d.

²⁹ Reinhard Müller “Reisespesen-Abrechnung,” BArch NS 12/844/d.

³⁰ The books included Fischer-Geistbeck’s *Erdkunde für Mittelschulen*, Jakob Graf’s *Familienkunde und Rassenbiologie*, Bruno and Schulz’s *Erbkunde, Rassenkunde, Rassenpflege*, Lothar Herdt’s *Vererbung und Rasse*, and Horst Geyer’s *Rassenpflege*. “Bescheinigung,” signed by director of LBA Werschetz (26.9.1941), BArch NS 12/844/d.

³¹ As the *Deutsche Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”*’s collection is primarily centered on the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* cultural legacy, it is likely that the volume— delivered to the ABV in an enormous, uncatalogued, and previously unused collection of *Donauschwaben* sources by Sombor’s regional archive

by various SS-affiliated academics in Germany, the volume represents a considerable departure from those Habsburg and Prussian textbooks that had reached the Banat's German minority during the interwar period.³² Focusing on the "Indo-Germanic and Germanic" tribes from the dawn of human civilization until the year 1000 CE, even the book's first page contains a timeline connecting the "ancestors of the Germanic tribes" from 100,000 BCE, to various Germanic heroes, to Hitler.³³ In gripping, even violent prose peppered with exclamation marks and the alleged personal narratives of historic Germanic conquerors, the textbook takes its readers on a journey through various waves of "Germanic" victories across Europe, from the "earliest human traces in our country," to the "Indo-Germanic period" (4000 BCE to 2000 BCE), to the "Early Germanic Period" (2000 BCE to 800 BCE), to the "Great Germanic Period" (800 BCE to 1000 CE).³⁴

Throughout the volume, supposed historical fact intermingles with contemporaneous National Socialist ideology. Drawing its readers immediately into an imagined common heritage (emphasizing throughout that this history's protagonists are "our ancestors"), the volume employs the terminology adopted (often from this very history) by the National Socialist regime. Tribal leaders hence became "*Führer*," and their inner circle "*Gaugenossen*"; Nordic tribes especially excelled in their "*Kinderreichtum*" ("wealth in children"); and the Germanic migrations represented "the battle of the Germanic peoples for the German space" ("*Kampf der Germanen um den deutschen Raum*") and over "blood and soil" ("*Blut und Boden*").³⁵ Largely due to mixed marriages ("*Mischehen*"), the "racial composition" of the "Aryan" tribes had already been partially "corrupted" at least two thousand years before Christ. As a result, "people of the Nordic type became increasingly rare, so that the Nordic creative spirit, will to fight, and drive towards freedom" ebbed over the centuries.³⁶ This "racial degeneration"

in September 2014— had been used in the Batschka prior to 1944, most probably in Werbass. However, textbooks delivered to the Western Banat were at least comparable to this volume.

³² See previous chapter on the interwar *Donauschwaben* school system. Also consider: Franz Jelinek, Valentin Pollak, and Franz Streinz, *Deutsches Lesebuch für österreichische Realschulen*, vol. 3 (Vienna: Österreichischer Schulbuchverlag, 1924), ABV.

³³ "Wie lange ist es her?," Walter Hohmann et al., *Volk und Reich der Deutschen: Geschichtsbuch für Oberschulen und Gymnasien. Klasse 2. Indogermanen und Germanen (Von der Urzeit bis 1000 n. Chr.)*, 3rd edition (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Salle, 1942), 1.

³⁴ *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, III-IV.

³⁵ *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, 6, 29, 45, 51-52, 87.

³⁶ "Das indogermanische Blut versiegte allmählich, und Menschen nordischer Art wurden immer seltener. Damit schwand auch der nordische Schöpfergeist, Kampfeswille und Freiheitsdrang. Die entartete Mischbevölkerung war nicht mehr imstande, ihre Unabhängigkeit zu behaupten." *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, 30-31.

(“*Entartung*”) was then purportedly further compounded by the advent of Christianity, which attempted to force the previously “heroic” Germanic religion—based on earth and fire-based Gods, the sun, and the swastika—into shameful “submission” under the teachings of “foreign” and “questionable heroes” like the Apostles.³⁷ By the year 1,000 CE, claims the textbook, the “era of the Germanics” (“*Germanenzeit*”) had ended. However, even in the current age, the “purity of their blood, the strength and beauty of their bodies, and their high intellectual capabilities” could inspire their “descendants” to “be as brave and loyal, and think and live as heroically, as them.”³⁸

By the 1941/42 academic year, the Western Banat’s school system had been fundamentally transformed. With the *Reich*’s backing, the *Volksgruppe* was able to overturn all of those educational policies that they had perceived as so noxious under Yugoslav administration, and—within the span of several short months—open exclusively German-language schools at all educational levels across the territory, re-educate their teachers, “cleanse” the school system of “foreign influences,” introduce new curricula, and supply “their” pupils with National Socialist texts. Formally, many of those hopes fostered by pro-*Erneuerer* educators and activists prior to April 1941 had now been realized: all “German” children within their territory now had unhindered access not only to mother-tongue classrooms, but also to a full National Socialist education.

2. *Micro-Level Perspectives*

While the sweeping legal, administrative, and curricular changes that occurred within the Banat’s schools in 1941 are crucial, it is even more important to consider whether or not such alterations had an impact on those very pupils targeted by the *Volksgruppe*’s educational measures. Policies proclaimed, after all, are rendered trivial if they are neither perceived nor enacted. Here once again, the historian’s craft becomes more instructive and more powerful when it explores the memories and the life-worlds of those individuals caught within historic events—when macro-level historic change is lined up against micro-level and personal transformation.

Schools, in their situatedness between state authority and individual childhood subjectivity, form a crucial avenue of investigation into the interplay between macro-level structures and micro-level experience. Unlike extra-curricular youth groups— which,

³⁷ *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, 53-55, 95-96.

³⁸ *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, 119.

until the late 1930s, remained largely outside of the framework of formal state authority in the Yugoslav *Donauschwaben* case— schools were always directly tied to state-building projects. State priorities were inscribed in public school curricula and circumscribed the material taught at private schools. National concerns touted by state authorities determined whether or not children’s spoken language coincided with the one that they learned to read and write. Schools thereby became the first and predominant avenue in which children, otherwise “hidden” with their families or engaged in non-state supervised activities, came into direct contact with the state. Indeed, children and youth most noticed shifts in the state or its priorities when these were reflected in the classroom. It was thus primarily within the context of the school that the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* children and youth came to understand that, after April 1941, their lives would change forever.

It was Palm Sunday in 1941 when the first German planes began circling over the Banat’s towns. Sensing a potentially dangerous situation, the Yugoslav school authorities began sending children, especially ones located in boarding schools far from their families, home the following week. By Easter Monday, as Käthe Radner*— born in 1921 in Stefansfeld/ Šupljaja/Istvánfölda (today’s Krajišnik)— explained, “the first German soldiers entered our [towns] with motorcycles.”³⁹ Thereafter, it became clear that those children and youth who had previously been enrolled in schools outside of the Banat would never see their original classrooms again. Especially ethnic German teenagers— who, upon completing primary school, generally had had no access to secondary education in their small towns— traditionally had been sent to the neighboring Batschka, including the ethnic German schools in Werbass, to continue their education. However, with new frontiers arising, these youth were forced to find alternate solutions. Michael Bucherer, for instance, had almost completed his first year at Werbass’ German *Bürgerschule* when “the war broke out,” “the Germans occupied Yugoslavia,” and the Batschka and the Banat were split from one another. Unable to continue his education in the Batschka, the eleven-year-old instead took a series of exams in his hometown’s district capital, Betschkerek, to qualify for the new German-language *Realgymnasium* there.⁴⁰ Max Becker, who had started his studies at Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in 1940, was similarly sent home on Maundy Thursday in April 1941. Released into their

³⁹ Käthe Radner*, telephone interview with Caroline Mezger (11.8.2014).

⁴⁰ Bucherer, interview.

Easter holidays two days earlier than anticipated, all of the LBA's students and teachers boarded trains that day and scattered across Yugoslavia, including to Slovenia's predominantly German-speaking Gottschee territory. Unable to return to Werbass, Max instead re-qualified for the newly established *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werschetz that year.⁴¹

Students from Werbass' German *Gymnasium* experienced a similar fate. As Elmar Müller recalled, his older brother (born in 1929), had attended Werbass' *Gymnasium* for several years prior to the "*Aprilkrieg*" ("April War"). As Werbass' *Gymnasium* had been the only German-language secondary educational institution of its type in Yugoslavia up to that point, his father had enrolled his brother there when he was eleven. Hosted by a family in Werbass, and suddenly ripped from his familiar environment and social network, this transition represented a small "doomsday" ("*Weltuntergang*") for the young boy at the time. However, in April 1941 he, too, was sent home. Thereafter, he attended Betschkerek's new German-language *Gymnasium*.⁴²

For those generations of children and youth who had not yet entered secondary school in 1941, changes in the school system were more subtle. Unlike those age groups that had already enrolled in primary school during the early and mid-1930s, those children enrolled during the late 1930s enjoyed their education in more "continuous German-language schools."⁴³ Probably due to the increase in school autonomy already granted to the *Donauschwaben* during the late 1930s, most of the Banat's small towns had had a German-speaking primary school section by then, even if some of these were taught by Serbian teachers. The change in school administration in April 1941 was then fairly convenient for these students: enrolled already in a German-speaking primary school, these pupils thereafter were able to continue studying in German primary schools and even beyond, in the newly established German-language *Bürgerschulen*, *Hauptschulen*, and *Gymnasien* founded by the *Volksgruppe*.⁴⁴

Divergences in curriculum and language of instruction resulted in tremendous variations in language knowledge. Already prior to 1941, differences in linguistic knowledge had been considerable, as those *Donauschwaben* generations who had still

⁴¹ Becker, interview.

⁴² Müller, interview.

⁴³ Müller, interview.

⁴⁴ Müller, in describing the difference between his and his brother's education. Generally speaking, Bucherer, Becker, and Radner can be counted towards this "earlier generation," born during the 1920s, while Müller and Wetter can be considered as part of the "later generation," born during the early 1930s.

received instruction under the Habsburg Monarchy generally spoke Hungarian almost fluently, but often had difficulties reading and writing “standard” German (“*Hochdeutsch*”). Those generations enrolled in primary school during the 1920s and early 1930s became nearly fluent in Serbian, knew almost no Hungarian, and also had difficulties with literary German.⁴⁵ Those freshly enrolled in German-language Kindergartens and primary schools during the late 1930s barely received any instruction in Hungarian or Serbian at all. In any given *Donauschwaben* family of the Banat in 1941, therefore, the interviewees’ grandparents and great-grandparents (born at the turn of the twentieth century) generally conversed in their local “Swabian” dialect, prayed in Hungarian, and wrote in a misspelled German intermingled with Hungarian phrases. The interviewees’ parents—depending on whether they had completed their education under Habsburg or Yugoslav rule—would have had varying degrees of knowledge of Hungarian and/or Serbian. In turn, those interviewees born during the 1920s acquired an almost fluent Serbian and no Hungarian, while those individuals who were born during the 1930s received virtually no formal “foreign language” training—despite state-mandated Serbian lessons even after 1941.⁴⁶

To be sure, all of the Banat’s “Germans” lived in a distinctly multinational and multilingual environment, even during the German occupation years. Even in those villages where ethnic Germans were in the majority, all *Donauschwaben* had continuous contact with other minorities and languages. Languages of trade and administration, for instance, had always differed before 1941, and varied even thereafter, so that the local *Donauschwaben* had no choice but to converse and write (as much as possible and/or necessary) in other languages. As Elmar Müller described, his father had a brick factory. Even during the war, “all nationalities” bought bricks at his shop, and “it made no difference whether it was a Serb, a Hungarian, or a German who walked through the door.”⁴⁷ Especially children quickly learned languages in informal settings. Although his town was almost exclusively German-speaking, Michael Bucherer, for instance, learned fluent Hungarian as a child through interaction with the Hungarian farm hands

⁴⁵ As mentioned in Chapter I, the official legislation spoke of the “state language,” meaning Serbo-Croatian or Slovenian. However, as all interviewees and almost all German primary sources refer to the language as “Serbian,” I have kept the latter terminology in these passages.

⁴⁶ Becker, Wetter, Radner, interviews. Even between 1941 and 1944, Serbian lessons were mandatory in the Western Banat’s ethnic German schools from the late primary school years onwards. *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 37.

⁴⁷ Müller, interview.

(“*Knechte*”) employed by his family.⁴⁸ Elmar, too, spoke Hungarian fluently thanks to his family’s Hungarian maid, Rosalie. Concerned that his children would learn a “twisted German” (“*verkorste Deutsch*”) and miss out on a potentially important second language, Elmar’s father had instructed the maid to speak only Hungarian with his sons. As a result, whenever Elmar read works by Karl May in German, for example, he would automatically translate everything into Hungarian for Rosalie. Next to morsels of Serbian—which he picked up from his Serbian neighborhood friends—Elmar therefore also learned Hungarian, although it had never been taught at his school.⁴⁹

Donauschwaben who were slightly older, and who had still experienced significant parts of their education under the Yugoslav system, learned Serbian in a more formal setting. As Max Becker explained, his city had no German-language Kindergarten when he was a small child. Though the student body was multiethnic, his Kindergarten teachers only spoke Serbian, a language which he could not understand for the first few weeks of his enrollment. Initially unable to integrate himself into the class (which was mostly composed of non-German speakers), he nonetheless learned Serbian after several months. This initial training helped him once he entered primary school (the “*Volksschule*”) in 1931. Ninety percent of his primary school instruction was now in German. However, for several hours per week, he also had to learn Serbian, both in the Cyrillic and “Latin, or Croatian” scripts. Additionally, he and his classmates had to learn German in the Gothic, Latin, and *Sütterlin* scripts.⁵⁰

As Max recalled, most of his teachers in the *Volksschule* were ethnic Germans. The first year, his teacher—a “tall, slim, and blond” lady named “*Lehrerin*” (teacher) Bunz—was apparently not very popular among the kids, meting out physical punishment in abundance. After several months, however, she fell ill, so that a Jewish lady took her place. It was 1932, and—as Max explained—“a certain emanation [*Ausstrahlung*] against Germans” had already been present in the “Jewish cultural circles” (“*jüdischem Kulturkreis*”). Looking back, it was clear that the teacher “had an aversion against German children,” so that tensions existed between her and her students, and Max and many of his peers grew to “hate” her—though not for “political” reasons, as he

⁴⁸ Bucherer, interview. Born in 1929, his primary education had been in German for the first four years (with Cyrillic Serbian instruction beginning in years three and four), entirely in Serbian in fifth and sixth grade, and German again once he began secondary school.

⁴⁹ Müller, interview.

⁵⁰ The *Sütterlin* script was introduced by the Prussian Ministry of Culture in 1915, and became the official script taught at schools in Germany between 1935 and 1941.

emphasized.⁵¹ The following year, this teacher was replaced by an ethnic German married couple named Benz. Especially Frau Benz had a “warmth for children,” lending her students poetry booklets and instructing in a manner admired by her students even retrospectively.⁵²

In 1936, Max entered Kikinda’s *Realgymnasium* after successfully passing the necessary exams. Unlike his primary school, his secondary school was entirely in Serbian, aside from foreign language classes in German, French, and either English or Latin. As Max recounted, this caused some problems. Apparently favoring their Serb students, the Serbian “professors” categorically gave their non-Serb (primarily German and Hungarian) students worse grades and asked them more difficult questions in class. As a result, he failed his Serbian language classes during his first and second years at the *Realgymnasium*. After spending his summer holidays learning Serbian, he finally passed his re-examinations. His Serbian teacher— “a venomous [lady]”— purportedly was very “proud that she had turned a *Donauschwab* into a Serb ... or into a proper Serbian speaker.” In general, Max explained, his *Realgymnasium* education had been very centered around Serbian national teachings. In history class, for instance, the students were forced to memorize long Serbian “heroic odes, all of it fantasy! Assembled over the centuries [...] like the *Nibelungenlied*.” After Max spent endless afternoons on his family terrace memorizing stories about “characters” like “the main hero of Serbian history, Kraljević Marko” (Prince Marko), fragments of these odes ingrained themselves into his mind for the rest of his life: “*Vino pije Kraljeviću Marko, pola pije, pola Šarcu daje ...*”⁵³

Upon completing the *Realgymnasium*, Max wanted to study at Graz’s technical college, as “the Serbs”— according to his father— were “fifty years behind the Germans or Austrians in technology” at the time. As it was 1940, and “tensions around Adolf”

⁵¹ “Und dann hab ich eine ... äh als Vertreterin eine Jüdin! G’habt ... Und, interessant, für mich, rückblickend ... Dass ich ... in diesem Alter ... Nicht von mir aus! ... Aber von der Lehrerin eine Aversion ... auf deutsche Kinder hatte [...] Da war ein gespanntes Verhältnis [...] Es kann grad ’31, ’32, also mit der Machtübernahme ... n’gewisse ... Ausstrahlung v- ... in diesem ... ja äh jüdischem Kulturkreis ... gewesen sein [...] Und die [Lehrerin] hab ich auch ... irgendwie ... als Kind ... gehasst!” Becker, interview.

⁵² Becker, interview. For a complete list of those teachers employed by the Banat’s *Schulstiftung* in 1943, consider: “Statistik der im Dienste der Schulstiftung stehenden Erzieher-innen und Volksschulen Stand am 30.6.1943,” *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 51-62. Those teachers mentioned by name by the interviewees from that time period indeed appear on this list of instructors.

⁵³ “When Marko drinks, he gives Šarac [his horse] an equal share of the wine.” Translation from Dragutin Subotić, *Yugoslav Popular Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15. For more on the use of Serbia’s oral tradition of epic poetry in Yugoslavia’s interwar school system, see: Troch, “Between Tribes and Nation,” 167-176.

were mounting, however, Max did not receive the necessary passport. The authorities, he explained, refused to hand him the necessary paperwork as there were also technical schools in Yugoslavia that Max could attend. Frustrated in his initial ambition, Max turned to his cousins for advice instead. Among the first graduates of the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* (when it was still in Sombor), these young women had established contacts with students from the *Reich*, traveled to Germany, and met Hitler personally during the late 1930s. Now teachers at local German schools in the Banat, they advised Max that the best education he could receive in German in Yugoslavia was at the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werbass. “For the love of Germandom” (“*dem Deutschtum zuliebe*”), Max therefore decided to enroll at the LBA.

To enter the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*, Max had to pass a series of stringent entrance exams, especially in German, mathematics, and music. As he was virtually tone deaf, Max barely passed the music exam (which consisted of singing and playing an instrument, in his case, violin). He was therefore admitted to the LBA ranked forty-ninth out of fifty boys and girls. Nevertheless, as soon as the 1940/41 academic year started, Max began his education with full enthusiasm. “Teachers were a role model in the villages,” Max explained. Teachers therefore had to be knowledgeable not only in general cultural and scientific subjects, but also in agriculture and gardening (to garner respect from the local farmers and housewives) and music (to lead the local church choir). At the end of every year, the Yugoslav state commission came to test the LBA’s students and faculty. “Of course one had to be able to demonstrate a perfect Serbian, even at the German school,” Max elaborated. In his opinion, these were simply matters of “*Volkstumspolitik*” (national/ethnic politics), tactics continued even by the *Volksgruppe*’s leadership after 1941.

After being sent home from the LBA over the Easter weekend in 1941 to escape potential bombardment, Max’s career at Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* ended. In September 1941, however, he was able to enroll at Werschetz’s LBA. No longer under the authority of the Yugoslav state, the Western Banat’s students and teachers now came under *Reich* control instead. As Max recalled, initially, a *Donauschwabe* from Werschetz (Dr. Ludwig Bauer)— a former principal at Werschetz’s *Gymnasium* and a “good professor of biology and the sciences”— became the academy’s director. However, as with all other German schools in the Banat, a *Reichsdeutsche* teacher, a *Rektor* Reining, who always wore NSDAP insignia, soon replaced him. *Reichsdeutsche* were now placed at all levels of the school administration, causing tensions as the Banat’s Germans

suddenly felt supervised and controlled by frequently “arrogant” *Reichsdeutsche*. Even students did not always appreciate their new *Reichsdeutsche* instructors. Max’s beloved Dr. Bauer was thus replaced when he was in the LBA’s third grade by a *reichsdeutsche* Frau Dr. Döring, a rather unsympathetic woman who enjoyed sentimental students’ writings.⁵⁴

The LBA, already an “elite” “German” institution prior to 1941, became an explicitly National Socialist academy thereafter. As Max recalled, many of the school books used had been confiscated from previous Serbian schools; others probably came from the *Reich* directly. In the LBA dormitories’ first year, the boys were housed in the former carpenter’s workshop of a Jewish man who had been deported that summer.⁵⁵ In full *Deutsche Jugend* uniform, the boys would march from the dorm to their classes, which now were taught also by *reichsdeutsche* teachers. After school and on weekends, all students spent their time at *Deutsche Jugend* events.⁵⁶ Students’ report cards became adorned by swastikas.⁵⁷ Even a successful report card, however, was no longer enough to pass into the next grade. Instead, “as [the *Volksgruppe*] took over all stupidities of the Third Reich,” students now also had to present a positive “*Völkisches Zeugnis*” (“*völkisch* report card”), which stated that “a student is *völkischly* stable [*stabil*] or *völkischly* loyal [*treu*] and can be allowed to start the next grade without concern.”⁵⁸ Based on an agreement reached between the Banat’s *Landesjugendführung* (LJF) and the *Hauptamt für Schulwesen* in 1942, the “*Völkisches Zeugnis*”— in the *Volksgruppe*’s words—formed a supplementary “*völkisch* and character evaluation,” which had been “impossible to include in report cards directly for formal juridical reasons.”⁵⁹ Consisting of a form— which Max remembered as being printed on a piece of DIN A-5 format, colorful, “strong paper” to make it seem “meaningful, valuable”⁶⁰— the *Völkisches Zeugnis* was to include reports on students’ extra-curricular service to the *Volksgruppe*. The main criteria

⁵⁴ Becker, interview.

⁵⁵ This is corroborated in: Peter Binzberger, *Spuren des Erinnerns: Rückblick auf ein bewegtes Leben* (Sersheim: Hartmann Verlag, 2004), 110.

⁵⁶ Becker, interview.

⁵⁷ See embedded image for an example of these report cards.

⁵⁸ Becker, interview.

⁵⁹ “*Eine allgemeine völkisch-charakterliche Beurteilung in das Schulzeugnis selbst einzufügen, war jedoch aus formaljuristischen Gründen nicht möglich.*” Georg Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues und der Bewährung* (Betschkerek: Die ‘Deutsche Jugend’ im Banat und in Serbien, c. 1942), 42.

⁶⁰ “*DIN A-5 Formular [...] bisschen stärkeres Papier, also ... Art Pergament oder, oder ... also getöntes Papier [...] Also schon wie ein ... wertvolles Dokument oder ... oder wie mer das Ding nennen soll [chuckles] ... Bedeutendes, wertvolles ...! [laughs]*” Becker, interview.



Fig. 4.1 Report Card by Banat’s *Schulstiftung*, 1944. Source: Private collection, Max Becker*. Censored by author as per agreement signed by interviewer and interviewee.

included “*Diensteifer*” (“zeal in service”), “*Pflichtbewusstsein*” (“conscientiousness”), “*Charakterfestigkeit*” (“strength of character”), and “*Völkische Einsatzbereitschaft*” (“*völkisch* readiness for duty”). These qualities, according to the form, were primarily to be exhibited in *Landdienst* participation, in *Deutsche Jugend* camps, and through demonstrated “*Führereigenschaften*” (“leadership abilities”).⁶¹

Of course, National Socialism had already made its way into the *Donauschwaben*’s educational system prior to the Axis occupation of much of Southeastern Europe. Käthe Radner, for instance, completed six years of primary education in a German-language primary school (with Serbian language and history classes) in her native Stefansfeld. Like other interviewees, she emphasized that learning Serbian was actually a very good thing, as it enabled the *Donauschwaben* to communicate with their neighbors and function within the new state system.⁶² Although she was a talented student and had wanted to

⁶¹ “*Völkisches Zeugnis*,” reprinted in Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 41.

⁶² Radner, Bucherer, Müller, interviews. As Bucherer stated, having a Serbian-language education was a “wonderful thing, and something that one could use for integration or something today.”

continue her studies at a secondary school, her mother did not allow her to go. Käthe therefore enrolled in a “*Haushaltungsschule*” (“housekeeping school”) in Novi Sad with her cousin and three other girls from Stefansfeld instead. “Back then,” she explained, “the *Erneuerungsbewegung*” had begun to maintain “schools and professors,” including the *Haushaltungsschule*. From November 1937 to April 1938, Käthe and fourteen other girls learned “everything that a housewife needs to know and be familiar with.” They did laundry and weeded the school garden; they cooked and took care of infants; they attended lectures by a doctor and studied “*Vererbungslehre*” (“hereditary science”).⁶³ The course’s leader, as Käthe remembered, was Jolande Ott—a woman who became the first VoMi-approved “*Frauenschaftsführerin*” (leader of the ethnic German women’s organization) of the post-1941 Western Banat.⁶⁴ Although it was a lot of work—work which Käthe’s parents had to pay for with tuition fees—she enjoyed the course. “We dedicated ourselves to the *Erneuerung*,” she elaborated; “Hitler ordered something, and we then lived accordingly ... but I cannot say how exactly it was.”⁶⁵

National Socialist sentiments—which had remained simmering primarily at elite institutions that the *Donauschwaben* could join by choice prior to the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia—openly proliferated across the Western Banat’s mainstream and mandatory educational system after April 1941. As Fritz Wetter explained, all the textbooks used at his local primary school now came from Germany; all the history students learned revolved around “*Heimatgeschichte*” and the history of Germany.⁶⁶ Indeed, as

⁶³ As Käthe was in poor health at the time of the interview and had a hard time hearing my voice through the telephone, her son (who was by Käthe’s side) helped “translate” my questions through the telephone. At this point, an argument erupted between Käthe and her son, as Käthe remembered “*Vererbungslehre*” (“hereditary sciences”) as “*Bewerbungslehre*” (“job application sciences”), and her son asked her whether she had not meant “*Vererbungslehre*.” An advertisement for enrollment at the *Haushaltungsschule* from that very year still exists in archived newspapers today [see: “Neuer Lehrgang im Schulungsheim der Zentral-Wohlfahrtsgenossenschaft in Novisad,” *Bela-Crkvaer Volksblatt*, vol. 42, no. 31 (1.8.1937), 1]. According to this advertisement, the girls indeed learned “*Vererbungslehre*.” For more on such courses for women in Novi Sad, also see: IAZ, “Die hygienischen Verhältnisse in dem Dorfe Bukin (Südslaw. Batschka),” *Südostdeutsche Forschungen*, edited by Fritz Valjavec, Südostinstitut München, vol. 3, no. 1 (6.1938): 256-260; AMV/KB 140, *Rundschreiben Nr. 3/39* about the “*Woge-Schulheim*” in Novi Sad (21.8.1939); *Woge-Blatt. Zeitschrift für ländliche Wohlfahrtspflege*, edited by Johann Wüsch, Novisad, vol. 5, no. 1 (1936), ABV.

⁶⁴ Jolan Ott’s connection to the VoMi and the *Frauenschaft* is revealed in the archival record. In 1942, a *reichsdeutsche* woman was “placed at Jolan Ott’s side in an advisory position”; in 1942, Sepp Janko replaced Jolan Ott with Irene Müller, a lady from the Romanian Banat. Letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, “Landesfrauenführerin Irene Müller, Banat- Serbien” (28.10.1942), PA AA, R 100380-2.

⁶⁵ “*De Hitler hat befohle und mir han’ ... dann ... nachgelebt. Aber ich kann des ned sage, wie des war ...*” Käthe, interview.

⁶⁶ Wetter, interview.

emphasized even in Werschetz's newspaper, the *Deutscher Volksfreund*, especially history curricula had been rewritten. In preparation for the German *Volk*'s "leadership tasks [*Führungsaufgaben*'] within Europe and the whole world," the Western Banat's schools now focused their history lessons on "the tragedy of the *Volk* without space" and similar topics. Only thereby, the article claimed, could an "absolute allegiance to the *Führer*" be fostered, and a new (German) leadership class be raised within Europe.⁶⁷ Such teachings made an impression on the Banat's ethnic German youth. History, as Fritz explained, had now become his favorite subject. However, as he elaborated, "we always differentiated significantly between '*reichsdeutsch*' and us." Unlike the *Donauschwaben*— who had seemingly become less "pure" in "kind" ("*Schlag*") and language over the centuries— the "*Reichsdeutsche*" had always seemed "a little more perfect." "We saw the *Reichsdeutsche* as half-gods! ... *Reichsdeutsch!*," he chuckled.⁶⁸

Other children exposed to National Socialist instructors and teachings had a different reaction. Elmar Müller, who emphasized that the same teachers often taught at a school's German-language section in the morning and at its Serbian-language section in the afternoon,⁶⁹ thus recalled one particularly NS-enthusiastic instructor at his *Bürgerschule* in Modosch. A "*volksdeutsche*" veteran from the Batschka or Banat who had been wounded in battle during World War II, this teacher was "quite oriented towards National Socialism" ("*... war ziemlich ... nazistisch eingestellt*"). One day, Elmar remembered, this teacher announced that he had been able to organize "*Bezugsscheine*" (rationing cards) so that his students could purchase shoes.⁷⁰ Every student then had to stand up and announce how many "*Joch*" of land their parents owned— only the poorest

⁶⁷ "Im Geschichtsunterricht erfährt es [das Kind] mit Stolz und Bewunderung vom Auftrag des Reiches als Ordnungsmacht Europas. Die Tragik des 'Volkes ohne Raum', des 'Volkes für andere' und des Volkes politischer Zersplitterung und Ohnmacht festigen den Willen zur unbedingten Gefolgschaftstreue für den Führer ..." "Eine Schuljugend erlebt den Krieg: Der Anteil der Schule am Kriegsgeschehen, 'Marschbefehl' in pädagogisches Neuland," *Deutscher Volksfreund: Deutsche Zeitung für Hennemannstadt-Werschetz und Umgebung*, vol. 43, no. 37 (4.4.1942), 6.

⁶⁸ "Ja, die [reichsdeutschen] waren ... in ihrer Art schon etwas ... hammen ja ... so Hochdeutsch gesprochen, nicht so den Dialekt, diesen ... wir haben halt den schwowischen Dialekt, wie wir ... und waren schon, vom Schlag etwas, und schon anders ... Bisschen, perfekter, so ... schon ... weil wir waren doch irgendwo etwas ... JWD ... 'janz weit draussen' ... als Volksgruppe ... und das hat sich natürlich schon auch niedergeschlagen, bemerkbar gemacht ..."; "Ja wir haben sie als halbe Götter betrachtet ... *Reichsdeutsch!* [chuckles]" Wetter, interview.

⁶⁹ This description is repeated in Bucherer, interview.

⁷⁰ For a newspaper announcement for shoe rationing cards in the Western Banat, see: "Tagesneuigkeiten: Bezugsscheine für Schuhe eingeführt," *Deutscher Volksfreund*, vol. 43, no. 3, (16.1.1942), 4. For an original copy of a Western Banat "*Bezugsschein*," see: IAZ Fond 133, no. 4214/43: 2.III.1942, "Brennmaterial Bezugsschein."

children would then receive these cards.⁷¹ When it was his turn, Elmar announced, “truthfully,” that his family owned eighty *Joch*. The teacher, understanding “eight,” decided to hand Elmar a rationing card. Immediately, however, his classmates “screamed: NO!!! Eighty!!!” Shocked, the teacher scolded Elmar loudly, told him to be ashamed of himself, and took back the cards. “We had the money [...] and did not ask anyone to give us those shoes for free,” he explained; however, “you can neither generate shoes in a brick factory, nor do shoes grow in the fields.”⁷² “It may sound ridiculous,” Elmar stated, “however, from that moment on, this whole Nazi story was over for me.”⁷³

3. *The Schulstiftung and the Deutsche Jugend Join Forces*

Whether or not ethnic German pupils remained convinced of the National Socialist cause, the Western Banat’s school system between 1941 and 1944 ensured that all of them would remain firmly under the *Volksgruppe*’s control. To this effect, an elaborate network of treaties and cooperations were set up between the *Hauptamt für Schulwesen* and other *Volksgruppe* authorities. The *Landesjugendführung* (LJF) in particular became a crucial partner of the *Schulstiftung*. According to one official *Deutsche Jugend* report, during the summer of 1942, the *Schulstiftung* and the LJF had already carried out a major joint project to help bring Belgrade’s ethnic Germans into the Western Banat. Unable to attend German-language secondary schools in Serbia, twenty boys and twenty-five girls were brought from Belgrade to various Banat academies that year. The *Schulstiftung*, apparently, paid for their recruitment and school fees; the *Landesjugendführung* evaluated the intellectual capabilities and “*völkish* and racial worth” of the youth before they even embarked upon the exchange.⁷⁴

The relatively informal— but, in their joint focus on youth, necessarily close— LJF/*Schulstiftung* relationship became formalized for the first time on October 1st, 1941. Following heated debates between the LJF-*Hauptamt IV* and the *Hauptamt für Schulwesen*, all “German male and female pupils” attending German schools were placed

⁷¹ One *Joch* is equivalent to approximately 1.42 acres.

⁷² “*Wir haben das Geld, wir haben nicht [...] so gebeten, dass uns jemand die Schuhe schenkt! ... Aber weder in der Ziegelei kann mer Schuhe erzeugen, noch auf diesem Feld wächst Schuhe!*” He here refers to his father’s brick factory (already mentioned previously). Müller, interview.

⁷³ “*Von dem Moment an, kann ich Ihne sagen ... war für mich ... diese ganze Nazi Geschichte erledigt ... Es klingt zwar lächerlich, also, was ich g’sagt [chuckles] ...*” Müller, interview.

⁷⁴ Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 27.

directly into the *Deutsche Jugend* (DJ) and its subsidiaries. On March 1st, 1942 and March 17th, 1942, more extensive contracts were signed by Adam Maurus (head of the *Hauptamt für Schulwesen*) and Franz Germann (head of the LJF). According to their articles, all students enrolled at “German schools” automatically became DJ members, and were required to behave according to DJ regulations and participate in all DJ-related “home front” activities (including the *Arbeitsdienst*, *Landdienst*, and *Erntedienst*). A “*Völkisches Zeugnis*,” completed by the respective DJ leaders, was now required in addition to a successful report card to pass into the next academic year, and to join any kind of *Volksgruppe* association in a leading position in future. Georg Peierle, a previous mediator between the LJF and the school system, became the “*Beauftragter für den völkischen Einsatz der deutschen Schülerschaft*” (“Commissioner for the *Völkisch* Mission of the German Student Body”). All schools, similarly, were to appoint “contact men” (“*Verbindungsmänner*”) between the LJF and the *Schulstiftung*. Sunday evenings and additional afternoons were to be kept both class- and homework-free to enable students to attend DJ meetings (“*Wochendienst*”); supplementary holidays for the training of *Bann-* and *Gefolgschafts*-leaders could be authorized by school principals; and *Volksgruppe* holidays (including January 30th, the “*Heldengedenktage*,” Hitler’s birthday, May 1st, harvest festivals, and solstices) were further to be celebrated in schools. Expulsion from a German school for disciplinary problems, moreover, would entail a dismissal from the DJ. However, a dismissal from the DJ would not necessarily automatically result in an expulsion from school.⁷⁵ According to Peierle, these joint measures had one aim: to reverse “the almost unforgivable crimes against our youth” that had been committed by the “Serbs” in previous decades, in their school and military system’s mass “stultification and alienation from our language, our *völkisch* essence, and our German nature.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Abkommen zwischen der Landesjugendführung und dem Hauptamt für Schulwesen über den völkischen Einsatz der deutschen Schülerschaft” (1.3.1942), “Zusatzabkommen zum Abkommen der LJF und dem Hauptamt für Schulwesen” (1.3.1942), “Durchführungsbestimmungen zum Art. 7 des Abkommens zwischen der LJF und dem Hauptamt für Schulwesen vom 1. März 1942,” reprinted in Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 33-41.

⁷⁶ “Die neu zu uns gestossene Jugend musste umgeschult werden ... An unserer Jugend wurde ein schwer wieder gutzumachendes Verbrechen begangen ... *welch raffinierten Methoden das chauvinistische Serbentum die Entfremdung unserer Jugend beim jugoslawischen Militär und in der Schule betrieben hat ... eine Abtötung aller Fähigkeiten und rassischen Kräfte, eine planmässige Verdummung, Entfremdung von unserer Sprache und unserem völkischen Wesen, von unserer Deutschen Eigenart.*” Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 43-44. Emphasis in original.

The LJF leaders indeed saw the school system's cooperation as essential. As the Western Banat's *Landesjugendführung* admitted in late 1942: "We still do not have the means at our hands to force the German youth into our organization." The only notable exception, it conceded, was the school system.⁷⁷ Indeed, those Banat *Donauschwaben* children and youth interested in receiving a German-language education ultimately had no choice but to join the *Deutsche Jugend* and participate in its festivities and home front services. The teachers and school authorities, in their cooperation with the LJF, then became the primary informants and enforcers not only in relation to childrens' and young people's curricular education, but also in regards to their extra-curricular engagements. Oral history interviews underline how schools became a main source of *Deutsche Jugend* service enforcement. As Elmar Müller recounted, he himself was forced to join the *Pimpfe* organization as a young boy. "I could never stand it!," exclaimed Elmar. Whenever he skipped the mandatory youth meetings, however, it was his more enthusiastic classmates who picked him up at his home. "Come with us! You must join us! There's no choice!," they would cry.⁷⁸ His older brother similarly abhorred "group, mass things." Even though his classmates and DJ associates threatened and beat him up on several occasions, he still "did not go [to a DJ event] a single time."⁷⁹

It was not just classmates who helped enforce *Deutsche Jugend* service, however. Rather, in March 1942, the agreement signed between the LJF and the *Hauptamt für Schulwesen* also included provisions for a "*DJ-Streifendienst*" ("DJ patrol force"). "For the protection of all DJ members," this "patrol force" would "take care of youth protection and youth criminal law," both inside of the classroom and outside of it. The official

⁷⁷ "Wohlgemerkt: Wir haben nach wie vor keine Zwangsmittel in der Hand, um die deutsche Jugend in unsere Organisation zu zwingen. Die ganze Erfassung beruhte auf dem Grundsatz der Freiwilligkeit, vielleicht nur mit Ausnahme der deutschen Schule." Emphasis in original. Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 30.

⁷⁸ "Ich sag zwangsläufig, ja ich war ... Wiederhol's jetzt, ich war noch nie äh so für diese [...] zum Beispiel Wandern, Jugendherberge und so was. War nie mein Fall! [...] Und dann sollt' ich plötzlich unter anderem auch da ich glaub einmal in der Woche, oder was, war so eine Versammlung [...] und das gefiel mir absolut nicht! [...] Da auf Befehl dann, dann von so viel bis so viel Uhr musste da sein und ... Und, naja, ich wurde da zwei, drei Mal abgeholt [laughs] von den Schulkameraden aber äh ... Komm mit! Du musst dabei sein! Geht ned anderst! [...] Des konnt' ich nie leiden! ... Und zwar, erinnere' jetzt, es war nicht, dass ich, dass ich jetzt sagen will ich bin ... gegen die politische Richtung gewesen. Nein! ... Das war, das hab' ich gar ned verstanden! Das äh als Kind hat man da gar nicht gewusst wie ... was dahinter steckt, so. Ganz schlicht und einfach, ich wollte meine Ruhe!" Müller, interview.

⁷⁹ Müller, interview. As he emphasized, the German minority in his town was not so large, and the leaders of the German youth movement were perhaps less enthusiastic than those of other towns, so that it was easier in their case to withdraw from mandatory DJ service.

regulations (“*Dienstordnung*”) of the schools and the DJ, after all, “completed one another”; students would therefore need to be kept under “strict supervision,” both in school and outside of it, to ensure that all legal codes were being upheld. School directors and teachers were to remain in contact with the local DJ leadership. Only joint commissions composed of a school’s director, “individual educators,” DJ leaders, *Bund deutscher Erzieher im Banat* representatives, and— if applicable— dormitory directors could now decide on the promotion of students to the next academic year.⁸⁰

Dormitories formed another crucial link between students’ extra-curricular and curricular education. Already prior to April 1941, dormitories had been central to the existence of German-language secondary schools in the region, as most German-speaking children and youth were forced to move away from their hometowns in order to continue their education upon completing primary school. After April 1941, the Western Banat’s *Schulstiftung* not only acquired and opened a range of new dormitories for boys and girls (in Betschkerek, Werschetz, Weisskirchen, Kikinda, Pantschowa, Modosch, and elsewhere); rather, they also fashioned these explicitly into National Socialist institutions. All of these dorms’ inhabitants were to be “educated towards a unified worldview.”⁸¹ Dormitory directors were simultaneously DJ leaders, placed under the authority of the LJF. Students living in these dorms formed their own DJ units. Their schedules were to be harmonized between school, extra-curricular, and dormitory-based activities, all of which were to stand under the auspices of children’s and young people’s greater “*völkischer Einsatz*” (“*völkisch* task”).⁸²

The observational and political role of the *Schulstiftung*’s dormitories becomes apparent in oral history interviews conducted with their former inhabitants. After transferring from Werbass’ *Bürgerschule* to Betschkerek’s *Realgymnasium* in 1941, Michael Bucherer, for instance, initially lived in a dormitory (“*Schülerheim*”). However, after two years, he decided to move into private lodgings, and thereafter lived with two other *Realgymnasium* students at a local family’s home, for which his family paid room and board. “In the *Schülerheim*, [everything] was so strict,” he explained. “[They told us] at this and this time we have to study,” they enforced a “service” and determined that “now we go left, now we go right, now we must do this or that.” Especially in the dormitory, it was “self-evident” (“*eine Selbstverständlichkeit*”) that students also joined

⁸⁰ Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 36.

⁸¹ *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 22-23, 26-27.

⁸² Peierle, *Bericht über ein Jahr des Aufbaues*, 33-34, 37-38.

“the youth [group ...] not for any national feelings or something... few people were enthusiastic,” but simply because it was the policy.⁸³ As a result, “many [...] took a distance from the dormitory... for the simple reason [that] they more or less wanted to stand privately on their own feet, instead of being somehow— in quotation marks— under command” all the time.⁸⁴

With the re-configuration of the Western Banat, German-language education— a right and privilege that the *Donauschwabern* had fought for intensively during the interwar period— was suddenly transformed into a duty. For the Western Banat’s ethnic Germans, attending a “German” school was no longer a matter of gaining access to select German-language institutions— even if these were in a different district or country. Rather, it had turned into a compulsory exercise, backed coercively by state authority, social pressure, and (if need be) the police. An intermingling of actors and agendas from the extra-curricular and curricular spheres, especially in relation to nationalist activism and minority rights, had already occurred prior to 1941. After the establishment of the semi-autonomous *Volksgruppe*, however, the extra-curricular and curricular spheres were even more consciously and tightly interwoven. Attending a German school thus entailed membership in the *Deutsche Jugend*; dormitory directors became extra-curricular youth group leaders; and children and youth suddenly found themselves within a compulsory and mutually constitutive tapestry of German classroom education, National Socialist youth groups, and “home front” service. Reactions to these developments varied from person to person, and frequently existed in contradiction with one another, even within individual children and youth. Generally speaking, receiving a mother-tongue education was perceived as a benefit and a “liberation” to all *Donauschwabern* involved. However, in its tight coexistence with National Socialism, *Reich* supervision, and local radicalized minority politics, the ethnic German educational system became an arena in which some individuals flourished and others faded. Many children and youth— depending primarily on personalized interactions with teachers, school directors, and peers— vacillated between the two.

⁸³ “Man war in die Jugend [*Deutsche Jugend*] irgendwie äh ... Unter, untergebracht ... als Selbstverständlichkeit ... Nicht aus irgendwelchen nationalen Gefühlen oder wie ... da waren wenige begeistert gewesen ...” Bucherer, interview.

⁸⁴ “Viele haben dann [...] Abstand genommen von dem Schülerheim ... Aussem’ einfachen Grund ... Die wollten mehr oder weniger privat und eigenes ... Beine steh’n, als [...] irgendwie unter Anführungszeichen kommandiert zu werden.” Bucherer, interview.

Education, extra-curricular youth group and “home front” service, and— in the case of those students staying at dormitories— even living situations were so tightly interwoven after 1941 that very little space was left for those organizations not directly endorsed and supported by the *Volksgruppe*. The seeds of secularization and right-wing, totalitarian politics sown prior to 1941 even gave rise to considerable changes in the religious sphere between 1941 and 1944. From church institutions, to Catholic traditions, to personal religious devotion— all traditionally crucial to the *Donauschwaben* societies and senses of self— the church took a back seat, shrinking almost into oblivion for those children and youth incorporated into the *Volksgruppe*’s projects during those years.

C. The Role of the Church

During the interwar period, the various church denominations had played a crucial role in the organization and, to a degree, the “nationalization” of the *Donauschwaben* communities. Engaged in a contestation over children and youth both in the curricular and extra-curricular arenas, the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Methodist Churches developed increasingly elaborate educational schemes during the years prior to 1941. In all cases— and largely due to the simultaneous rise of the right-wing *Deutsche Jugend*— the influence of religious youth groups and educational projects nonetheless declined during the late 1930s. Following the Western Banat’s occupation by *Reichsdeutsche* forces in April 1941, the *Donauschwabens*’ church organizations did not recover. On the contrary: ecclesiastical matters shrank to the peripheries of the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* societies, disappearing almost entirely from both public debate and (ex-) young people’s personal recollections.

While a significant body of archival and historiographic material exists both in Germany and in Serbia related to the *Donauschwaben*’s Church activities in the Western Banat up to 1941, any record or discussion of ecclesiastical issues during the occupation years is almost impossible to find. Most historians who have written about the Banat during those years avoid questions of ecclesiastical organizations and religion almost entirely; most archival collections that include sources on the Banat’s *Donauschwaben* churches prior to 1941 remain silent on these topics thereafter.⁸⁵ Questions of the Western

⁸⁵ These collections include ones in the *Bundesarchiv* (Berlin), the *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes* (Berlin), and the *Deutscher Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”* (Apatin). National libraries (as in Berlin,

Banat's church organizations, as well as the *Donauschwaben's* interactions with ecclesiastical authorities and more personalized perceptions of religious faith, therefore remain a major, unexplored field of inquiry. It is not possible to fill these gaps entirely within the framework of this dissertation. However, a first attempt will be made in the following passages to explore the role of the churches not only in the *Donauschwaben* communities at large during those years, but also within the lives of those former children and youth who are still able to reflect on these issues today.

1. The Re-Formulation of Church Structures, 1941-1944

With the re-drawing of boundaries in April 1941, Yugoslavia's ecclesiastical authorities were forced to re-organize themselves once again. Largely due to the lingering expectation that the Western Banat might still be "reunited" with Hungary, particularly the territory's "ethnic minority churches" were slow to react and— with the exception of the German Evangelical Church— barely established any Banat-specific bodies of authority.⁸⁶ At least according to Ekkehard Völkl— one of the only historians to have written about the Western Banat's churches between 1941 and 1944— especially the Catholic Church remained embedded within the context of Hungary's Catholic authorities during those years. Officially, the Western Banat's Catholic Church still belonged to Belgrade's Diocese after 1941. Monsignore István Kovács, a *Donauschwaben* clergyman, remained in position of the Banat's *Generalvikar* (Vicar General). However, the relationship between Kovács and the *Volksgruppe's* leadership was riddled with conflict from the start. Accused of being a "*Madjarone*" (pejorative for pro-Hungarian) by both *reichsdeutsche* and *volksdeutsche* authorities, Kovács stood under constant scrutiny during those years. Reports by the Banat's *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), for instance, accused Kovács of supporting "Magyardom," despite the purportedly increasing number of young clergymen who stood loyally with the *Volksgruppe*.⁸⁷

As during the interwar period, initiatives were taken from "abroad" to influence the region's Catholic congregations between 1941 and 1944. Unlike during the interwar period, however, most of the initiatives launched to help "educate" the region's Catholics

Belgrade, and Budapest) that house collections of religious publications for the period prior to 1941 have no such material for the Western Banat specifically between 1941 and 1944.

⁸⁶ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 131.

⁸⁷ Kovács (1879-1948) became the Banat's *Generalvikar* in 1936 under Josip Ujčić, Archbishop of Belgrade between 1936 and 1964. Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 67, 142-143.

stemmed from the Hungarian Catholic Church. The Archbishop of Szeged (Gyula Glattfelder) and various Budapest authorities attempted to send Hungarian clerics and teachers into the Banat during those years, to educate both Hungarian and *Donauschwaben* Catholics. These efforts were largely frustrated and blocked by the *Volksgruppe*.⁸⁸ The German Foreign Office, alternatively, barely intervened in the Banat's Catholic affairs. Unable to decide whether extant "*Führerbefehle*" (Hitler's orders) regarding the restriction of "foreign" clergymen in Eastern Europe's occupied territories applied to the Banat as well, the Foreign Office simply ignored the issue. Fearing conflict with the *Volksgruppe* and a further de-stabilization of German-Hungarian relations in the region, the Foreign Office largely avoided sending *reichsdeutsche* clergymen to the Banat during those years.⁸⁹ Finally, the Banat's Archbishop only appointed clerics with the Vatican's approval even during those years. The *Reich's* and the *Volksgruppe's* (as well as other minorities' Catholic authorities') control over the local Catholic Church hence remained limited.⁹⁰

The "Reformed Christian Church in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia" ("*Reformierte Christliche Kirche im Königreich Jugoslawien*"), established in 1930, experienced more significant changes between 1941 and 1944. Unlike the Catholic Church, the Calvinist Church had a minute number of *Donauschwaben* followers in the Banat. Previous ecclesiastical administrative lines, furthermore, did not coincide as nicely with the political lines drawn after 1941. Following the occupation of Yugoslavia, the Calvinist Church's Western *Seniorat* (district) largely fell to Croatia, the Northern and the (previously "German") Southern districts were incorporated into the Hungarian "*délvidék*" ("southern territories"), and the Eastern *Seniorat* remained within the Banat, under Serbian administration.⁹¹ The "Reformed Christian Church in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia," however, was only officially dissolved at a meeting of its heads in Sombor (Batschka) on January 28th, 1943. János Gachal, already previously *Senior* of the Eastern district, was elected Bishop of the Banat's Reformed Communities ("*Bischof der Banater Reformierten Gemeinden*") shortly thereafter, effectively casting the Banat's Calvinist Church as an independent Church district. However, the local German authorities were

⁸⁸ The predominant means therefore— as during the interwar period— were the refusal of entry documents and visas for foreign clerics.

⁸⁹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 142-144. As he explains, the *Volksgruppe* was reluctant to accept the "aid" of *Reichsdeutsche* clergymen, as they would not stand under the *Volksgruppe's* authorities.

⁹⁰ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 262.

⁹¹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 132.

only informed of this development in February 1943, when Gachal applied for travel permission to Budapest to discuss his new position as Calvinist bishop with Hungary's Reformed authorities. Alarmed by this subversive act, the *Reich* ambassador to Belgrade, Felix Benzler, wrote to the German Foreign Office urging *Reich* authorities to help nullify the appointment. According to Benzler's letter, the SD had reported that Gachal was not to be trusted: until recently, he had even "carried out baptisms of Jews [*Judentaufen*]." The *Reich*, however, did not take action, and the *Volksgruppe*'s hands were tied. Gachal thus continued acting as "Bishop," convening annual meetings of the Banat's Reformed Church administrators, and taking part at Calvinist festivities as the Church's ecclesiastical head. The Serbian government's financial contributions to the Banat's Reformed Church doubled during those years.⁹²

Both the Western Banat's Catholic and Calvinist Churches therefore remained largely outside of the *Volksgruppe*'s authority after 1941. As far as can be gleaned from extant sources and studies, however, this stood in contrast once again to the region's German Evangelical Church. After April 1941, the Western Banat's fifteen thousand Lutherans were suddenly split from their previous head, Bishop Philipp Popp, who stayed in Zagreb and became the leader of the Lutheran Church in the Independent State of Croatia. In order to remedy this situation, the Western Banat's pastors sent a petition to the German military authorities in Belgrade, asking for the establishment of an independent Lutheran bishopric seat. Diplomatic negotiations between the *Volksgruppe*, *Reich* officials in Berlin, and the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK) ensued. While the *Volksgruppe*—backed by the military authorities (*Militärverwaltung*) in Belgrade—demanded an independent German Lutheran bishopric authority, the *Reich* was reluctant to grant such privileges. According to the VoMi, the Foreign Office, and various *Reich* Church authorities, it would not be necessary to introduce such an office, as there were only ten Lutheran pastors in the entire Western Banat; as the Banat would soon be unified with the Batschka under Hungarian rule; and as the majority of the local Lutheran authorities purportedly exhibited too many pro-Hungarian proclivities to begin with. However, largely through the initiative of the *Militärverwaltung*, the Lutheran pastor of Franzfeld, Franz Hein, was declared "Temporary Leader of the German Evangelical Church in the Banat" ("*Vorläufige Leiter der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche im Banat*") on January 13th, 1942. Two weeks later, he was declared Bishop at a meeting of

⁹² Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 139-141.

the local Lutheran authorities in Betschkerek. On March 15th, 1942, his appointment was confirmed by all parties involved.⁹³

Franz Hein's inauguration as Bishop of the Banat's Lutheran Church was followed by the publication of the "Statutes of the German Evangelical Church in the Banat" (*"Kirchenordnung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche im Banat"*) in April 1942.⁹⁴ Signed by Prime Minister Nedić, the statutes confirmed those demands outlined by the Banat's German Lutheran authorities in January 1942. According to the document, the "German Evangelical Church in the Banat" (*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche im Banat*) "professed their loyalty" (*"bekennt sich zu"*) to the German Evangelical Church as a whole. The Banat's Lutheran Church was tied contractually to the *Kirchliches Aussenamt* in Berlin.⁹⁵ As such, the Church's Bishop could only be chosen in cooperation with the DEK's foreign office in Berlin, and confirmed by the Banat's Lutheran authorities, as well as by the head of state (here presumably meaning Nedić).⁹⁶ The official language of services, correspondence, and all activities related to pastoral care would be German. However, Lutherans of Hungarian and Slovak ethnicity (*"Volkszugehörigkeit"*) could be integrated into the Banat's German Lutheran Church as well, as long as they had "no Church organization of their own."⁹⁷ All clergymen and bureaucrats employed by the Lutheran Church were to make an oath before God (and the local Church authorities) to "fulfill [their] duties in all loyalty to [their] Evangelical Church and [their] German Volk."⁹⁸ Furthermore, the Banat's German Lutheran Church would have the right—within the framework of both ecclesiastical and local state laws— to maintain social

⁹³ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 133-137. According to Hausleitner, Franz Hein (1901-1986) had already supported the National Socialists in his hometown, Franzfeld, during the 1930s. Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 262.

⁹⁴ AMV/KB 6841 el. 9, "Kirchenordnung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche im Banat," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, no. 9 (1.4.1942), 1-7.

⁹⁵ This office consisted mainly of the DEK's "foreign office." Völkl emphasizes in his book that this particular "tie" between Reich authorities and the Banat's German Evangelical Church is not to be overestimated (*Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 140).

⁹⁶ §45, "Kirchenordnung," *Verordnungsblatt* (4.1942), 5.

⁹⁷ §1 and §13, "Kirchenordnung," *Verordnungsblatt* (4.1942), 2-3.

⁹⁸ "Ich, N. N., zum der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche im Banat, gewählt, gelobe vor Gott dem Allmächtigen, meinem himmlischen Vater, mein Amt in aller Treue für meine evangelische Kirche und mein deutsches Volk zu führen, mich an die Glaubensgrundlagen der evangelischen Kirche A.B. zu halten, und in ihrem Geiste für meine (Landeskirche bzw. Gemeinde) Sorge zu tragen. So wahr mir Gott helfe! Amen!" "Kirchenordnung," §14, *Verordnungsblatt* (4.1942), 3.



Fig. 4.2 Rural Demonstration “Thanking” Adolf Hitler, with Children and Two Men Appearing to Wear Ecclesiastical Robes on Stage. Begej Sveti Đurađ/Sankt Georgen an der Bega/ Bégaszentgyörgy (Banat), Early 1940s. Banner: “Wier danken unserem Führer.” Spelling error in original. Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.

programs, “youth work” (*Jugendpflege*), religion classes, religious educational institutions, and dormitories.⁹⁹

This early direct involvement of the DEK and *Reich* authorities in the Banat’s Lutheran Church’s matters of course raises questions about potential ideological (National Socialist) leanings of the Church. *Reich* involvement in *Donauschwaben* church affairs had already given rise to questionable publications, leaders, and activities during the interwar period. Unfortunately, the current lack of source material does not allow for a thorough exploration of the relationship between the Banat’s Lutheran Church and National Socialism. As Völkl has claimed, however, the Banat’s Lutheran authorities did engage in “German national” (and not necessarily National Socialist) rhetoric to obtain financial and political support from the DEK and the *Kirchliches Aussenamt*. However, such pro-German correspondence, states Völkl, should primarily be seen in light of opportunism and the dependence of the Banat’s Lutheran authorities on the *Reich*’s goodwill.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Preamble and §8, “Kirchenordnung,” *Verordnungsblatt* (4.1942), 1-2.

¹⁰⁰ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 135, 138-139.

And such “pro-German” correspondence there was. Letters exchanged between the Foreign Office and the Banat’s *Militärbefehlshaber*, for instance, described Hein’s inauguration in March 1942 as occurring with “honorary guests” from the SS and the SD, and in a spirit of “positive opinion of the National Socialist time.” At the ensuing “*Heldengedenkfeier*” (“heroes’ memorial service”), all speeches “highlighted the common will to fight Bolshevism and emphasized loyalty to the *Führer* and Greater Germany.”¹⁰¹ Documents currently archived in Zrenjanin further suggest that outward support of National Socialism occurred in the Banat even without the direct involvement of *Reich* authorities.¹⁰² In April 1943, for instance, the Banat’s Lutheran *Kirchenamt* (Church Office) sent Betschkerek’s mayor, Josef Gion, a “*Heil Hitler!*”-festooned invitation to a Lutheran service in honor of Hitler’s birthday.¹⁰³ The Lutheran Church’s pro-*Reich* self-representation seems to have been quite effective: by the spring of 1943, Hein was lauded by the *Reich* authorities for his work in the “interests of Germandom” (“*Deutschtumsinteresse*”) and “defense” against “Magyardom,” and supported in his efforts with four thousand *Reichsmark* from the *Kirchliches Aussenamt*.¹⁰⁴

Despite such support from the *Reich*, it seems that there were limitations as to what even *reichsdeutsche* officials would accept in relation to the explicit “racialization” of the *Donauschwaben* churches. In July 1942, for instance, a flurry of correspondence arose between the *Militärbefehlshaber* and the German Foreign Office about a *faux pas* committed by Christian Brücker, the *Volksgruppe*’s *Kreisleiter* in Belgrade. Earlier that month, he had sent a letter to the heads of the Banat’s Roman Catholic, German Lutheran, and Serbian Orthodox (“Pravoslavac”) Churches claiming that “mixed marriages between members of the German race and members of a foreign race (Croats, Serbs, and Hungarians)” would be allowed only with prior consent of the *Kreisleiter*.¹⁰⁵ All

¹⁰¹ “*In den Reden wurde immer wieder der gemeinsame Wille im Abwehrkampf gegen den Bolschewismus hervorgehoben und die Treue zu Führer und Grossdeutschland betont.*” Letter from *Bevollmächtigte des Auswärtigen Amtes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien* to German Foreign Office, “*Bischofseinführung im Banat*” (18.3.1942), PA AA, R 100939-2424.

¹⁰² Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 11-12. Völkl did not have access to these sources when he wrote this book. As his work was published in 1991, and access to the relevant Serbian archives was difficult before that, he only used archival collections in Germany.

¹⁰³ IAZ Fond 133, no. 6415/43, “*Einladung*” (17.4.1943).

¹⁰⁴ Letter from *DEK Kirchliches Außenamt* to German Foreign Office (12.6.1943), PA AA, R 100489-4; letter, signed by Reichel (Berlin) to *Bevollmächtigte des Auswärtigen Amtes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien* (28.6.1943), PA AA, R 100489-4.

¹⁰⁵ “... *Mischehen Deutschrassiger mit Angehörigen einer fremden Rasse (Kroatien, Serben und Ungarn) in Serbien nur mit vorheriger schriftlicher Genehmigung des Kreisleiters des Kreises Prinz Eugen der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Serbien geschlossen werden dürfen.*” Letter to VoMi (31.7.1942), PA AA,

ecclesiastical authorities involved immediately protested, whereupon Sepp Janko sent a statement to the Foreign Office that Brücker had unfortunately (and mistakenly) extended to civilians a policy that only applied to members of the *Prinz-Eugen-Division* of the SS.¹⁰⁶ The German Foreign Office and the VoMi sympathized, stating that they were aware that Brücker had always been “overly zealous” (“*übereifrig*”). In reality, Brücker had been “correct in his racial understanding” (“*rassische Auffassung*”); however, it was politically reckless to publicly declare the *Reich*-allied Croats and Hungarians as “members of a foreign race.”¹⁰⁷

Despite such efforts to “nationalize” issues of confession— especially on part of the Lutheran Church— civic records assembled even by the *Volksgruppe*’s authorities suggest that, between 1941 and 1944, major distinctions were not necessarily drawn between nationalities in Church matters. Baptismal certificates signed by the Catholic Church even in 1943 remained trilingual (Latin, German, and Hungarian), occasionally included parents of mixed confessions (such as of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches), and listed family members with mixed German, Hungarian, and Serbo-Croatian names.¹⁰⁸ Regular church news columns in the local German press— such as in the *Deutscher Volksfreund*— similarly not only advertised upcoming Catholic and Lutheran services, but also announced the engagements and marriages of couples with mixed Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, Russian, and German names.¹⁰⁹

Compared to the interwar period, moreover, the *Reich* was strikingly absent— both in support and in earnest interventions— in the *Donauschwaben*’s post-1941 religious affairs. The reasons for this were multiple. In 1941, Germany’s Propaganda Ministry restricted the publication of religious materials in Germany. Moreover, in September 1941, the *Reich* minister for church affairs declared that his ministry would curb its activities outside of the boundaries of Germany and its directly incorporated territories. The reasoning for this measure was twofold. On the one hand, Hitler wanted to contain

R 100382-1; transcription of letter from *Deutsche Volksgruppe in Serbien Kreis Prinz Eugen Kreisverwaltungsamt Belgrad* to Roman Catholic Church’s Bishopric Seat in Belgrade, “Mischehen” (12.7.1942), PA AA, R 100382-1.

¹⁰⁶ Transcript of letter, signed by Janko, “Schreiben des Kreisleiters Brücker, Belgrad, an die Bischöfe in Belgrad,” PA AA, R 100382-1.

¹⁰⁷ Letter to VoMi (31.7.1942), PA AA, R 100382-1.

¹⁰⁸ Consider: IAZ Fond 133, no. 693/1943, “Baptimales—Taufschein—Keresztlevél,” signed 5.4.1943 by Karl Fehér; IAZ Fond 133, no. 167/1943; IAZ Fond 133, no. 582/1943, “Taufschein.”

¹⁰⁹ Between March 13th and 19th, 1942, these included couples like Nikolić Mirko and Martinov Sara, Hegedüs Janos and Dutz Katalin, Radul Maxa and Reiter Elisabeth. “Bevölkerungsbewegung,” *Deutscher Volksfreund*, vol. 43, no. 34 (28.3.1942), 3.

his struggles with religious policies and authorities within Germany's boundaries. On the other hand, Nazi authorities (such as those currently stationed in the Sudetenland) feared that *Reich*-supported ecclesiastical projects would come to rival National Socialist power among Eastern Europe's "*Volksdeutsche*." Furthermore, by 1943, war-related restrictions severely limited religious institutions' access to paper; the *Reich*'s religious press, already targeted by various repressive measures during the previous years, came to a virtual standstill thereafter.¹¹⁰

In this context of the churches' declining power, especially in "national" matters, the Banat's local German authorities developed *Ersatz*-rituals, couched in National Socialist lore. In September 1943, the *Banater Beobachter* reported triumphantly on "the first SS consecration of marriage [*Eheweih*]" in the Banat." On August 31st that year, two SS officers and their brides reportedly were married in Betschkerek in a purely SS-led ceremony. The wedding was opened by a procession of the brides, grooms, and marriage witnesses ("*Trauzeugen*"), which included illustrious figures like Sepp Janko and Christian Brücker. The wedding guests, consisting of the majority of the *Volksgruppe* elite, thereupon rose for a Hitler salute. Following speeches on the importance of maintaining the "community of blood" ("*Blutsgemeinschaft*"), an SS leader and Belgrade's female DJ leader alternately recited National Socialist poems on the duties of the German man and the German woman, while the couples exchanged rings. The newly married couples thereupon "symbolically" received bread and salt, the congregation erupted in the "*Deutschlandlied*" (the German national anthem), *SS-Gruppenführer* Meyszner publicly expressed his congratulations, and Sepp Janko gave a roaring speech on "eternal faith" in "the German future." As the article concluded:

Those seeds, carried by the mother soil and the powerful worldview in the SS, have blossomed. Out of the faithful proclamation of loyalty to God's most exalted creation, to our Germany, [and] out of the acts of great hearts, the joyful will to eternal being, we will draw inexhaustible strengths for all eternity.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 19, 53-54, 153.

¹¹¹ "*Die Saat, getragen von dem Mutterboden und der starken Weltanschauung in der SS [runic script] ist aufgegangen. Aus dem gläubigen Bekenntnis zu Gottes erhabenster Schöpfung, zu unserem Deutschland, aus der Tat grosser Herzen, dem freudigen Willen zu unserem ewigen Sein, werden wir nie versiegende Kräfte in aller Zukunft schöpfen.*" Heinrich Hildenbrand, "Die erste SS-Eheweih im Banat: Die Saat geht auf!—Blut will zu gleichem Blut!," *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 757 (3.11.1943), 5.

Ultimately, the relationship between the *Volksgruppe* and the various *Donauschwaben* confessions was both variegated and conflicted. Caught between *Reich* diplomatic concerns and disinterest, domestic interethnic struggles (and/or cooperations), the unwillingness of certain clergymen to submit to National Socialist desires, the expectation of renewed border changes, and conditions of war, the *Volksgruppe*'s hands were largely tied in ecclesiastical matters. At least according to surviving sources, however, the German Lutheran Church once again represented an exception. Supported by both the *Reich* and the *Volksgruppe*, the Banat's German Lutheran Church received an unusually high degree of autonomy and funding during the occupation years. Such privileges, however, came at a cost, as the Lutheran Church's leadership was forced to publicly assume a pro-*Reich* stance, and become dependent on political calculations made by the DEK, the VoMi, and the *Volksgruppe*.

2. "From Below" Perspectives: Reflections on Church Institutions and Religious Devotion

The absence of archival sources, contemporaneous press, and historiography on the *Donauschwaben*'s churches in the Western Banat between 1941 and 1944 is striking. Indeed, based on available sources, it is almost impossible to determine whether any of those youth projects launched by the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Methodist Churches during the interwar period survived after 1941. Even the *Volksgruppe*'s press—in its many youth-oriented publications—makes no reference to religious youth organizations as, for example, a phenomenon to integrate and/or overcome.¹¹² Oral history interviews with individuals raised in the Western Banat during those years, similarly, allow for little insight into such topics. All interviewees, when asked about religious (youth) groups during those years, either stated that they do not remember any kind of Catholic or Protestant youth groups, or claimed downright that there were none.¹¹³

The absence of source material and memories on ecclesiastical youth groups between 1941 and 1944 gives the impression that, following the dissolution of previous Yugoslav structures in April 1941, none of the churches' youth associations survived in the newly "autonomous" Western Banat. As there are no sources to prove this hypothesis,

¹¹² Such publications include, as mentioned in the previous section on the Banat's youth groups, *Führerdienst der DJ*, *Schaffende Jugend*, *Der Pimpf*, and *Kinderland*.

¹¹³ Bucherer, Müller, Wetter, Becker, interviews.

however, it would be premature to claim that the inauguration of the *Volksgruppe*'s regime spelled the absolute demise of all religious (youth) organizations. Instead, it would perhaps be more fruitful to contextualize this absence within the interviewees' larger memory landscapes related to questions of religion and the role of the Church in the *Donauschwaben* communities.

Unfortunately, it was not possible over the course of this dissertation's research to find a Protestant interviewee from the Banat; all interviewees from the Banat identified themselves as Catholic.¹¹⁴ As Catholics comprised over eighty-five percent of the Banat's *Donauschwaben*, however, these individuals' narratives at least allow for insight into the confession to which most of the region's *Donauschwaben* belonged, as well as for some "outsiders'" perspectives on the rest.¹¹⁵ Differences in narratives—as in any oral history project—of course exist even within this fairly small sample. However, a remarkable consensus arises across these interviews: though it remained crucial to the *Donauschwaben*'s daily lives and, to a degree, identity, the Church declined significantly in importance across the generations, losing most of its attraction for those children and youth raised between 1941 and 1944.

The Church, as all interviewees agreed, had always been essential to the *Donauschwaben*. As Elmar Müller explained, "today [we] are still used to differentiating more according to nationality"; however, prior to the late nineteenth century, even town administrators categorized the local population according to religion. Previously counted as "Catholic," "Protestant," or "Orthodox," individuals at the turn of the twentieth century suddenly were classified as "Germans," "Romanians," "Hungarians," "Bulgarians," or "Serbs" instead. As Elmar emphasized, this was "not a product of the First World War; rather, one could almost say that the First World War was a product of this development."¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, "[religious] faith was strongly tied to nationality" even thereafter.¹¹⁷ Indeed, almost all interviewees, when asked about their communities' customs, reflected primarily on religious traditions. Käthe Radner, for instance, recalled with enthusiasm the Easter, Advent, Christmas, and carnival practices in her town. Once

¹¹⁴ Partially, this is due to the fact that there were so few Protestant Banat *Donauschwaben* to begin with. In 1939, some 15,000 *Donauschwaben* in the Banat declared themselves as Lutheran. Exact statistics do not exist for the Calvinists. Out of 10,540 Calvinists in 1939, however, only a negligible number were "German" (Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 67-68). Most of the Banat's Protestants, furthermore, were based in Franzfeld (today's Kačarevo). It is unknown how many survived to the current day.

¹¹⁵ Statistic from Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 66.

¹¹⁶ Müller, interview.

¹¹⁷ "Der Glaube ... war stark an die Nationalität gebunde." Becker, interview.

a year, furthermore, her town celebrated a “*Kerweih*” (a fair following the blessing of the town church), an event at which young men bought bouquets at auction (“*lizitiert*”) for their future brides.¹¹⁸ Weddings, funerals, and name days were similarly elaborate enterprises.¹¹⁹ Even smaller family traditions were tied to the religious calendar. As Michael Bucherer recalled, he and his sister received new clothes once a year, right before their town’s *Kerweih* on St. Martin’s day (in November). “That was always an event!,” Michael explained. “We had to wake up very early, prepare everything [...] and then sit on the [horse-drawn] wagon and go” to Kikinda, the nearest city with a large selection of shops. “We then went into the different shops and got new shoes and a coat” and all sorts of other gifts.¹²⁰

Especially for the older generations, “the church was the focal point of the week.” As Max Becker explained, even after 1941, his grandparents’ generation “didn’t go to church for one minute less,” as— for them— “it formed an ingrained rhythm, over the week and weekends [...] to attend Masses and baptisms and so on.”¹²¹ This, however, changed across the generations. Even his parents’ generation was, though still religious (“*gläubig*”), much more sceptical towards the Church as an institution. The following generation— the children and youth of the early 1940s— were then even less inclined towards Church teachings and organizations. The main reason for this, explained Max, was the rise of National Socialism. Particularly children and youth flocked to the more physical and violent (“*Hau rein!*,” or “Hit it!”-based) ideology and practices of the National Socialists during those years.¹²² Max himself was happy to leave his post as an altar boy during the mid-1930s and join the *Deutsche Jugend* instead: “It [the DJ] was of course much more interesting than ... kneeling there at that age in front of the altar and reciting ‘Our Father’ in Latin, and not understanding any of the Mass, because we had never learned Latin.”¹²³ Service in the *Deutsche Jugend*, in any case, had become mandatory for youth regardless of religious compartment following April 1941. As Max

¹¹⁸ Radner, interview.

¹¹⁹ Bucherer, Radner, interviews.

¹²⁰ Bucherer, interview.

¹²¹ “*Meine Grosseltern [...] also die sind keine Minute weniger in die Kirche [...] Des war eingespielter Rhythmus, über die Woche, Wochenende ... Und die und die Messen werden besucht und Taufen und so weiter, ned?*” Becker, interview.

¹²² According to Max, this was because children and youth, by nature of their incomplete psychological development, are less concerned about spiritual questions to begin with.

¹²³ “*Des war natürlich interessanter wie da ... in dem Alter da vorem Altar knie und den Vater Unser ... äh ... Lateinisch runterlei, äh die ganze Messe gar ned wisse, was mer sagt, well mer kei Latein g’lernt hat.*” Becker, interview.

elaborated, any “remaining” “*Ministranten*” (“altar servers”) also would have been called to DJ service. “I do not want to vouch for it, but it is possible that the German, the *Reichs*-German influence, or the Nazi influence, or however one should call it, was so strong that [the remaining Catholic youth groups] fell apart” after 1941.¹²⁴

As Max explained, even girls— traditionally more “protected” and subject to a “milder education” than boys— experienced these changes. During the 1930s, girls primarily still socialized in small groups, visiting each other at their families’ homes on Sundays and singing religious and folk songs. “And then came ... National Socialism, uniform, standardization,” songs about “*Führer, Volk, and Fatherland*,” and slogans on “faith and beauty.”¹²⁵ As Max emphasized, National Socialism did not entirely replace religious faith, as most individuals did not “draw a clear mental line” between the two, or actively apostate and resign from the Church. However, National Socialism did manage to considerably “weaken” religious faith in the youngest generations.¹²⁶

To a degree, National Socialism and the Church seem to have coexisted, uneasily, even after 1941.¹²⁷ Fritz Wetter— whose grandfather filled a crucial role in his town’s *Volksgruppe* administration, whose father had helped organize Semlin’s relocation camps for Bessarabian Germans in 1940, and who himself repeatedly expressed positive opinions of Hitler and Nazism— thus claimed that his family were good Catholics (“*gut katholisch*”) and went to Church every Sunday even during the early 1940s.¹²⁸ Educational institutions led by the *Volksgruppe*, furthermore, retained at least some religious components. As Michael Bucherer recalled, his German *Realgymnasium* in

¹²⁴ “*Da will ich mich nicht verbürgen ... ob da diese deutsche, reichsdeutsche Einfluss, also Nazi-Einfluss oder wie mer’s nennen soll ... Ob der so stark war ... dass diese Gruppen auseinander fiel ... Das kann schon sein ...*” Becker, interview.

¹²⁵ “*Und dann kam ... Nationalsozialismus, Uniform, vereinheitliche ... Und vorgeschrieben, so etwa ... was für Lieder man singe ... muss! [...] Da war Führer, Volk und Vaterland! Ned? Und äh Sauberkeit der Seele und äh des Körpers! [...] Gab’s doch da dieser Spruch ... Schönheit ... Glaube und Schönheit!*” Becker here alludes to the name of the BDM branch for 17 to 21-year-olds in Germany (“*Glaube und Schönheit*”). Becker, interview.

¹²⁶ “*Ersetzt ist zuviel gesagt ... Geschwächt wurde ... Sie sind ja nicht ausgetreten! ... Und haben auch kein klarer gedanklicher Strich gemacht, ich ja auch nicht! [...] Da muss ich sagen, ihr Glaube ist ganz sicher ... irgendwie abgeschwächt worden ...*” Becker, interview.

¹²⁷ Within the *Reich*, as Bergen has illustrated, individuals often simultaneously clung to National Socialist ideology and the Christian beliefs, symbolism, and practices of their childhoods. Furthermore, despite National Socialist attacks on Christian institutions, Germany remained a thoroughly religious society, albeit in a slightly altered form. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 8-9, 47, 229. Such patterns also become apparent in the *Donauschwaben* context.

¹²⁸ Wetter, interview.

Betschkerek had religion classes for both Protestants and Catholics.¹²⁹ However, unlike at his previous educational institutions, students never attended Mass. Between students' weekly schedule of classes, extra-curricular activities, and dormitory-related tasks, "the organization of the school" did not allow for Church visits, even if Michael "would have valued it." Despite official religion classes, therefore, "the influence of the Church was much smaller" in Betschkerek during the 1940s than in his hometown (Molidorf) during the 1930s.¹³⁰

Differences in the frequency and intensity of religious practice presumably arose not only based on generation and— closely intertwined therewith— education.¹³¹ Rather, even after 1941, disparities also seem to have arisen between rural and urban environments.¹³² Those interviewees raised in small, agricultural-based towns emphasized religious practice and family devotion more frequently than those raised predominantly in urban environments. Interviewees who were raised as teenagers in Banat cities with large German populations during the early 1940s, and who had relatives who were integrated into the *Volksgruppe* elite, more heavily emphasized national (-socialist) activities, reflecting positively even today on aspects of Nazism.¹³³ As Elmar Müller, from a small town (Modosch), recalled, "Goebbels' [...] official propaganda" of course also existed in his hometown's press and radio. However, as a village in which ethnic Germans represented a minority, the *Donauschwaben* remained "multiethnic out of principle": "When you live next to someone and they have known you forever [...] it

¹²⁹ The status of religion classes under *Volksgruppe* administration is difficult to ascertain based on available source material. However, based on the Banat's *Schulstiftung*'s own reports, there were two official religion teachers in the Banat's German schools in 1941. *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 24.

¹³⁰ "Wir hatten auch katholischen Unterricht, oder ... wenigstens äh die Evangelische auch ... und aber s'wurde da irgendwie doch äh, s'war en Unterschied zwischen Betschkerek oder ... Der Einfluss war ... viel weniger gewesen ... Ich mein ... Wir hatten unsere Religionsstunde und ... und so aber ... das mer da gemeinsam irgendwie einen Gottesdienst besucht hätten oder was da ... da, da war nix [...] Des lag an, an der ganzen Organisation von der Schule aus! Man hat dann nicht aufgefordert [...] dann ist auch niemand gegangen! [...] Ich hätte n'Wert d'raufgelegt, aber ..." Bucherer, interview.

¹³¹ The type of education received (particularly when and under which administration) were identified by several interviewees as a defining factor in personal religious faith. See, for instance: Becker, Müller, interviews.

¹³² The sample of interviewees, of course, is relatively small, rendering such differences fairly hypothetical. However, an urban/rural divide becomes apparent even within this small sample. Potential differences between urban and rural environments were highlighted even for individual interviewees as they moved from smaller towns to urban centers (for schooling, for example). However, such differences still seem to have been smaller than those between generations, for instance.

¹³³ Radner, Müller, and Bucherer could be counted towards the former category, Wetter and Becker towards the latter.

is more difficult to tell them how bad I am,” he explained. This, Elmar emphasized, may have been different in larger cities where ethnic Germans represented a majority, and in which the *Volksgruppe* had more direct control.¹³⁴

The urban/rural divide seems to have made a significant difference in “national” ecclesiastical matters. Max’s hometown, Kikinda— a city of almost thirty thousand inhabitants (of which up to seven thousand were “German”)— had a sufficiently numerous Catholic congregation to warrant a separate, “German” Catholic priest. As there were enough “German,” tithe-paying Catholics in Kikinda during the early 1940s, their priest was— as Max claimed— “purely German” (“*rein deutsch*”). The Church, Max stated, was still important to the “*Volkstum*”; for that reason, “we simply wanted a German priest, and not a ... foreign ... nationality.”¹³⁵ This stood in contrast to Catholic congregations located in smaller, more ethnically mixed settlements. As Michael Bucherer remembered, his village was too small to warrant its own priest. Molidorf therefore shared its Catholic priest with Toba/Tóba/Nova Crnja, a neighboring town with a Catholic Hungarian majority.¹³⁶ Modosch, as Elmar Müller recalled, had its own Catholic priest. However, every second Sunday, the priest held his sermons in German. On the other Sundays, the sermons were alternately in Hungarian or in Bulgarian. “The priest had to know three languages!” Elmar marveled. Although the priest was “more Hungarian at heart” and spoke Hungarian better than German, “nobody was bothered by it, because everyone was able to realize their rights.”¹³⁷

Ecclesiastical matters among the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* are difficult to explore for the period from 1941 to 1944. Both archival and secondary sources offer little insight into the status and activities of the various churches during this period. Even educational programs and extra-curricular youth organizations— which were so important to all religious confessions during the interwar period— seem to disappear from the historic record after 1941, creating the impression that Church-based youth initiatives, too, simply vanished. Significantly, even oral history interviews— otherwise so useful in

¹³⁴ Müller, interview. As Müller stated, his town had approximately four thousand inhabitants during the early 1940s, half of which were German, the rest of which were primarily Serbs and Hungarians. See appendix for annotated map.

¹³⁵ “*Mir wollte halt eigen’ Pfarrer ... und ned a fremde ... Nationalität, ned?*” Becker, interview.

¹³⁶ Bucherer, interview. As Bucherer explained, Molin/Molidorf had approximately 1,200 inhabitants during the early 1940s, almost all of which were ethnic Germans. See appendix for annotated map.

¹³⁷ “*Dann hat niemand sich gestört daran, weil eben jeder zu seinem Recht kam.*” Müller, interview.

providing information on topics ostensibly erased from the formal record— have failed to fill the gaps. The absence of materials and memories on Church-based child and youth activities, however, should not immediately be interpreted as stemming from an obliteration of all ecclesiastical programs after 1941. Indeed, although the interviewees could not recall ecclesiastical youth groups, all of them reflected on the continued importance of religious traditions to the *Donauschwaben* communities. Variations in religious practice and conviction presumably had already existed prior to 1941 depending on the particular generation, education, town, and family. It therefore would be a stretch to attribute all of these differences to changes in state administration, or to the installation of the *Volksgruppe*'s National Socialist programs after 1941.

This being said, National Socialism does seem to have chipped away at the churches' traditional dominance in educational and extra-curricular matters during these years. All interviewees agreed that their generation was the least religious and that, unlike their parents and grandparents, their education had not allowed for the development of a similar intensity of religious faith. Religion became less important in schools, mandatory youth groups monopolized time previously reserved for more "private" and spiritual pursuits, and *Deutsche Jugend* and dorm schedules prevented church attendance on Sundays. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the churches even still attempted to provide an organizational or ideological antidote to National Socialism after April 1941. Youth who had previously had access to religious youth organizations therefore seem to have been engulfed almost entirely by National Socialist projects thereafter. As we shall see, this experience diverged quite significantly from that of the *Donauschwaben* communities allocated to different post-Yugoslav states. Especially in the Batschka, the Catholic Church continued its youth programs after 1941, launching one final, publicized, and ultimately frustrated attack against the *Deutsche Jugend* and its National Socialist teachings during those years.

D. Reich Military Conscription and the Western Banat's *Donauschwaben* Youth

By the outbreak of World War II, it had become apparent that individuals mobilized into youth organizations would fulfill not only ideological and educational tasks, but would also contribute to the war effort of states, political agencies, and occupational

regimes. Although countries like the United States and Great Britain had largely stopped systematically recruiting child soldiers (below the age of eighteen) by the end of World War I, Europe's World War II conflicts spawned multiple contexts for the renewed implementation of child soldiers.¹³⁸ Civil and guerilla warfare (as carried out by partisan units), military occupations, and the dispersal of the formal battlefield setting drew entire societies into war, including boys and girls.¹³⁹ Perhaps the most infamous example of the state-led recruitment of child soldiers during World War II is provided by Nazi Germany. Especially following Germany's February 1943 defeat at Stalingrad, Hitler began ordering the mass recruitment of male teenagers into *Waffen-SS* units. Over the course of that year, two hundred thousand fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds across Germany were called to military service. In conjunction with the Hitler Youth authorities, the SS had recruited some eighty to ninety-two percent of sixteen-year-old males in certain German regions by 1945; many of these recruits, furthermore, were as young as fourteen when they were sent to the front. In 1945, with Germany's last, desperate military operation (the "*Volkssturm*"), the *Wehrmacht*, too, began recruiting teenagers, many who were well below the age of fifteen.¹⁴⁰

Regions like the Western Banat and the Batschka were heavily affected by these policies. As we have seen, ethnic German youth involved in the *Deutsche Jugend* and its subsidiaries were mobilized behind the front for Germany's war effort from the late 1930s, as DJ members participated in recycling drives, served as temporary agricultural hands, and contributed "millions" of working hours to the 1940 "resettlement" of ethnic Germans from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dobrudja.¹⁴¹ By 1941, however, it had also become evident that youth were not merely to donate their time and labor on the *Reich's* "home front"; rather, after 1941, teenagers were also called upon to sacrifice their lives as soldiers on the Axis' bloody military frontiers.

¹³⁸ David M. Rosen, *Child Soldiers in the Western Imagination: From Patriots to Victims* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 76.

¹³⁹ For more on the evolution of warfare during the twentieth century, including the use of partisan and guerilla forces, see: Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Combattre: Une anthropologie historique de la guerre moderne (XIX^e-XXI^e siècle)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Rosen, *Child Soldiers in the Western Imagination*, 77-79.

¹⁴¹ "Die Entwicklung nach dem Weltkrieg," 26. See Chapters II and III for more on this topic.

1. SS Military Recruitment Among the Western Banat's Donauschwaben: An Overview

The history of the military mobilization of Southeastern Europe's *Donauschwaben* is complex, and has been mired for decades in a thin source base, a variety of societal taboos, and a range of politically-driven misinformation.¹⁴² Only recently have historians studied the *Donauschwaben's* World War II military involvement more critically, using archival sources and (occasionally) memoirs from German, Hungarian, and (post-) Yugoslav collections.¹⁴³ Unlike with the history of *Donauschwaben* childhood and youth education and extra-curricular organizations, a fair amount of research has therefore been conducted on the military mobilization of the *Donauschwaben*— at least from an almost purely “from above” and macro-level perspective.

Regardless of particular historiographic depiction, however, it is apparent that the *Deutsche Jugend* and its leadership became crucial to the establishment of military formations in the Western Banat almost from the beginning. According to secret correspondence between Belgrade's German legation and the German Foreign Office, some of the Western Banat's first SS troops had been recruited during the summer and fall of 1940, in the framework of Semlin and Prahovo's temporary relocation camps for ethnic Germans. Purportedly without the *Reich's* knowledge, Sepp Janko— who had already toyed with the idea of a separate *volksdeutsche* SS division for some time— authorized Gustav Halwax (now a fully *Reich*-educated *SS-Untersturmführer*) to recruit young “*volksdeutsche*” men under the cover of their “work service” (“*Arbeitsdienst*”) at the camps. These young men were then sent to the *Reich* for SS training on the same barges as the “resettling” ethnic Germans from further East.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² As with the history of National Socialism and the *Donauschwaben* more generally, the literature of expellee organizations and former *Donauschwaben* themselves (if it mentions their military involvement in the first place) generally frames the ethnic Germans as the victim of brutal Nazi mobilization policies and postwar retributive actions, while socialist-era Yugoslav works cast the ethnic Germans in the role of a willing, rabidly National Socialist “fifth column.” Consider: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 8-18.

¹⁴³ Such studies include ones on the Western Banat specifically by Ekkehard Völkl, Thomas Casagrande, Akiko Shimizu, Johann Böhm, and Mariana Hausleitner, as well as works on the larger Southeastern European or Hungarian contexts (consider: Norbert Spannenberger, Valdis Lumans, Zoran Janjetović) (see works cited for full citations). More recently, even sweeping histories of the Third Reich's projects in Europe have included some discussion of the Western Banat's military involvement (consider: Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 351-354, 456).

¹⁴⁴ Letter from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office, “Beziehung auf den Drahtsbericht vom 13. September 1940” (4.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934; letter from German Foreign Office

Encouraged by these early successes in military recruitment, and spurred by the ongoing war's development in favor of Germany, the local ethnic German leadership arranged for additional mobilizations under the umbrella of the *Kulturbund's* sports organizations. In addition to Gustav Halwax, DJ leader Jakob Lichtenberger became partially responsible for the establishment of para-military "sports organizations," based on the *Donauschwaben's* local youth and sports groups, during the summer and fall of 1940. Lichtenberger had been sent to the *Reich* for an eight-week training session in 1940, and, upon his return, had received authorization from the *Reichsführer SS*, Heinrich Himmler, to bring at least three hundred SS "volunteers" across the border and into the *Reich* over the following weeks.¹⁴⁵ By January 1941, these plans had been extended: following an agreement between the *SS-Ergänzungsamt* and Yugoslavia's ethnic German leadership, "civilian doctors" in Hungary and the Western Banat were to be re-trained as "military physicians" ("*Musterungsärzte*"). Under the leadership of *Waffen-SS* doctor Hans Huber, these physicians were then to tour Yugoslavia's ethnic German sports organizations, examining their male members in such an "inconspicuous manner that the individual man did not know that he had been medically examined for military service [*'gemustert'*]." At least two hundred ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia were to be mobilized in a first round, as well as five hundred from both Hungary and Romania.¹⁴⁶ Such activities seem to have been effective not only in mobilizing SS recruits into the *Reich*. Indeed, "*Selbstschutzorganisationen*" ("self-defense organizations") "according to the model of the SA" had cropped up across the Western Banat (such as in Franztal, by Semlin) and the Batschka in such large, *Reich*-unauthorized formations that the VoMi itself became nervous about keeping order locally. The VoMi intervened in January 1941, ordering Halwax and his colleagues to stop their covert activities immediately.¹⁴⁷

to VoMi (16.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934. The degree to which the VoMi and the German Foreign Office were informed of—and even supportive of—these activities is contested. Consider: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 219-223.

¹⁴⁵ As Shimizu explains, the *Reichsführer SS* ordered Lichtenberger to be named under an alias in all documentation related to these activities. Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 219-222.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, "Untersuchung in Jugoslawien- Freiwillige aus Rumänien" (24.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934; "Aufzeichnung," signed Triska (3.2.1941), PA AA, R 100934; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 220. According to Böhm, however, the "April War" in 1941 put an end to these schemes, so that they were never realized in full (Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 366).

¹⁴⁷ Letter from German Foreign Office to VoMi, signed Nöldeke (16.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934; telegram from German Legation in Belgrade to German Foreign Office (15.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934;

When German forces entered the Western Banat in April 1941, they therefore not only encountered a generally warm and enthusiastic welcome by the local *Donauschwaben*, but also an already partially mobilized ethnic German population, trained and willing to fight for the *Reich* and its objectives. Immediately, *Reich* military officials began tapping into this segment of *Donauschwaben* society, giving Halwax the task of overseeing a levy of ethnic German men into the SS Division “*Das Reich*” for as long as it would still be stationed in Yugoslavia. By late April 1941, Halwax was leading four “admissions commissions” (“*Annahmekommissionen*”), which, in coordination with the Western Banat’s newly appointed ethnic German mayors, organized the levy of some six hundred “racially fit” ethnic German recruits into the SS over the following weeks. By July 1941, at least one thousand young men from the Western Banat had joined the SS, generally as volunteers, and outside of any local or international legal framework.¹⁴⁸

Until the end of 1941, thousands of ethnic Germans from the Western Banat “volunteered” for the various *Reich* military and local police forces. However, it was only in January 1942 that Janko’s vision of a separate *Waffen-SS* division began to materialize. In cooperation with the newly appointed HSSPF Meyszner, Janko opened negotiations with Himmler, VoMi chief Werner Lorenz, and Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop about the official recruitment of ethnic Germans from the Western Banat and Serbia into the SS. In February 1942, Himmler and von Ribbentrop agreed to the formation of an “armed home guard, which should be educated by the *Waffen-SS*, in the Serbian Banat.”¹⁴⁹ An official call to arms, to be displayed in each *Donauschwaben* village, was also drafted, and signed by Janko:

The German *Wehrmacht*, during the spring last year, has liberated your homeland and salvaged you from the foreign yoke. Germany is fighting a heavy battle with its soldiers in order to safeguard our fatherland and all of Europe from Bolshevism. The Bolshevik enemy has also attempted to rear its head in your homeland over the past months and weeks, trying to make streets unsafe and set your villages on fire. German troops contained this danger. For you, however, it is now a matter of honor that you, in following the traditions of your fathers, and as a borderland people, assume the protection of your homeland yourselves. I am therefore calling all men from the ages of seventeen to forty-five to report, to the mayors

letter from VoMi chief to German Foreign Office (16.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934; telegram from Belgrade’s German Legation (signed Heeren) to German Foreign Office (20.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934.

¹⁴⁸ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 223.

¹⁴⁹ Quotation from *Reich* directives to Janko, quoted in: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 226.

of the German villages, to service with the weapon for the protection of your own homeland. Nobody who is healthy can exclude themselves from this service. Germans in Serbia and in the Banat, prove yourselves worthy of your fathers and express your thanks to the *Führer* through a manly enlistment and through your deeds.¹⁵⁰

As the wording of this call to arms implies, military service became mandatory for all healthy “Germans” in the Western Banat between the ages of seventeen and forty-five in February 1942. In reality, however, the legal situation was much more complex. Unwilling to turn ethnic Germans’ military service in the Banat into a matter of forced mass conscription, *Reich* authorities attempted on several occasions to block Janko from writing a general mandatory conscription (“*Wehrpflicht*”) into law. As *Reich* officials feared, mass conscription under *Volksdeutsche* leadership would not only deprive the region of necessary workers and administrators, but also cede too much authority to an insufficiently installed (and *Reich*-controlled) body of ethnic German administrators. Nevertheless, Janko published ordinances in the *Volksgruppe*’s “*Amtsblätter*” and “*Verordnungsblätter*” (official “regulations circularies”) over the following months, stating that only the *Volksgruppenführer* (Janko) personally had the right to excuse anyone from their mandatory military service (“*Dienstpflicht*”). Any man who refused a call to arms, according to Janko, would be “severely punished.”¹⁵¹

By June 1942, a mustering of men born between 1892 and 1925 had taken place in almost every *Donauschwaben* village. Those “volunteers” chosen for service were sent conscription letters, upon which they were forced to report to service either with the SS and the Banat “*Freikorps*” units or, as in the case especially of the older cohorts, with the

¹⁵⁰ “*Die deutsche Wehrmacht hat im Frühjahr des vergangenen Jahres Eure Heimat befreit und Euch vom fremden Joch erlöst. Deutschland kämpft mit seinen Soldaten einen schweren Kampf, um unser Vaterland und ganz Europa vor dem Bolschewismus zu bewahren. Auch in Eurer Heimat versuchte der bolschewistische Gegner in den vergangenen Monaten und Wochen, sein Haupt zu erheben, die Straßen unsicher zu machen und Eure Dörfer anzuzünden. Deutsche Truppen haben wiederum diese Gefahr gebannt. Für Euch aber ist es nunmehr eine Ehrensache, daß Ihr, den Traditionen Eurer Väter folgend, als Grenzvolk den Schutz Eurer Heimat selbst übernehmt. Ich rufe Euch daher auf, daß alle Männer vom 17. bis zum 45. Lebensjahr sich bei den Bürgermeister der deutschen Dörfer zum Dienst mit der Waffe zum Schutz Eurer eigenen Heimat melden. Von diesem Dienst kann sich keiner, der gesund ist, ausschließen. Deutsche in Serbien und im Banat, zeigt Euch Eurer Väter würdig und stattet Euren Dank an den Führer durch mannhaftes Eintreten und durch die Tat ab.*” BArch NS 19/1728, fol. 10; Janko, “Aufruf zur Dienstleistung in der SS-Freiw. Division ‘Prinz Eugen’ (1942),” *Reden und Aufsätze*, 113. As Shimizu explains, various iterations of this text had been drafted and circulated before the approval of this particular version (Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 225-228).

¹⁵¹ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 228-230, 235-237.

local “security,” border control, and police (HiPo or *Deutsche Mannschaft*) forces.¹⁵² Those men who did not report to service were either punished (and sometimes tortured, or even shot) directly, or, if they could not be found, their family members were publicly shamed and harrassed instead.¹⁵³ Perhaps ten thousand to fifteen thousand men reported for duty by April 1942 alone.¹⁵⁴ However, officially, there was no legal basis for this recruitment. Neither international treaties, nor official *Reich* proclamations, nor regulations between the *Reich* and the remaining occupied Serbian territories regulated or allowed for such activities.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the various *Reich* (VoMi, Foreign Office, and SS) agencies quickly encouraged and required the mass military mobilization of the Western Banat’s ethnic Germans. Nowhere did this become as visible as with the establishment of the “7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division ‘Prinz Eugen’.”

The mass recruitments of the spring of 1942 had been coordinated largely by *SS-Gruppenführer* Arthur Phleps, a former Transylvanian Saxon Habsburg officer and interwar Romanian military veteran.¹⁵⁶ In March 1942, Phleps became head of the, still unofficial, Prinz Eugen Division, the world’s first *Volksdeutsche*-based *Waffen-SS* unit.¹⁵⁷ Following the levy of thousands of men in the Western Banat, the SS-Division “Prinz Eugen” finally became official, with a seat in Belgrade, in June 1942. Johann Keks, the former “old guard” SDKB chief, was put in charge of the enlistment office in Betschkerek. Arthur Phleps became the Division’s head officer, while command over the Division was split, uneasily, between the HSSPF, the *Ersatzkommando Südost* of the *Waffen-SS* in Vienna, the *Volksgruppe* leadership, and the Division’s officers.¹⁵⁸ Ultimate control over the the unit lay with Heinrich Himmler.¹⁵⁹

Building upon the Habsburg heritage unique to the region, the *Reich* and the *Volksgruppe* leadership employed symbolism designed to evoke a feeling of continuity

¹⁵² Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 236-238; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 168-169.

¹⁵³ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 280-281.

¹⁵⁴ Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 393.

¹⁵⁵ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 231-233.

¹⁵⁶ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 188-189, 233.

¹⁵⁷ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 344; Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire*, 456. As Mazower states, by the end of World War II, nineteen out of thirty-eight *Waffen-SS* divisions (comprising almost half a million troops) were composed of “foreigners,” most of whom came from Eastern Europe, and a considerable portion of which were ethnic Germans from Southeastern Europe.

¹⁵⁸ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 234-237.

¹⁵⁹ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 284. For a brief overview of the *Ersatzkommando Südost*, as well as the *Reich*’s military units in the region more generally, see: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 363-365.

with the *Donauschwaben*'s past. Named after Prince Eugene of Savoy, an Austrian officer who had helped drive the Ottoman Turks from the region during the late seventeenth century, the *Waffen-SS* Division's very title was tied to the founding myths of the territory's "liberation" from "barbarism" and the advent of German settlement to the region. Unlike the regular *reichsdeutsche* SS troops, the Prinz Eugen Division's official insignia became the "*Odalsrune*" ("odal rune"), a symbol intended to reflect the traditions of old Germanic land ownership, which the *Donauschwaben*— in their service— were now to protect across Southeastern Europe.¹⁶⁰ Even in the press, SS service was tied directly to the *Donauschwaben*'s historic legacy. One February 1942 article from the Batschka, for instance, exclaimed that it was through service in the SS that the region's Germans had become a "heroic *Volk* once again." For centuries, "valuable German soldiers' blood" had settled in the region. Especially in the Habsburg era, these ethnic Germans then had used the "German sword" and the "German plow" to defend their (German) culture, *Volk*, and homeland. In this renewed moment of conflict and crisis, it would be the ethnic Germans' duty to assume their place in the "heroic German guard," and defend their families, homes, and "Germandom."¹⁶¹ One April 1942 article— written after the departure of SS recruits from the district Palanka (Batschka)— describes this "calling" even more clearly: "This war ... is the war of all Germans ... The *Volk*, the highest duty, also calls the men of our *Volksgruppe* [German minority] to the front, where *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* stand in one union of blood and *Weltanschauung*, and fight for an idea that is a common good to all Germans."¹⁶² Service in the SS was framed as an expression of solidarity to the German "motherland," as a duty towards one's family and nation, and as a continuation of previous traditions of borderland military service.

Through a combination of initially voluntary enthusiasm and, eventually, forced drives of military conscription, thousands of ethnic Germans from the Western Banat ultimately joined the *Reich*'s forces.¹⁶³ By January 1944, at least 22,000 men had been recruited into the *Reich*'s military formations from the Western Banat and Serbia. Of

¹⁶⁰ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 188-189, 213.

¹⁶¹ "Wir sind wieder ein heldisches Volk," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6875 (12.2.1942), 1.

¹⁶² "Unsere Soldaten werden tapfer für uns kämpfen: Die Heimat wird jederzeit treu und unerschütterlich zu ihnen stehen," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6915 (1.4.1942), 3.

¹⁶³ This interpretation of initial voluntary enthusiasm turned into forced, often violent conscription, is shared by most recent historians of the Western Banat, including: Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 393; Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 280-281; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 218-239; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 343-344.

these, over 15,000 served in the *Waffen-SS*, approximately 600 in the *Wehrmacht*, and the rest in various ethnic German police forces.¹⁶⁴ The Prinz Eugen Division counted 392 officers (“*Offiziere*”), 1901 lower officers (“*Unteroffiziere*”), 18,985 troops, and 1,381 aids (“*Hiwis*”) in January 1944, comprising a total of 22,659 men. Some 53.6%, or 12,145 men, in the Prinz Eugen Division came from the Western Banat and Serbia; 8.5% were *Reichsdeutsche*; and the rest had been recruited from Hungary, Romania, Croatia, and Slovakia. By the end of the war, at least 55% of all men mobilized in the Western Banat had served in the Prinz Eugen Division.¹⁶⁵ As such, most of the Banat’s men remained in Southeastern Europe throughout the War, mobilized in brutal “home guard” units that pillaged and massacred Partisans in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia.¹⁶⁶ Approximately 4,500 *Donauschwabern* who were deemed unfit for military service worked as laborers in the *Reich* instead.¹⁶⁷ As far as is known, a fraction of those men mobilized for military service further were stationed in concentration camps, as guards at KZs like Mauthausen and Auschwitz.¹⁶⁸

2. Military Mobilization and the Life-World of Youth

Youth did not escape this mass mobilization for war. Indeed, youth themselves became directly involved in the *Reich*’s war effort, both behind and on the frontlines. Male teenagers were enlisted not only for “work service” (“*Arbeitsdienst*”) and pseudo-military training within their hometowns; rather, as depicted in the *Deutsche Jugend* press, and embodied within life stories like that of Max Becker, they were also sent to the *Reich* for substantial, generally SS-coordinated, military training.¹⁶⁹ As soon as *Reich* troops occupied Hungary in March 1944, further *WE-Lager* (*Wehrtüchtigungslager*, or “military training camps”) were organized in Hungary for *Volksdeutsche* youth from

¹⁶⁴ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 196; Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 280-281.

¹⁶⁵ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 211.

¹⁶⁶ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 228-290; Böhm, *Die deutschen Volksgruppen im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien und im serbischen Banat*, 399-437.

¹⁶⁷ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 282.

¹⁶⁸ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 279; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 303; IAZ, Fond 131, Box 1, “Deutsche Volksgruppe in Banat und Serbien, 1941-1944,” letters (10.12.1943 and 18.2.1944), no signatura.

¹⁶⁹ See previous sections on the *Deutsche Jugend* press and “from below” perspectives on DJ service.

Southeastern Europe.¹⁷⁰ Growing in number as *WE-Lager* in other Eastern European regions (like in Upper Silesia) were moved to “safer” territories like the Hungarian borderlands, these *WE-Lager* increasingly incorporated youth from the Western Banat. By mid-September 1944, as discussions on the evacuation of the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* commenced, it was further decided that all male youth over the age of fourteen would not be sent westwards with their families. Rather, they would be implemented either in the “securing” (against the incoming Partisan and Soviet forces) of their hometowns, or sent directly to a *WE-Lager* for further military training.¹⁷¹

Studies on the age distribution of the Western Banat’s ethnic German soldiers do not exist. Nevertheless, as the *Volksgruppe*’s press suggests, the military service of teenagers in formations like the *Waffen-SS* was not only common, but highly celebrated. Newspapers like the *Banater Beobachter* and the *Deutscher Volksfreund* regularly published the “heroic” death announcements of, and birthday and name day wishes for, seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds stationed in the *Waffen-SS*.¹⁷² Columns like “*Front und Heimat*” (“Front and Homeland”), designed as a public line of communication between soldiers and their homes, further frequently printed the photographs and well-wishes of teenage girls for “their men” on the front.¹⁷³ In December 1943, the *Banater Beobachter* even published the portrait of a sixteen-year-old *Waffen-SS* soldier named Sepp Hee. According to the accompanying article, Sepp had served in the Prinz Eugen Division for nineteen months. As one of the youngest “carriers of arms” in the Division, he had nevertheless recently been promoted to the position of *SS-Sturmmann*, of which his entire village of Klek/Bégafő/Klek (by Betschkerek) was proud.¹⁷⁴

Within this context of military mobilization, the Western Banat’s ethnic German schools, once again, became a breeding grounds and major contributor of National Socialist fighters. By late June 1943, 61 out of 206 male ethnic German teachers employed by the *Schulstiftung* had been mobilized into the SS— a proportion that would

¹⁷⁰ More on the *Reich*’s occupation of Hungary in March 1944 in this dissertation’s sections on military recruitment in the Batschka.

¹⁷¹ Letters (24.8.1944, 14.6.1944, 15.9.1944, 24.7.1944, and 12.7.1944), BArch NS 28/119 (“Hitler-Jugend: WE-Lager in Ungarn, Juni-Sept. 1944”). For more on these evacuation plans, see: Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 119-235.

¹⁷² Consider: *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 703 (2.7.1943), 6; “Fery Seemayer,” *Deutscher Volksfreund*, vol. 43, no. 3 (16.1.1942), 4.

¹⁷³ Consider: *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 703 (2.7.1943), 6; *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 710 (10.7.1943), 5; *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 720 (22.7.1943), 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 856 (30.12.1943), 5.

Fig. 4.3 Sixteen-Year-Old Banat
SS-Sturmmann Sepp Hee, 1943.
Source: *Banater Beobachter*. Vol. 3,
No. 856 (30.12.1943). p. 5.



have been much higher, had both Janko and the German Foreign Office not protested against the mass mobilization of teachers in 1942.¹⁷⁵ With the exception of a handful of youth who had actually become teachers or gone to university, furthermore, every male graduate of the Banat's higher secondary schools and *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*, by mid-1943, had been mobilized either into the *Waffen-SS*, the *Wehrmacht*, or the *Luftwaffe* (the German air force).¹⁷⁶ Ultimately, the combination of National Socialist-inspired curricular education, *Deutsche Jugend* service, and mass military conscription seems to have worked in the *Reich's* favor, as almost every ethnic German male teenager in the Western Banat was transferred seamlessly from the classroom to the military front.

The degree to which youth enlistment into organizations like the *Waffen-SS* was voluntary and a matter of personal enthusiasm for the Nazi project is clearly debatable. Nevertheless, traces of agency on the part of these youth do appear in the archival record. Letters sent in December 1943 and February 1944 by the *Volksgruppenführer* ("Volk group leader") of neighboring Croatia on the behalf of several DJ members turned SS-men illustrates this point strikingly. According to these letters, addressed to the *Reich's*

¹⁷⁵ "Stand der Lehrkräfte am 30.6.1943," *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 48; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 235-236.

¹⁷⁶ For a detailed list of every graduate and their current (1943) position, see: *Die deutsche Schule im Banat*, 40-46.

SS leadership, four *Donauschwaben* youth, born between 1922 and 1925, had approached him due to frustration with their SS service. Apparently, they had volunteered for the SS straight from the *Deutsche Jugend* in September 1942. After several months of training, they were stationed at the Mauthausen concentration camp. However, as previous and (as they hoped) future youth leaders, it was their “utmost desire” to fight on the front, preferably with the SS “*Gebirgsdivisionen*” (“mountain divisions”). As the *Volksgruppenführer* concludes, he hoped sincerely that “this justified and notable wish” would be “granted,” and that these young men would soon be sent to the front.¹⁷⁷

Youth who were not mobilized as soldiers between 1941 and 1944 (because they were either female or too young) directly participated in SS operations in other ways. In September 1942, for instance, the local *Deutsche Jugend* and *Deutscher Mädelbund* groups were enlisted as aids in a mass medical inspection drive by the SS. Spearheaded by the *SS-Standartenführer* Dr. Holfelder, a team of doctors, nurses, and radiologists toured the Western Banat, taking X-rays of the chests of entire *Donauschwaben* villages, and—presumably—identifying these communities’ last mobilizable men. Local children and youth, as well as *Schulstiftung* teachers, were enlisted across the region to help ensure the completion of the radiology tour.¹⁷⁸ Other children and youth supported the *Reich*’s forces more indirectly. As in the Batschka, the Western Banat’s school children were urged to breed silk worms in their homes and their classrooms, to supply the *Luftwaffe* with the silk that they needed for their parachutes.¹⁷⁹ Finally, throughout the early 1940s, male and female DJ members in the Western Banat engaged in fundraising performances and sports events in support of the *Reich*’s troops.¹⁸⁰

The massive presence of both *reichsdeutsche* and *volksdeutsche* military units after April 1941 also affected children’s and young people’s lives when they were not explicitly contributing to Germany’s war effort. Even logistically, the sudden presence of *Wehrmacht* and SS units brought novel conditions. Across the Western Banat, German troops confiscated former dormitories and school buildings for military purposes. In

¹⁷⁷ IAZ, Fond 131, Box 1, “Deutsche Volksgruppe in Banat und Serbien, 1941-1944,” letters from Croatia’s *Volksgruppenführer* Branimir Altgayer to *Beauftragten des Reichsführers-SS für Kroatien*, “Versetzung zur Fronttruppe” (10.12.1943 and 18.2.1944), no signatura.

¹⁷⁸ IAZ, Fond 131, Box 1, “Rundschreiben Nr. 20. Betrifft: Besprechungen für die Röntgenaufnahmen,” signed by Sepp Janko (10.9.1942).

¹⁷⁹ “Seidenraupenzucht,” *Banater Beobachter*, vol. 3, no. 717 (18-19.7.1943), 6. More on this silk worm production by ethnic German children and youth in Southeastern Europe in the chapters on the Batschka.

¹⁸⁰ For a poster announcing such an event, consider: Poster, “Für das WHW, Fussballkampf der Soldatenmannschaften,” NLS/SC PI 241/4.

Werschetz, the German Catholic dormitory was closed in 1942 and turned into a *Wehrmacht* military hospital.¹⁸¹ In Betschkerek, the *Wehrmacht* (and presumably the SS and German police forces) confiscated rooms and entire buildings in April 1941 that had formerly been used by the city's primary, secondary, and trade schools. Much to the chagrin of the city's officials, not one dinar had been paid into the city's coffers for this real estate, so that a hole of some two million dinars had opened in the city's budget by April 1943.¹⁸²

Oral history interviewees, too, confirm that every ethnic German child and youth within the Western Banat was directly confronted by the region's sudden occupation and military mobilization. Fritz Wetter, for example, distinctly remembered the first time he saw German soldiers in his hometown. One day in April 1941, German tanks, which had previously been stationed in Romania, rolled onto Karlsdorf's marketplace. Full of excitement, Fritz's mother ordered him to go and invite one of the soldiers for a meal. "I went to the marketplace, where I saw the tanks standing, and there stood a ... well a big [man] with an armband ... 'Division Grossdeutschland'," Fritz explained. "I still hear myself today," he mused; "'Kamerad!' ... that [term] was common back then [chuckles] ... 'don't you want to come and eat with us?' [chuckles] ... *Kamerad* ..." Apparently, the soldier did not come for lunch. However, Fritz's family eventually hosted two *reichsdeutsche* soldiers in their home during the War. They had their own room, Fritz explained, and every mealtime they returned to their military post ("*Feldkessel*") to eat.¹⁸³

Hosting *reichsdeutsche* soldiers seems to have been quite common among the Banat's *Donauschwaben*. As Käthe Radner recalled, *Reichsdeutsche* were not only stationed in the Banat on active military duty, but also sent "on holiday [...] in Vojvodina" as there "was still enough to eat" there. "Every [land-owning] farmer had ... a vacationer ['*Urlauber*']," she explained. These soldiers visited each other from house to house, talked and ate with the local population, and often promised that they would return to the Banat after the war, as they had enjoyed "such a nice time" there. Breaking off her narrative, Käthe was overcome by sadness; this "good, beautiful future" ("*gute, schöne Zukunft*"), she stated, of course never came, as the "Russians" occupied the region,

¹⁸¹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 81-82.

¹⁸² IAZ Fond 133, no. 5224/43, letter from *Stadtverwaltung Grossbetschkerek, Technische Abteilung to Bürgermeisteramt Grossbetschkerek*, "Quartierleistung-Benützung städt. Objekte[r] [sic] von der deutschen Wehrmacht" (2.4.1943). It is unclear based on this letter which ethnic group had operated/used these school properties previously.

¹⁸³ Wetter, interview.

brought about a “*Z’sammebruch*” (“collapse”), and initiated her *Vertreibung* in late 1944.¹⁸⁴

The German military, however, also formed a virtual presence in the Western Banat between 1941 and 1944, in the form of the local German-language media. Asked about the press and radio during their childhood in the Banat, almost all interviewees recalled Belgrade’s German radio channel. Radio Belgrade, in 1941, had been turned into the “*Soldatensender Belgrad*” (“Belgrade Soldiers’ Channel”), a radio station that broadcast German-language propaganda and news, German folk songs, guest performances by *reichsdeutsche* musicians and symphony orchestras, and live *Winterhilfswerk* (WHW) charity concerts.¹⁸⁵ Every evening, the *Soldatensender Belgrad* broadcast messages from soldiers on the front to their families, and vice versa. As Michael Bucherer explained, Molidorf had not been electrified yet during the 1940s. Nevertheless, some forty-two out of three hundred (German) households in his village had a radio, which they powered with batteries and generators every evening to listen to the German radio stations.¹⁸⁶ Elmar Müller’s town, Modosch, similarly only had electricity in the evening, when the town’s generator was activated for a few hours. “Every evening it was an event!” exclaimed Elmar, when Belgrade’s “*Militärsender*” (“military channel”) aired its messages to and from the region’s German soldiers. In retrospect, the program had clearly been a form of “psychological war tactic” (“*psychologische Kriegsführung*”). Nonetheless, “everyone” listened to the program, and sang along with its closing tune, the famous song of “Lili Marleen.”¹⁸⁷ In cases where youth did not have access to a radio, they simply built their own detectors. As Max Becker recalled, he and his friends

¹⁸⁴ Radner, interview. Elmar Müller, too, recalled these “*Urlauber*,” and explained that (according to rumors he had heard) it was not uncommon for these *reichsdeutsche* soldiers to marry local *Donauschwaben* women (Müller, interview). Fritz Wetter similarly explained that marriages between *reichsdeutsche* soldiers and *volksdeutsche* women occurred in his hometown. He even showed personal photographs during the interview that were taken at such a wedding, with the party’s men all dressed in full military uniform (Wetter, interview).

¹⁸⁵ For posters advertising these programs and concerts, see: Poster, “II. Musikwoche des Wehrmachtssenders Belgrad” (10.1943), NLS/SC PI 130/535; poster, “Soldatensender Belgrad: 1. Grosser Bunter Abend” (9.1943), NLS/SC PI 130/536; poster, “Soldatensender Belgrad: 3. Grosser Bunter Abend” (12.1943), NLS/SC PI 130/537; poster, “Soldatensender Belgrad: 2. Grosser Bunter Abend” (10.1943), NLS/SC PI 130/538.

¹⁸⁶ As Michael explained, he and his sister played games before falling asleep each night as children, in which they counted each house, bicycle, and radio in their neighborhood. That is why he knew the number of radios. Bucherer, interview.

¹⁸⁷ Müller, interview. For an overview of the role of radio in propaganda and war for various actors in Yugoslavia’s World War II conflicts, consider: Ioannis Stefanidis, *Substitute for Power: Wartime British Propaganda to the Balkans, 1939-1944* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 233-301.



Fig. 4.4 Children after Singing on Belgrade’s German Radio Channel, Early 1940s. Source: Private collection, Fritz Wetter*. Handwritten Caption: “*Im Belgrader Sender haben wir gesungen.*” (“We sang on Belgrade’s [radio] channel.”)

constructed basic radio receivers to listen to the German radio programming. After 1941, he explained, Belgrade’s military radio channel was clearly “influenced by Nazism” (“*nazistisch angehaucht*”); however, every evening, he and his friends would listen to its program that featured “Lili Marleen,” “the most popular German song!”¹⁸⁸

Not all recollections of *Reich* military presence in the Western Banat, however, were as upbeat and as innocuous. When German troops marched into the Banat in April 1941, children and youth observed not only the harassment and eventual deportation of their Jewish neighbors (consider Max’s narrative); rather, they were also forced to say goodbye to their older male relatives, who were now departing in the wake of the *Waffen-SS*’s mass conscription levies. As Fritz Wetter emphasized, “all *donauschwäbische* men of the age of military service *had to* enlist with this ... Prinz Eugen Division.”¹⁸⁹ According to Fritz, his own father—the forty-year-old son-in-law of his hometown’s mayor—had been called to service in 1941. However, he was quickly released and placed

¹⁸⁸ Becker, interview. For a contemporaneous report on the importance of the “Lili Marleen” song to ethnic Germans on the front, consider: “Das Lied von der Lilli-Marlen,” *Deutscher Volksfreund*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1.1.1942), 5.

¹⁸⁹ “*Die donauschwäbischen Männer im wehrfähigen Alter mussten [emphasis] alle ... zu dieser Prinz Eugen Division einrücken.*” Wetter, interview.

into Karlsdorf's forestry commission ("*Forstverwaltung*") instead, where he worked aside the former Serbian commissioner as the "*Volksgruppenführer*'s" representative.¹⁹⁰ Michael Bucherer's father, too, had been "pulled into military service" ("*eingezogen*"). However, as Michael explained, his father had had an ear operation, and therefore was placed only into a "*Wachmannschaft*" ("guard unit"). With this division, his father accompanied a group of ethnic German school children to Bohemia during the fall of 1944, as the Axis military front in Southeastern Europe began to collapse and initial evacuations of the *Donauschwaben* population began.¹⁹¹ "He had committed no crimes! And had not done anyone any harm!," Michael emphasized; nevertheless, upon his return to Yugoslavia, his father was immediately imprisoned by Partisan forces.¹⁹²

Max Becker similarly recalled the day on which his father was drawn into SS service. As he explained, he "only ever saw [his] father in uniform for ... one hour or one day, one evening." Like every man in his city, Max's father was called to military service, examined, and put into an SS (or *Wehrmacht*) uniform.¹⁹³ That same evening, his father returned home for a night. The next day, his father went back to the military authorities and protested against his service due to his advanced age (of almost fifty). Partially because his chain factory also played an important (military) economic role, he was ultimately excused from active military service. As Max explained, back then, most *Waffen-SS* units in Europe recruited mainly "young people," who were perhaps up to thirty-five or forty years of age. However, in the Banat, "they took everything, right? That could crawl and fly, or read and write ... They [the Banat's ethnic Germans] were good enough to send to the slaughter ... Home defense, they called it ..."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Wetter, interview.

¹⁹¹ As per an agreement signed by Adam Maurus and Sepp Janko on 25.9.1944, all of the Western Banat's ethnic German children were to be evacuated to the *Reich* with their school classes within the framework of a "*Kinderlandverschickung*" (Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 160-161). This measure, however, was mired in chaos and ultimately hardly realized. According to *Reich* sources, by November 1944, at most 1,500 out of 20,000 ethnic German school children in the Western Banat had been evacuated in this program. "Reisebericht" (11.11.1944), BArch, R 4901/12820, fol. 23. When asked about a "*Kinderlandverschickung*" in their hometowns, this is the "KLV" program that most interviewees from the Western Banat remembered, in contrast to interviewees from the Batschka (consider: Wetter, interview).

¹⁹² "*Er hat ja nichts verbochen! Und ... Hat ja niemand' was getan!*" Bucherer, interview.

¹⁹³ Max vacillated in his description of his father's uniform as being either an SS or a *Wehrmacht* uniform. As with other interviewees, his narrative occasionally attempts to exculpate formerly mobilized individuals by placing them in the (supposedly morally less problematic) *Wehrmacht*, and not the SS. Consider: Michael Bauer*, in an in-person interview with his sister Johanna Bauer*, and Caroline Mezger (27.7.2011).

¹⁹⁴ "... aber im Banat haben se alles g'holt, ned? Was kreuchen und fleuchen konnte, oder lesen und schreiben, ned? ... Die ware zum Verheizen gut genug, haben sie g'sagt, Heimatverteidigung ..." Becker, interview.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was difficult to obtain detailed narratives of military conscription and service within the framework of these oral history interviews. Faced already during their childhood and youth by the disruption and trauma that mass conscription and frontline casualties brought to their families, all interviewees were then faced over a lifetime with the *a posteriori* reflections, judgments, and histories of the horrific nature of what their fathers', uncles', and brothers' units had done. Almost all interviewees therefore spoke of the subject in the most basic terms, explaining, for instance, how their own fathers escaped "active" (SS) military service due to their age or a (usually minor) physical ailment, or avoiding the subject altogether.¹⁹⁵ Others reflected primarily on the disturbances that SS conscriptions brought to their villages. As Michael described, the war years were exceedingly difficult, as all men were "pulled into service [...] with the German military." "Everything descended into disorder," Michael reflected, "as women were suddenly left alone with their children [...] and fields to plow." "Men are the [physical] strength of a community," he explained, a fact that made life in an agricultural community trying when they suddenly all left.¹⁹⁶

Narratives on SS service and its repercussions remained incomplete not only due to the interviewees' reluctance to speak about such subjects, but also due to my own limitations. Oral history is, after all, always an intersubjective, interactive process in which the narratives, questions, reactions, and interpretations of both the immediate actors and the imagined audiences shape what is remembered, and how that which is recalled is framed, told, and ultimately re-told. The interviewer's own knowledge, psychological limitations, and sense of taboo thus shape oral history narratives considerably, contributing at least partially to a maintenance of the boundaries of the unknown.¹⁹⁷ As Gabriele Rosenthal has indicated, especially with the testimony of

¹⁹⁵ Becker, Radner, Wetter, Bucherer, Müller, interviews. As the topic of relatives' military service was not central to this dissertation, I in this case also did not push much for narratives that were, for almost all interviewees, exceedingly difficult to provide.

¹⁹⁶ "Die Männer wurden eingezogen ... Jetzt' gehört ihr zum deutschen Heer, genommen ... Und dann ist die ganze Dorfgemeinschaft ... Ist ja irgendwie in ... in Unordnung geraten! Dadurch ... dass ... äh ... s'war schwierig gewesen, die Felder zu bestellen ... äh, die Frauen wurden da äh ... gelassen ... äh mit den Kindern [...] wie sollten die die Landwirtschaft weiter betreiben?" Bucherer, interview.

¹⁹⁷ Consider, for instance: Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," 3; Passerini, *Memory and Totalitarianism*, 1-19; Ronald J. Grele, "Movement without an Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History," *The Oral History Reader*, edited by R. Perks and A. Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 44-45; Joan Sangster, "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *The Oral History Reader*, edited by R. Perks and A. Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 87-100; Yow, "Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research," 51-66.

(supposed) perpetrators, “intimations of involvement in Nazi crimes are often passed over or blocked out by the listeners because of their own fears ... fears about exposing the past of people we encountered who ... may have done terrible things.” At least in part, she states, this is because researchers “were socialized ... in milieux where taboos about addressing certain themes, prohibitions against asking further questions and certain exonerating depictions were and continue to be operative.”¹⁹⁸

Max Becker, too, was drawn into *Waffen-SS* service at the apex of his National Socialist education. In August 1944, he received a summons to enlist with the Prinz Eugen Division, which he followed. With almost no further training, he was sent to the front “to defend Vienna.” For several months, he served on a variety of fronts, first in the Banat and Southern Hungary, and then in Bohemia. Being an “individualist,” he purportedly escaped his SS service, under threat of the death penalty, three times. On one of these occasions, he traveled to Vienna, where he eventually met a defeated Sepp Janko, and was placed by the VoMi into the provisional *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in St. Pölten (Austria) to complete his teacher training certificate.¹⁹⁹ After the Third Reich’s capitulation in May 1945, Max was imprisoned in an American POW camp. Upon his dismissal in August 1945, he received his official denazification papers, which he has preserved to the present day.²⁰⁰

As during the rest of the interview, Max seemed not just happy, but eager to discuss (parts of) his experiences, even when the subject turned to his exploits within the *Waffen-SS*. After hearing two days of nearly uninterrupted narratives still deeply entrenched in a National Socialist worldview, however, I could no longer listen. Perhaps, when faced with such narratives, other researchers would be more successful in delving further into the recollections and interpretations of individuals whose lives and worldviews, as children and as youth, were so deeply marked by the Nazi project. At certain moments, however, mimicry turned into agency, youthful fascination transformed into adult

¹⁹⁸ Rosenthal, “National Socialism and Antisemitism in Intergenerational Dialog,” *The Holocaust in Three Generations*, 306. In this statement, Rosenthal highlights that this socialization and collective sense of the taboo surrounding Holocaust perpetration is primarily operative in non-Jewish German society. However, as is my personal experience, this statement can be extended to individuals who do not identify as German as well.

¹⁹⁹ Becker, interview. As a result of the evacuation of ethnic Germans from the Western Banat, Werschetz’s LBA students were sent to St. Pölten in October 1944 by the region’s *Kinderlandverschickung* program so that they could finish their degrees. For more on the Western Banat’s *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in St. Pölten, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 160-161, 259-260.

²⁰⁰ “Certificate of Discharge,” signed Capt. MC Charles J. Mock (8.8.1945), Max Becker’s personal archive.

conviction, and role-playing matured into a criminal act. It was especially at those moments that delving deeper became difficult, if not occasionally impossible, for me.

E. Conclusion

As the interwar mobilizers of youth had already agreed during the 1920s and 1930s, it would only be through concerted education and training that the next generation would carry the ideal human being, the realized political project, and the defined national body into the future. Children and youth, placed at the epicenter of ideological, political, and nationalist contestations during the interwar period, retained their highly charged position in the Western Banat even after 1941. However, with the ascent of the *Volksgruppe*, the terms of these contestations changed profoundly. Organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend*, previously conceptualized as a subversive fringe project, turned into the state-mandated norm after 1941. Now a branch of the ruling regime, the *Deutsche Jugend* lost its position as a relatively autonomous set of youth groups, becoming anchored instead in a larger, politicized context of childhood and youth institutions. Working hand-in-hand with the now Nazi-coordinated minority school system, the ethnic German dormitories, and even the military, the *Deutsche Jugend* developed a monopoly over youth education between 1941 and 1944, incorporating all *Donauschwaben* youth into National Socialist structures, whether they agreed with the *Volksgruppe*'s conduct and specific notions of "Germanness" or not.

The combination of mandatory curricular schooling and extra-curricular service had a profound effect on the lives of the Western Banat's ethnic German children and youth. No longer allowed to attend a German-speaking school without official enrollment in the *Deutsche Jugend*, an at least outward conversion to National Socialism became the only formal ticket into receiving a mother-tongue education. This education, in turn, was now being shaped by National Socialist administrators, *Reich*-educated teachers, and SS-designed curricula.

Children and young people's reactions to these developments were, perhaps unsurprisingly, multifaceted. Some youth— who had often already been exposed to National Socialist fervour in their homes— flourished within this context and developed a lifelong enthusiasm for Hitler and his visions. Others felt alienated by the *Deutsche Jugend* and its activities. Still others simply did not care. Regardless of these young

people's particular reactions, however, it is apparent that National Socialism entered the lives and minds of all *Donauschwaben* children and youth, becoming— at the very least— a force to be considered and negotiated in their daily lives. Due in part to novel political conditions, traditional sources of education, community engagement, and identity had floundered and faded into the background of the newer generations' lives. Especially the Church— which had previously been so crucial to the *Donauschwaben*'s collective identity— disappeared almost entirely from the youth arena after April 1941, offering few alternatives, in mentality or activity, to National Socialism. At least officially, speaking German meant being German; being German, especially for the younger generations, meant ascribing to National Socialism. In the Western Banat, the Church, not to mention the youth groups of other ethnicities, barely tarnished this equation.

The mass mobilization of youth into the *Deutsche Jugend* had dramatic consequences as Europe's military fronts moved ever closer to the *Donauschwaben*'s homes. Already engaged in "home front" and agricultural service from the late 1930s, *Deutsche Jugend* members formed the vanguard of *Donauschwaben Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS* volunteers from as early as 1940, agreeing to sacrifice their lives in the name of their homeland, their "*Führer*," and the German "*Volk*." Stationed in anti-Partisan units, SS battalions, and concentration camps, ethnic German youth as young as fourteen served in the *Reich*'s military formations, bringing to fruition previous dreams of a unified and mobilized ethnic German population, and sending the promise of the future generations to slaughter and be slaughtered.

With these activities, however, the Western Banat's ethnic German children and youth were not alone. Indeed, the Yugoslav *Deutsche Jugend* reared parts of its severed body in other Axis-occupied territories after 1941, affecting *Donauschwaben* communities across Southeastern Europe. In the Batschka, especially, *Deutsche Jugend* membership became nearly universal, German-language school attendance entailed a National Socialist education, and SS service became the norm. Due to differing state and national structures, however, the terms of contestation over and by youth were altered, lived, and remembered quite differently, as we shall see.

PART III

THE BATSCHKA, 1941-1944

Chapter 5

Youth Mobilization in the Batschka, 1941-1944

A. Introduction

After Yugoslavia's occupation and dissolution in April 1941, the *Donauschwaben* followed diverse trajectories. Split once again across state boundaries, and placed within newly constituted minority—"host state"—*Reich* relational triangles, the *Donauschwaben* nevertheless re-organized themselves swiftly.¹ As illustrated in the previous chapters, in the Western Banat, this reconfiguration of local ethnic German organizations occurred brutally, efficiently, and on a massive scale thanks to the *Reich*'s installation of a semi-autonomous *Volksdeutsche* occupational administration. Employed as an extension of *Reich* power and government in the region, the Western Banat's *Volksgruppe* faced almost no limitations in the realization of its projects and ideals—as long as these were in line both with National Socialist tenets and *Reich* desires. Not all of Vojvodina's *Donauschwaben*, however, experienced the same degree of *Reich*-enforced "autonomy." One fascinating and crucial counter-example to the Western Banat is the Batschka, a territory ceded to Hungary between 1941 and 1944.

Like the Western Banat, the Batschka became an Axis-administered territory after April 1941. Unlike their authoritative, autonomous *Volksgruppe* counterpart in the Western Banat, however, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* remained in the position of a minority that—despite having considerable social, political, and military influence—never attained the status of a governing elite. Originally reared in the same environment as the Western Banat's ethnic Germans, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* suddenly became confronted by a different state context in which, once again, their fate would be determined, at least to a degree, by Hungary. Over the following three years, the Batschka's Germans certainly continued most of the (National Socialist) *Donauschwaben*

¹ I here draw upon Brubaker and his triangulation of "national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external national 'homelands' to which they belong." Rogers Brubaker, "National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External National Homelands in the New Europe," *Daedalus*, vol. 124, no. 2 (1995): 108.

projects that had been established in the region over the previous two decades. Nevertheless, all of these activities materialized in a field of continuous tension and negotiation with the Hungarian authorities, which— despite being in an alliance with Germany— had their own conceptions about the *Donauschwaben*'s place within Hungary's national concerns. Frictions continuously arose not merely between ethnic Germans and Hungarians as the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* mobilized their youth, *en masse*, into the *Deutsche Jugend*. Rather, conflicts even within ethnic German communities on the meanings of "Germanness," and the place of National Socialism therein, assumed new complexities as the *Donauschwaben* once again negotiated their own relationship to the Hungarian state and legacy.

In order to shed more light on these issues, this chapter will first illustrate the manner in which the Batschka's re-incorporation into the Hungarian state was, even in April 1941, a highly conflicted affair. Offering some background information on the development of ethnic German organizations in interwar Hungary— which the Batschka's German organizations became part of— this section will then reconstruct the "Batschka Germans'" political and legal status within Hungary between 1941 and 1944. Highlighting the manner in which *Donauschwaben* projects navigated novel state conditions within the Batschka, this chapter will then illustrate how, despite new (and more restrictive) circumstances, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* were able to mobilize over ninety percent of their youth into National Socialist youth organizations once again. Unlike in the Western Banat, however, this mobilization took place in constant interaction with other nationalist, right-wing youth projects: the Hungarian *levente* and the "reichsdeutsche" *Hitler-Jugend*, which traveled to the Batschka in droves as part of the "*Kinderlandverschickung*" (Germany's wartime urban evacuation program). Turning once again to "from below" and oral history-based perspectives, this chapter ultimately will investigate not only the impact of mass *Deutsche Jugend* mobilization on the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* communities, their interactions, conflicts, and perceptions of "Germanness." Rather, in presenting personal recollections of exchanges with Hungarian and *reichsdeutsche* youth organizations, this chapter will also explore in more detail the many national (self-) interpretations and courses of action that opened, even for children and youth, in the framework of a minority (partially) empowered by an alternate context of occupation and war.

B. Re-Casting the Batschka and its “Germans”

1. Hungary’s Take-Over of the Batschka in April 1941

On April 11th, 1941, the Hungarian *Honvédség*’s fourth and fifth infantry divisions and its first tank division entered the Batschka. By April 12th, these forces had reached Subotica/Szabadka/Maria-Theresiopel and Sombor/Zombor. Three days later, all of the Batschka and the neighboring Baranja were occupied by Hungarian troops.² Hungary had agreed to send troops into the region upon Germany’s request, in hopes of re-gaining its former territories in northern Yugoslavia. Even within Hungary, however, this move had been anything but uncontroversial. Indeed, Hungarian Prime Minister Pál Teleki was so appalled by this planned and blatant defiance of his neutrality and friendship policy towards the Balkans that he committed suicide on April 3rd, eight days before the first Hungarian tanks entered the Batschka.³

In the Batschka, the arrival of Hungarian troops was, for the *Donauschwaben*, not only undesired, but also somewhat surprising. As discussed in Part II, the Batschka’s ethnic Germans had—in hopeful preparation for the arrival of *Wehrmacht* and SS troops—draped most of their towns, including Novi Sad and its Habag-Haus, with swastika flags.⁴ However, such displays of *Reich* enthusiasm were not merely greeted by the Hungarian troops with bewilderment; rather, they sparked violent encounters between Hungarians and Germans. Telegrams and letters from April 1941 on activities in the Batschka to Germany’s Foreign Office are thus peppered with descriptions of skirmishes that occurred when Hungarian military personnel, aided by the local ethnic Hungarian population, tore down National Socialist imagery, vandalized German property, and demanded the immediate relinquishing of any weapons to the Hungarian military. According to one April 22nd telegram, the days from April 13th to April 16th especially had seen large-scale conflict. In Hodschag, the German “*Selbstschutz*” (ethnic German paramilitary units, as they also arose in the Banat) was forced to give up its weapons to a Hungarian general. All *Donauschwaben* involved then had to sing the Hungarian national anthem to demonstrate “that they have now become Hungarian.” *Honvédség* forces across

² Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 96.

³ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 257-258.

⁴ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 260; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 96-97.

the Batschka demanded German residents remove swastikas and banners (such as some displaying the words “we thank our *Führer* Adolf Hitler”), while others simply destroyed such imagery and tore through German neighborhoods, smashing windows, and firing shots. At least half a dozen Germans were killed, including several women.⁵

Other reports by German military personnel recounted how Hungarian troops, upon their arrival in the Batschka, were “highly nervous” and began “shooting indiscriminately at the population.”⁶ Under orders to find any “Chetniks,” Hungarian troops further searched dozens of German homes at gunpoint, including that of a Jakob Lichtenberger (presumably not the youth leader Lichtenberger) in Novi Sad.⁷ These raids targeted especially the houses of Serbian and Jewish individuals. As one report indicates, Hungarian troops, filled with a “fear psychosis,” completely destroyed several Serbian villages, and killed their men, women, and children.⁸ It is difficult to ascertain, *a posteriori*, how many of these violent acts were indeed committed by Hungarian troops.⁹ Germans in the region therefore remained mobilized, at least unofficially, in *Bürgerwehren* aimed at the demilitarization of Yugoslav forces and “protection” of local Germans for several weeks. Many of these units, furthermore, had actually been furnished with weaponry, motorcycles, and other supplies by local German youth, who had stolen these from Yugoslav depots and who, both in their demeanor and activities, were described even in reports to the *Reich* as being in an “explicit fighting mood” (“*ausgesprochene Kampfstimmung*”).¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is apparent that Hungarian troops in the Batschka, too, acted with brutality. Hungarian troops were thus at least partially responsible for the “resettlement” of tens of thousands of Serbs out of the Batschka (a number which, including Serbs chased from Croatia, Macedonia, and the Batschka, figured over one hundred thousand individuals by July 1941 alone).¹¹ Furthermore, it was also mainly Hungarian troops, under the leadership of General Ferenc

⁵ Telegram (22.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937, fol. H297849-H297851.

⁶ “Abschrift,” signed by VoMi chief Lorenz (16.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937.

⁷ “Tatbestand,” signed by Jakob Lichtenberger (16.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937. According to the report, the Lichtenberger mentioned here was sixty-one years old on the day of the raid. He was therefore too old to be the youth leader Jakob Lichtenberger.

⁸ Letter, “Zwei deutsche Opfer in Neu-Werbass,” signed by Franz Hamm (17.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937; “Lagebericht,” signed by Johann Wüsch (17.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937, fol. H 297862-H297863.

⁹ For a helpful analysis and example of how wartime atrocities (particularly against civilians) can give rise to, and to a degree arise from, propaganda, memorial distortions, and fears, see: Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*.

¹⁰ “Bericht: über eine Dienstreise in der Batschka 5.-8.5.1941,” report by *Hauptmann* Robert Nowak, p. 4, PA AA, R 100939. For more on ethnic German youth involvement with the Batschka’s *Bürgerwehren*, consider: Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 96-98.

¹¹ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 159.

Feketehalmy-Czeydner, who carried out the infamous “*racija*” (“raid”) of January 1942, whereby— within the span of several days— over 3,300 individuals (mainly Serbs and Jews) were rounded up across the Batschka and killed. In Novi Sad alone, almost 900 individuals, including 550 Jews, 292 Serbs, and 13 Russians, were shot and drowned in the icy Danube.¹²

Considering such scenes, it is hardly surprising that both the Hungarian and the German authorities quickly became concerned about Hungarian-German relations in the Batschka. Reports by *Hauptmann* Dr. Robert Nowak, a leader of the Hungarian *Wehrmacht* and correspondent to the German Foreign Office, make such fears strikingly apparent. After taking two observational trips through the Batschka in mid-April and early May 1941, Nowak wrote to the Foreign Office, stating: “The *volksdeutsche* population perceived the Serbian regime as a foreign power [*Fremdherrschaft*]. It may *not* [emphasis in original] perceive the Hungarian regime as a foreign power as well.” According to Nowak, most Hungarian *Gendarms* and officers had no idea that “the Swabians today are, to the last village, thoroughly organized according to National Socialism.” “In no way,” Nowak explained, could “conditions” today be compared to those prior to 1918. Hungarians who came to the Batschka from “Trianon Hungary” simply could not understand the “totalitarian roundup” (“*totalitäre Zusammenfassung*”) that had taken place within the Batschka’s German population in previous years, as similar events had not taken place within Hungary. However, if Hungarians— even officers who had already served in the region prior to 1918— traveled to the Batschka and expected to be welcomed with their Hungarian language and Hungarian “orientation” (“*Gesinnung*”), they would only be appreciated by the “*Magyaronen* (Magyarized Swabians), who are hated most by the pro-National Socialist Swabians.”¹³

According to Nowak and a range of other Hungarian and German officials in the region, much would have to be done in the region to improve German-Hungarian relations. Partially, the Hungarian authorities suggested crafting more “propaganda,” especially through appropriately trained individuals, to “plant” the Hungarian

¹² For a contemporaneous German report of these events— especially also related to “accidental” German and Hungarian casualties— consider: “Batschkaer Situationsbericht” to Franz Basch (3.2.1942), PA AA, R 101093. For more on the “*racija*” and the massacre in Novi Sad, see: Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire*, 329; Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, vol. 1 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), xxviii-xxx.

¹³ “... *die Magyaronen (magyarisierte Schwaben), die von den nationalsozialistisch gesinnten Schwaben am meisten gehaßt werden.*” “Bericht: über eine Dienstreise in der Batschka 5.-8.5.1941,” 3.

“*Staatsgedanke*” (“state principle”) and “national consciousness” (“*Nationalbewusstsein*”) into the local German population’s “souls.”¹⁴ German officials, too, made a range of practical suggestions. Correspondence with the German Foreign Office hence planned a monetary compensation for each German individual who had incurred damages due to the *Honvédség*’s actions.¹⁵ Other suggestions included installing ethnic German mayors and officials across the Batschka, employing bureaucrats with German-language proficiency in each town with a German minority, and offering the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* certain holidays (such as Hitler’s birthday) on which they could officially raise the swastika flag.¹⁶ Most important, however, was that the “*Volksdeutsche* ... can live and work as Germans, without hindrance by the authorities.”¹⁷

Some of these concessions, as we shall see, indeed materialized. In many cases, however, German “national”— especially National Socialist— activities met considerable resistance. Even from April 1941, the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* population feared that becoming part of Hungary would entail losing many of those “freedoms” that they, over the course of the 1930s, had been able to gain for themselves within Yugoslavia. Hungary, it seemed, would be more restrictive in its policies towards the Batschka’s Germans than the late Yugoslav state.¹⁸ Some of the first demands that arose from the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* included Hungary’s assurance that the Batschka’s Germans would be able to retain those (now suddenly framed as extensive) rights that they had received under “Serbian rule.”¹⁹ An awareness existed even then among the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* that ethnic Germans’ rights and organizations had developed quite differently in the two countries. Such suspicions were at least partially grounded in reality. Indeed, it was within the framework of such differences that the Batschka’s ethnic Germans, once incorporated into the Hungarian state’s structures, brought both novel conflicts, and a new political tone to Hungary’s ethnic German organizations and activities.

¹⁴ “Übersetzung” (30.9.1941), PA AA, R 100939; Letter, signed by *Titeler Militärbezirkskommando* (14.7.1941), PA AA, R 100939.

¹⁵ “Durchdruck” of letter to VoMi, signed by Pacher (12.5.1941), PA AA, R 100935.

¹⁶ “Bericht aus Kleinker,” signed by Heinrich Reister (19.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937; “Vertragsentwurf,” PA AA, R 100927; “Bericht: über eine Dienstreise in der Batschka 5.-8.5.1941,” 2.

¹⁷ “*Die Volksdeutschen wollen unbehindert von der Behörde als Deutsche in Ruhe leben und arbeiten können.*” “Bericht: über eine Dienstreise in der Batschka 5.-8.5.1941,” 2.

¹⁸ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 97; Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 260-261.

¹⁹ “Bericht: über eine Dienstreise in der Batschka 5.-8.5.1941,” 3.

2. *The Kulturbund's Incorporation into the Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn (VDU)*

a. Hungary's Interwar Legacy

Many historians agree that Hungary's German minority, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, faced greater difficulties in establishing cohesive ethnic German organizations than those in other Habsburg successor states. Confronted by the collapse of what scholars agree was a (flawed) integrative polity (the monarchy), Germans became increasingly subjected to Magyarization campaigns after 1918. Through these, Hungary's minorities were pushed to assimilation through forced name changes (which numbered some eighty- to one hundred thousand in 1933 alone), discrimination in the workforce, and increasingly restrictive educational laws.²⁰ By 1940, German higher educational institutions had been outlawed, German schools dwindled, and the so-called "*Volksbildungsverein*"— one of the original Hungarian German organizations— was allowed no members under the age of twenty-one.²¹ Furthermore, while the seeds of nationally-based thinking had already been planted within Hungary's ethnic German communities before World War I, these communities, especially after the War, became geographically too fragmented and unable to provide a solid structural foundation for the flourishing of a cohesive ethnic German movement. Through the 1920 Trianon Treaty, the proportion of ethnic Germans decreased from 10.4% to 6.9% of Hungary's total population, as regions like most of the Batschka and the Banat were ceded to other successor states.²² The immediate postwar period hence saw a considerable degree of confusion not only for the greater successor states, but also for their ethnic German minorities.

It was within this climate that Hungary's Germans— much like Yugoslavia's *Donauschwaben*— attempted to launch a consolidated movement for the preservation of

²⁰ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 78-79; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 113. As discussed in the dissertation's first chapter, especially crucial here were Apponyi's 1907 educational laws, which restricted the development of minority schools. According to some estimates, in 1855, for instance, there were some 2,400 German schools in Hungary; by 1918, this number had already dwindled to 417, of which 254 belonged to the Transylvanian Lutheran school system. Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 9-10.

²¹ Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 209.

²² As we have seen, these territories had already housed the most politically mobilized ethnic German communities in Hungary, as with Edmund Steinaker's Werschetz-based *Ungarländische Deutsche Volkspartei* (UDVP). Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 1.

their own cultural and political position. In 1923, Hungary's former Minister for Minorities, Jakob Bleyer, founded the *Ungarländische Deutscher Volksbildungsverein* (UDV), an organization acknowledged by the Hungarian authorities in 1924 as the minority's only official representation.²³ Bleyer, in much recent historiography, is portrayed as a conciliatory figure; Bleyer and the UDV hoped to affirm German minority rights and help support German culture within Hungary, while at all times maintaining loyalty to the Hungarian state.²⁴ Seeing its mandate as primarily based in the countryside, the UDV launched various cultural initiatives ("*Kulturarbeit*") in Hungary's towns, opening libraries, supporting musical organizations (under the heading of "*Volkslied und Volksmusik*"), and holding folkloric festivities.²⁵ In most of these projects, the UDV was silently supported by the German government through funds allocated to the VDA.

At the same time, however, it seems that Bleyer's more conciliatory stance backfired. Suspicions of meddling by Germany rose among Hungarian officials, Magyarization policies did not abate, and the ethnic German leaders grew increasingly restless.²⁶ By 1933, with the death of Bleyer, the UDV essentially collapsed. Bleyer's successor, Gustav Gratz, was challenged by Franz Basch—a former student of Bleyer's born in Zurich in 1901 and a founding member of the more decidedly nationalistic 1920s student organization *Suevia*—for being a puppet of the Hungarian authorities.²⁷ Following Hitler's *Machtergreifung* in January 1933, Hungary's more nationalistic ethnic Germans (including Basch) observed political changes in the *Reich* with enthusiasm, as a triumph of the "national idea" within Germany, and an action that would, for them hopefully, result in more *Reich* support for fellow Germans in Hungary.²⁸ This *Reich* support was quick to follow. In 1934, Basch founded the rival *Volksdeutsche Kameradschaft*, an organization that thereafter dominated Hungary's *Volksdeutsche* organizations. Aware of the potential of such an organization, Nazi leaders in Berlin were quick to lend their support: the VoMi recognized Basch as the official leader of the Hungarian *Volksdeutsche*, and his *Kameradschaft* as the only official link between Berlin

²³ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 113.

²⁴ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 113.

²⁵ Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 99-100.

²⁶ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 78.

²⁷ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 114; Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 98; G.C. Paikert, *The Danube Swabians* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 114. Apparently, the Hungarian government began funding the UDV in an attempt to foil the more radical German organizations—a plan which was discovered and henceforth discredited the UDV. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 114.

²⁸ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 79.

and the minority.²⁹ By July 1937, the VoMi had officially renounced the legitimacy of the more moderate UDV and began to reinforce—also financially—the *Kameradschaft*'s “*Volkstumsarbeit*.”³⁰ On November 26th, 1938, the Hungarian authorities—now under the anti-Semitic Béla Imrédy government—recognized the reconstituted *Kameradschaft*, the *Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn* (VDU), with Basch as its leader, as the official representative body of Hungary's ethnic German minorities.³¹

In its early demands and activities, the VDU mirrored Yugoslavia's *Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund* quite closely. During the founding meeting of the VDU on November 26th, 1938, Basch and his entourage demanded a solution to the growing “school question” and an increase in German mother-tongue instruction, the creation of individual Kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools, the unification of the German “*Volk*” into one political party, and a legal basis for the creation of German charity and youth organizations.³² Basch further explained the *Volksbund*'s stance in the March 1942 edition of the VDU's periodical, the *Südostdeutsche Rundschau*. According to Basch, the VDU maintained a dual aim: the creation of a bridge between “homeland” (Hungary) and “motherland” (Germany), and between the Hungarian and the German people.³³ The maintenance of friendly relations with Hungary—certainly in the official rhetoric—remained a must. Nevertheless, the purpose of the *Volksbund*, its organizations, and its publications would include the creation of a “*Sprachrohr*” (direct speaking line) between *Volksdeutsche* and *Reichsdeutsche* and a fortification of their “spiritual and social” bonds, the support of German cultural projects, and the maintenance of unconditional “*Volkstreue*” (“*Volk* loyalty”) through traditional values of “blood, idea, and language.”³⁴

Youth would form a crucial component towards the realization of such aspirations. The early 1930s had thus already seen a minor *Wandervogel* movement among Hungary's ethnic Germans. Furthermore, local German youth organizations increasingly began to stress “*völkisch*” values, organizing folk music and theater events, field trips, and even

²⁹ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 114.

³⁰ Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 153; Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 121, 127. Reich funding helped finance primarily German-speaking publications in Hungary, the *Suevia*, the Hungarian German economic office, propaganda (“*Volkstumsarbeit*” in German villages), and the *Volksbildungsverein*. Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 106.

³¹ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 115.

³² Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 27; Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 144-145.

³³ *Südostdeutsche Rundschau: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Ungarn* (3.1942), 7.

³⁴ *Südostdeutsche Rundschau* (3.1942), 8, 3, 6.



Fig. 5.1 Hitler Youth Group from Germany Salutes the *Reich* and Hungarian Flags, Bačko Novo Selo. Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.

work camps.³⁵ Exchanges between students further flourished, as *Reichsdeutsche* were sent on ethnographical and ideological missions into *Volksdeutsche* communities, and *Volksdeutsche* students traveled to Germany to gain access to higher education, and, ultimately, insight into Nazi ideology, youth training, and youth organizations.³⁶ By the mid-1930s, German Hitler Youth groups regularly visited Hungarian towns. There, they conducted training and workshops both with Hungarian *levente* groups (more on these later), and— in VoMi-funded HJ and BDM trips for “*Volksdeutsche Einsatzfahrten*” (“*Volksdeutsche* service trips”)— with Hungary’s ethnic Germans.³⁷

During the 1930s, there was no legal basis within Hungary for the large-scale mobilization of ethnic German youth into separate, HJ-inspired formations. Nonetheless, such groups flourished within the framework of local VDU chapters especially during the latter part of the decade, as the *Volksbund* gained impetus among Hungary’s ethnic

³⁵ Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 44.

³⁶ See, for instance: Harvey, “Mobilisierung oder Erfassung?,” 363-390; Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben*, 209.

³⁷ Consider, for instance, various permission applications and forms for these trips from late 1938 to late 1939 in the PA AA “*Reichsjugendführung*” fond (PA AA, R 27145).

Germans, and *Reich* agencies became increasingly entwined with Hungary's *Volksdeutsche* activities. The *Volksbund*'s press, in the form of both their radical branch's *Deutsche Nachrichten* and their (initially) more moderate *Deutscher Volksbote*, regularly printed articles on the activities of Hungary's "*Hitler-Jugend*" during this time.³⁸ Vacillating in their terminology between "*Hitler-Jugend* (HJ)," "*Deutsche Jugend* (DJ)," and "*Bund Deutscher Mädchen* (BDM)," and "*Bund Deutscher Mädel*," almost every issue of these papers described events like evenings of youth folk song, dance, and theater in Hungary's "*Reichsdeutsche Kolonien*" ("*reichsdeutsche colonies*"); NSV-organized youth field trips to Stuttgart's 1938 "*Reichstagung der Auslandsdeutschen*"; "Hitler Youth" football games; and meetings of fully HJ-uniformed ethnic German youth formations.³⁹ In 1938, furthermore, the *Reich* installed an official *Landeskreisjugendführer* for Hungary (Herbert Engel), making Hungary's Hitler Youth an independent *Landeskreis* according to Germany's organizational structures (although the HJ still had no legal standing in Hungary as such).⁴⁰ Budapest came to house an official "*NS-Erziehungsheim*." By 1939, moreover, boys were encouraged—in preparation for war—to participate in bi-monthly paramilitary exercises according to the *Reichsjugendführung*'s model.⁴¹ Nineteen VDU youth chapters (or "DJ" divisions) had been established by the summer of 1940, a number that grew over the following months.⁴²

Like Yugoslavia, therefore, Hungary became the birthplace of increasingly right-wing, *Reich*-influenced ethnic German projects, including National Socialist-inspired youth formations. However, as historians like Norbert Spannenberger have indicated, there were significant differences, both quantitatively and qualitatively, between Hungary's and Yugoslavia's ethnic German formations by the late 1930s. While at least in official propaganda the *Volksbund* and its organizations (like the *Deutsche Jugend*) assumed a powerful, all-encompassing stance, Hungary's *Volksbund* was, both numerically and ideologically, comparatively insignificant. While in Yugoslavia over

³⁸ For more on these publications, see: Thomas Spira, "The Radicalization of Hungary's Swabian Minority after 1935," *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (Spring 1984), 10.

³⁹ *Deutscher Volksbote* (25.2.1940), 4; *Deutsche Nachrichten* (4.1938), 12-13; *Deutsche Nachrichten* (5.1938), 5-6; *Deutsche Nachrichten* (5.1938), 14-16; *Deutsche Nachrichten* (3.1939), 9-10; *Deutsche Nachrichten* (4.1939), 9-10.

⁴⁰ Article by Theo Stadler, the *Reich*'s head of the *Grenz- und Auslandsamt der Reichsjugendführung* (the *Reich*'s youth organization's foreign office), *Deutsche Nachrichten* (10.1938), 7.

⁴¹ *Deutsche Nachrichten* (11.1939), 5-6.

⁴² Zsolt Vitári, "Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend," *Deutscher Kalender 2010: Jahrbuch der Ungarndeutschen* (Budapest: Landesverwaltung der Ungarndeutschen, 2009), 250.

ninety percent of ethnic Germans had been officially included into the *Kulturbund* (including 96.5% in the Batschka alone) by 1941, in Hungary, *Volksbund* membership only hovered around twenty percent even after the Batschka's annexation.⁴³ Furthermore, the *Kulturbund* had a tradition lasting two decades; the *Volksbund*, in its newest, 1938-approved form, was a much younger formation that had not yet established the same presence among ethnic German communities, let alone succeeded in centrally organizing a majority of ethnic German individuals and clubs like Sepp Janko's *Kulturbund*. Especially by the late 1930s, furthermore, Yugoslavia's *Kulturbund* had adopted an (unofficial) policy of acting according to its own political agenda, making requests to the *Reich* and the Yugoslav government individually. The *Volksbund*'s activities, however, were circumscribed much more severely within Hungary, and— even by the late 1930s— formulated with an understanding of the *Volksbund* as merely a mediator between the *Volksdeutsche* and the Hungarian state. Finally, and despite its adoption of National Socialist slogans, uniforms, and ideological tenets, the *Volksbund* and its followers generally still saw themselves as loyal to the Hungarian state— a fact which would frustrate the Batschka's German leaders for whom the *Reich*, not the variable “host state,” was of primary importance.⁴⁴

b. Merging the SDKB and the VDU in 1941

Like with the Western Banat, the Batschka's international status, as well as the German minority's placement therein, was still somewhat unclear in April 1941. Although the Batschka had been occupied by Hungarian troops already, the ethnic German minority's leadership continued hoping for the region's incorporation into the *Reich*. Like Sepp Janko, Franz Basch was summoned to Berlin during this time to clarify the details.⁴⁵ Sensing a lack of German leadership within the Batschka, several thousand

⁴³ This calculation, made by the *Kulturbund*, is of course questionable. While most historians agree that *Kulturbund* membership was much higher in the Batschka than *Volksbund* membership in Hungary, many sources (also primary— more about this in the oral history sections) agree that *Kulturbund/Volksbund* membership dwindled with the progression of war, dropping to less than two thirds by 1942. Furthermore, the Batschka's membership statistics were calculated based on the registration of heads of households (whereby their entire household would be counted as belonging to the *Kulturbund*), inflating these statistics somewhat. See Wildman, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 593-594. The latter percentage was calculated from Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 169-170.

⁴⁴ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 261-263.

⁴⁵ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 98.

Donauschwaben fled (illegally) from the region “towards the *Reich*” and into the Banat. By early May 1941, these “fugitives” included some five thousand “*Volksdeutsche*,” a group apparently predominantly composed of “important” workers and craftsmen.⁴⁶ Panicked by such events, the *Reich* urged Basch to settle the Batschka’s Germans’ status (and nerves) as quickly as possible. In June 1941, the precise manner in which this was to occur was still unsettled. The Batschka’s previous *Kulturbund*, by then, had been officially dissolved, and some of the remaining leaders placed into a temporary *Volksbund* headquarters in Sombor.⁴⁷ However, both within the *Reich* and the *Donauschwaben* leadership, visions of the Batschka’s future lay somewhere between the complete resettlement of all *Volksdeutsche* into the *Reich* (the most undesirable plan, according to the *Reich*, as it would thereby lose its influence in the region), the creation of a *Reich*-administered Banat-Batschka *Gau* (seemingly the most popular option among the *Volksdeutsche*), and the complete subsumption of the Batschka’s ethnic German organizations under Hungary’s jurisdiction.⁴⁸

Ultimately, the latter plan was realized. In the fall of 1941, the Batschka’s *Kulturbund*— still defiantly termed as such by the Batschka’s Germans for the duration of the War— was officially renamed as the “*Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn— Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund— Gebietsführung Batschka*.” By October 1941, the Batschka’s *Volksbund*’s leadership structure had been determined. According to the local German-language press, Sepp Spreitzer would be the Batschka’s “*Gebietsführer*” (“regional leader”). In his work, he would be supported by *Volksdeutsche* officers of culture, press and propaganda, health, law, music, economy, agriculture, women, youth (offices initially held by Robert Kohler and Leni Eppli), and sports (a post filled by Peter Seifert). Any promotions and appointments, furthermore, were to adhere to the principles of the VDU’s “National Socialist movement.”⁴⁹ On November 9th that year, the Batschka’s *Kulturbund* formally joined the *Volksbund*.⁵⁰ Thereafter, the *Kulturbund*, the *Genossenschaftsverband* (economic cooperative), and the *Deutsche Schulstiftung* all became subsidiaries of the *Volksbund*. From the *Kulturbund*’s perspective, the Batschka

⁴⁶ Telegram (9.5.1941), PA AA, R 100935, fol. H 29774.

⁴⁷ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 261.

⁴⁸ “Bericht über eine Dienstreise nach Budapest und Neusatz,” trip from 2.-14.6.1941, pp. 1-2, PA AA, R 100927.

⁴⁹ “Die neue volksdeutsche Gebietsführung der Batschka,” transcription from *Aussendeutscher Wochenspiegel*, no. 36 (16.10.1941), BArch R57/neu/1071 Bd. 27; “Wichtige Vorschriften und Mitteilungen,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (5.10.1941), BArch R57/neu/1071 Bd. 27.

⁵⁰ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 261.

was now an administrative unit (with seven sub-units, consisting of Apatin, Hodschag, Novi Sad, Palanka, Middle Batschka, Sombor, and Baja) overseen by various ministries, including those of education, propaganda, legal protection, health, and youth.⁵¹ The Hungarian German administration adopted the region's German secondary and boarding schools, such as those in Apatin, Novi Sad, and Werbass.⁵² Furthermore, the Batschka's ethnic German youth groups now officially formed part of Hungary's *Deutsche Jugend*, under the leadership of *Deutsche Jugend* head Mathias Huber.

The *Kulturbund*'s incorporation into the *Volksbund*, however, not only had consequences for the Batschka's Germans; it also had tangible effects on Hungary and its *Volksbund*. It is estimated that with the accession of the Batschka's approximately 175,000 Germans, Hungary ultimately encapsulated a total of 800,000 ethnic Germans, making it a country with one of the world's largest German minorities. As such, it was increasingly interesting to *Reich* officials.⁵³ Furthermore, as Spannenberger indicates, an "erosion" took place within the *Volksbund* as soon as the Batschka joined its ranks. Accustomed to a larger degree of autonomy, as well as a more open enthusiasm for National Socialism, the Batschka Germans (also known as "*Batschkanesen*" by the Hungarian German community) quickly became known as "agitators," professing a more radical National Socialist ideology than their Hungarian-German counterparts. Even the VoMi expressed concerns about the "lack of discipline" exhibited by Batschka Germans. As the VoMi feared, the Batschka's Germans confronted Hungarians with a whole new "tone" to which they were not accustomed, and one which would create diplomatic difficulties between the German and Hungarian states and peoples. Nevertheless, as soon as the administrative unification of the territories was completed, Batschka Germans—like Franz Hamm, Joseph Trischler, and Sepp Spreitzer—quickly took over key administrative positions in the *Volksbund*, making the Batschka both "qualitatively and quantitatively" the most substantial birthplace of the *Volksbund*'s post-1941 leadership.⁵⁴ Interestingly, it was also only after the Batschka Germans' incorporation into the *Volksbund* that the Hungarian "*Hitler-Jugend*" not only adopted a fully National Socialist

⁵¹ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 263.

⁵² See Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*; Janjetović, "Die Donauschwaben in der Vojvodina und der Nationalsozialismus," 51.

⁵³ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 268; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 223.

⁵⁴ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 168, 263, 329.

form and substance, but also finally became an affair specifically regulated by the Hungarian state.

C. The Mobilization of the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* Youth into the *Deutsche Jugend*

1. *The Batschka's Deutsche Jugend Joins Hungary's Deutsche Jugend*

a. *Legal Basis of Incorporation*

As in the Western Banat, youth mobilization remained a top priority for the *Donauschwaben* in the Batschka immediately after their re-allocation to a new state. At least according to the Batschka's press, "the collapse of *Südslawien* [Yugoslavia]" had had no effect on the Batschka's DJ, whether in aims or in *modus operandi*. Even during the war days, youth work apparently continued, and initial steps were taken to re-launch the Batschka's youth sports programs. The only hiccup, seemingly, was that the majority of youth leaders had been drawn into military service in April 1941. However, and also largely thanks to educational institutions like the German *Mittelschulen* and *Lehrerbildungsanstalten*, new male and female youth leadership rapidly would be found and trained. Ultimately, the Batschka's DJ had fought, under conditions similar to those of their mainland Hungarian counterparts, against "a world of misunderstanding, apathy, and lethargy" for many years. They were thereby prepared, even at a "more advanced" level, for the continuation of their work in Hungary's *Deutsche Jugend*.⁵⁵

In the spring of 1941, the Batschka's *Deutsche Jugend* was included into Hungary's *Deutsche Jugend*, even though Hungary's *Deutsche Jugend* had not yet been legalized as such. In order to celebrate this "unification" between the Batschka's and "Old Hungary's [*Altungarn*]" youth groups, the Batschka sent several hundred youth— including a large brass band— to a June 29th, 1941 *Landesjugendtag* in Mágocs/Magotsch/Magoč (Hungary).⁵⁶ Framed by historians like Spannenberger as an event emblematic of the

⁵⁵ Robert Kohler, "Ein Jahr Jugendarbeit in der Batschka," transcription from *Deutsche Zeitung in Ungarn* (22.5.1942), BArch R57/1154 Bd. 32.

⁵⁶ Kohler, "Ein Jahr Jugendarbeit"; Vitári, "Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend," 252. For a propaganda booklet printed by the *Volksbund* on the event, see: Heinrich Reister and Bruno Klein, *Erster Landesjugendtag Mágocs 1941* (Budapest: Landespropagandaamt des Volksbundes der Deutschen in Ungarn, 1941).

Gleichschaltung of the *Volksbund* according to the model of the NSDAP, the *Landesjugendtag* attracted between twelve thousand and fifteen thousand *Deutsche Jugend* members from across Hungary and its newly incorporated territories.⁵⁷ Accompanied by some eight thousand *Volksbund* members, the assembled youth listened to speeches pushing for the legalization of the *Deutsche Jugend*, as this would be crucial for the “reawakening” of the German “spirit.”⁵⁸ *Landesjugendführer* Mathias Huber gave a speech in which he defined the goal and task of the *Deutsche Jugend* as the “creation of the new German man.” This new German man— a National Socialist— would be formed first by the construction of physically strong, military-ready bodies, and, second, through the “breeding” of willful, responsible, and knowledgeable minds.⁵⁹ As soon as the rally ended, ethnic German youth reportedly marched through the streets of Mágocs, chanting “*Heil Hitler*” and “*Sieg Heil*”— a display that prompted the town’s Hungarian residents to throw eggs at the passing budding radicals.⁶⁰

Like the Batschka’s adult *Donauschwabern*, the Batschka’s German youth— even at this *Landesjugendtag*— quickly gained a reputation for overzealousness. According to a report by Batschka DJ head Kohler, for instance, the Batschka’s youth won first prize in every sports competition except one at the *Landesjugendtag*.⁶¹ It was apparently also the Batschka’s youth delegation that controversially began chanting “*ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*” at the Mágocs event.⁶² As will become apparent over the course of this chapter, this radicalization of the Batschka’s DJ would have severe implications for young people’s interactions with other members of their community, especially, as we shall see, in their parallel *levente* service.

Regardless, the *Deutsche Jugend*’s leadership’s main priorities, in the spring of 1941, revolved around the legalization of its activities. Following various requests by the *Volksbund*, the Hungarian Prime Minister signed an executive order on March 21st, 1941, which acknowledged the *Deutsche Jugend* and opened legal procedures that would turn the *Deutsche Jugend* into a youth organization supervised by the Hungarian Ministry for Religion and Public Education. This process was only completed in February 1942,

⁵⁷ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 168, 276.

⁵⁸ Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 171; Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 149; Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 44; Zsolt Vitári, “VIII. Hitlerjugend és Magyarorszag a haboru idején,” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Pécs, 2008), 523-527.

⁵⁹ Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 171.

⁶⁰ Vitári, “Hitlerjugend,” 527.

⁶¹ Kohler, “Ein Jahr Jugendarbeit.”

⁶² Vitári, “Hitlerjugend,” 523-527.

however, when an ordinance was passed that made it possible for ethnic German *levente* (members of the mandatory Hungarian pre-military youth groups) to form their own sections. These “*Deutsche Jugend*” groups would be allowed to use the Hitler salute; however, they would not be able to opt completely out of *levente* training.⁶³

Unsatisfied by these concessions, German officials continued their negotiations with the Hungarian authorities. On April 1st, 1942, an agreement on the legalization of the *Deutsche Jugend*—termed “*Német Ifjúság*” (“German Youth”) in Hungarian—was finally reached. According to its statutes, the aim of the *Deutsche Jugend* would be to train German youth, outside of school, according to the “National Socialist worldview” and simultaneously instill within them loyalty towards the Hungarian state. The *Deutsche Jugend*—open only to “the children of Hungarian citizens of German ethnicity”—would thereafter be allowed to hold cultural, athletic, and “ideological” events, circulate German-language press, and establish youth homes and centers.⁶⁴ At the same time, however, the *Deutsche Jugend* officially remained a youth organization under supervision of the Hungarian government, and only open to the children of *Volksbund* members.⁶⁵

With the *Deutsche Jugend*'s legalization in April 1942, its precise structures were also regulated. Following the German *Hitler-Jugend*'s example, the *Deutsche Jugend* was split according to age, whereby six- to ten-year-olds were organized into the “*Spielschar*” (or “*Kindergruppen*,” Kg); ten- to fourteen-year-olds into the “*Jungvolk*” (DJv); fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds into the “*Deutsche Jugend*” (DJ); and eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds into the “*Jungkameradschaft*” (M).⁶⁶ The law also established a female “*Deutscher Mädelsbund*” (DMB) for girls with similar age divisions.⁶⁷ Furthermore, distinct leadership and geographic distinctions were made (with “*Banne*,” “*Kreise*,” and “*Stämme*”), which split Hungary's *Deutsche Jugend* into seven administrative units (“*Schwäbische Türkei*,” “*Mitte*,” “*Buchenwald*,” “*Westungarn*,” “*Sathmar und*

⁶³ Vitári, “Hitlerjugend,” 514-515; Vitári, “Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend,” 251-252.

⁶⁴ “... wird für die Kinder ungarischer Staatsbürger deutscher Volkszugehörigkeit ...” Reproduced in: Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 45.

⁶⁵ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 316-317. For the full statutes in their original Hungarian-language version, see: AMV/KB 736, “A ‘*Német Ifjúság*’: A Magyarországi németek ifjúsági szervezetének alapszabályi,” Budapest (1942).

⁶⁶ “Die ‘*Deutsche Jugend in Ungarn*’ staatsrechtlich anerkannt,” transcription from *Südostdeutsche Tageszeitung* (17.3.1942), BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 78.

⁶⁷ *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Jugend in Ungarn 1943*, edited by Herbert Mars and Mathias Huber, vol. 3 (Novi Sad: Landesjugendführung der DJ. Abteilung Presse und Propaganda. Deutsche Druckerei u. Verlags A.G., 1943), 132-133.

Karpatenland,” “Nordsiebenbürgen,” and “Batschka”).⁶⁸ A uniform, moreover, became compulsory. DJ members had to wear a brown shirt, necktie (“*Halsbinde*”), leather belt, DJ emblem, shoulder strap, black trousers, and white stockings. *Jungkameraden* donned a black tunic (“*Uniformrock*”), a belt buckle with a victory rune, rider’s trousers, and boots, while girls wore dark blue skirts, a white blouse, and a black necktie. The *Deutsche Jugend*’s official emblem, furthermore, became a HJ-inspired, black and red rhombus with a “*Sonnenrad*” (a curved swastika characteristic of the VDU) at its center. Finally, the *Deutsche Jugend*’s official language became German.⁶⁹

Following the *Deutsche Jugend*’s legalization, its activities became increasingly all-encompassing and brazen. By May 1942, the VDU, in conjunction with the DJ, operated eight “*NS-Erziehungsanstalten*” (“National Socialist educational institutions”) for boys and two for girls across Hungary. The DJ adopted the songs, poems, marches, and salutes of the *Reich*’s Hitler Youth. A new youth paper, *Jugend voran!*, was printed to further disseminate National Socialist propaganda.⁷⁰ Basch and the DJ leadership, furthermore, became more unabashed in their public proclamations. In the May 1942 issue of the VDU’s *Südostdeutsche Rundschau*, for instance, *Landesjugendführer* Huber issued a report on the significance of the *Deutsche Jugend*. After decades of struggle, claimed Huber, hundreds and thousands of youth had finally learned to wave the flag of the German youth movement with “unsurpassed glowing enthusiasm.” Now that the *Deutsche Jugend* was legal, it could openly create “the new German human being.” And it would do so from as young an age as possible, through a National Socialist formation and “breeding” of character, physical fitness, and “racial awareness.” “The motherland is the blood source of our *Volk* and the creator of this mighty idea that fills us all today,” Huber continued; while the *Deutsche Jugend* did not wish to create autonomy for itself within the Hungarian state, it would nevertheless serve as a vehicle to perpetuate and propagate National Socialist values.⁷¹ Images of joyful, athletic, well-fed, enthusiastic, and Nazi uniform-clad German youth in swastika-draped meeting halls, strewn throughout the article, left nobody in doubt that the German youth movement was there, alive, and potent.

⁶⁸ *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Jugend in Ungarn 1943*, 132-134.

⁶⁹ “Die ‘Deutsche Jugend in Ungarn’ staatsrechtlich annerkannt.”

⁷⁰ Spannenger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 318-319.

⁷¹ *Südostdeutsche Rundschau* (5.1942), 167-172.

b. *The Deutsche Jugend's Relationship to the Levente*

While the *Deutsche Jugend* was legalized in early 1942 as the official ethnic German youth organization in Hungary, the DJ never attained a complete monopoly over German-language extra-curricular youth training. Partially, this was due to the fact that the *Deutsche Jugend* remained only one alternative among several for ethnic German youth, as—unlike in the Banat—entities like the Church were able to maintain a visible and independent youth program. However, another major reason was to be found with the Hungarian state itself. Despite their incorporation into the *Deutsche Jugend*, ethnic German youth in Hungary were still required to serve in the Hungarian national youth organization, the *levente*, for the duration of World War II.

The *levente* was established in 1921 as a response to Hungary's World War I defeat, ensuing restrictions in Hungary's potential for war mobilization, and a renewed post-Trianon desire by the Hungarian government for national unification. Designed as an extra-curricular organization for male youth between the ages of twelve and twenty-one (especially for those no longer attending school), the *levente* became an avenue not merely for paramilitary training, but also for the inculcation of Hungarian "national values" and state loyalty.⁷² Like the *Hitler-Jugend* in Germany, the *levente* developed a near monopoly over youth organizations in Hungary over the course of the 1930s. Between 1937 and 1938, the *levente* already boasted some 600,000 members, while the Boy Scouts retained a mere 50,250 members. Hungarian Catholic youth organizations, like the *Katolikus Legényegyletek Országos Testülete* (KALOT) for males and the *Katolikus Leánykörök Szövetsége* (KALÁSZ) for females, had an ever poorer showing: at most 35,000.⁷³ Officially under the supervision of the *Honvédség* ministry, the *levente* became mandatory for all (male) Hungarian citizens between the ages of twelve and twenty-three in 1939; thereafter, *levente* membership continuously surpassed one million individuals.⁷⁴

⁷² Vitári, "Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend," 244-246.

⁷³ Letter from *Deutsche Gesandtschaft*, "Ungarische Jugendverbände" (18.1.1937), PA AA, R 98875. These numbers arise from German Foreign Office correspondence and are probably at least partially inaccurate. According to Spannenberger, by the late 1930s, the Hungarian Boy Scouts organization still had some 170,000 members; in 1938, the KALOT further only had some 30,000 members. Norbert Spannenberger, *Die katholische Kirche in Ungarn 1918-1939: Positionierung im politischen System und „Katholische Renaissance“* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 67, 103.

⁷⁴ Vitári, "Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend," 245.

Hungarian by citizenship, all *Deutsche Jugend* members were also required to serve in the *levente* after 1939. Some of the thorniest issues that arose with the *Deutsche Jugend*'s legalization therefore revolved around its relationship to the *levente*. On April 23rd, 1942, *Deutsche Jugend* head Huber and *levente* leader Alajos Béldy reached an agreement. According to the agreement, all DJ members would have to attend weekly *levente* exercises. DJ leaders, furthermore, were required to attend an annual two-week training session with *levente* leaders if they missed the weekly *levente* events due to other pressing, DJ-related responsibilities. The official language of instruction would be “the Magyar [sic],” however, in districts with large German minorities, German-speaking instructors would be employed who could give the most crucial commands in German. DJ members, furthermore, would be allowed to speak German among each other during breaks, and would be able to wear the DJ emblem. If necessary, VDU members could act as *levente* leaders. Like all *levente* leaders, however, they would have to be specifically trained. The *Deutsche Jugend* and the *levente*, furthermore, were required to announce all of their events to each other at least one week in advance to prevent scheduling conflicts. A new curriculum was to be established especially for the DJ's six- to ten-year-olds in order to instill a familiarity with the Hungarian language and state structures. Hungarian national holidays, as well as Regent Miklós Horthy's birthday and name day, would have to be celebrated together by both organizations. In order to encourage “mutual respect and friendly cooperation,” moreover, the Hungarian youth press— like *Levente* or *Szebb jövőt* (“more beautiful future”)— was to publish articles about the DJ. In return, the the VDU press— like the *Jungkamerad* or *Die Deutsche Zeitung*— was to provide coverage of the *levente*'s activities. Finally, any *levente* or DJ leaders who “through their behavior make a peaceful and friendly cooperation impossible” would be dismissed from service.⁷⁵

Officially, the *levente*-DJ relationship had been clarified by April 1942. Furthermore, as the German Foreign Office's archival record indicates, the *levente* itself had also maintained active ties to Germany's *Hitler-Jugend* from 1933 onwards, engaging in mutual exchange programs, training, and diplomatic activities.⁷⁶ In February 1937, the German government even formally opened a *levente* home in Berlin for “young

⁷⁵ AMV/KB 521, announcement from VDU, *Gebietsleitung* Batschka, Zombor (12.5.1942).

⁷⁶ For archival traces of these LJF-*levente* relations, consider: correspondence from 7.-8.1935, PA AA, R 98875.

Hungarian citizens in the German *Reich*” right across the street from Berlin’s university.⁷⁷ The relationship between the *levente* and Hungary’s German minority, however, always had its wrinkles. In the mid-1920s, the *Ungarländische Deutscher Volksbildungsverein* had already complained about Hungary’s rising expectations that its German minority also participate in the *levente*.⁷⁸ Such tensions escalated especially after the *levente* became mandatory, as reports circulated of discrimination, even beatings and physical abuse, against non-Hungarian speakers in local *levente* divisions.⁷⁹ When the Batschka joined Hungary in April 1941, such conflicts reached a boiling point, as tens of thousands of youth (according to some estimates, forty thousand ethnic Germans alone⁸⁰) suddenly had to join the *levente*, even though they understood no Hungarian at all and had no appreciation of the Hungarian national project. As the historian Zsolt Vitári has indicated, frustration about *levente* service was not exclusive to the German minority; Serbian, Romanian, and other youth also balked at the prospect of serving in Hungarian youth divisions.⁸¹ However, considering their long-standing mass-mobilization into pro-*Reich* youth groups, the tensions between ethnic Germans and *levente* authorities ran especially high. Demonstrations by German youth against *levente* leaders in towns such as Hódság became so severe that the German embassy attempted to intervene in 1944, requesting freedom from *levente* training for *Deutsche Jugend* members. However, bullying by *levente* officers continued (including the accusation that *levente* officers had burned a swastika into a German boy’s chest), creating even greater resistance by Batschka German youth.⁸²

Despite such diplomatic, logistic, and “national” challenges, the Batschka’s *Deutsche Jugend* not only maintained its pre-1941 mobilization level, it appears even to have surpassed it. As proclaimed in the 1943 *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Jugend in Ungarn*, ninety percent of all German youth in the Batschka (or 22,000 individuals) had been

⁷⁷ “Verbalnote” (3.2.1937), PA AA, R 98878. The home’s location still houses Berlin’s *Collegium Hungaricum* today.

⁷⁸ Vitári, “Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend,” 254-255.

⁷⁹ Vitári, “Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend,” 254-255.

⁸⁰ Report, “Volksdeutsche in der Batschka,” from *Deutsche Gesandtschaft* Budapest (5.12.1941), p. 3, PA AA, R 100939.

⁸¹ Vitári, “Die Leventejugend und die Organisierung der Deutschen Jugend,” 246.

⁸² Vitári, “Hitlerjugend,” 537-538.

“coordinated” by the *Deutsche Jugend* by then; now, it was the job of the *Deutsche Jugend* leaders to increase these memberships daily.⁸³ As the article continued:

We will let them curse us, we youth from the Batschka, however, know that our Lord, who has created us for battle, loves us. Therefore, the entire youth of the Batschka sees only one goal: ‘To bring the outsiders into our ranks through games, sports, and schooling and to create the new, upcoming type of human being, who is healthy in body and mind and who will proceed openly and honestly through this, for us Germans such a beautiful, life.’⁸⁴

According to propaganda issued by the Batschka’s *Deutsches Volksblatt* in 1943, the creation of a fully “Germanized,” National Socialist youth, by that time, had become a reality. In its November 23rd issue, the *Volksblatt* described how a *Kinderlandverschickung* group from Germany had marched through the streets of Werbass with the local *Deutsche Jugend* troops and pupils from the town’s German middle school.⁸⁵ Apparently, the *volksdeutsche* and *reichsdeutsche* youth looked so similar in “folk costume, posture, racial features, etc.” that confusion arose as to which students came from Germany and which from the Batschka. This, as the author claimed, constituted undeniable proof that the “*Volkstumskampf*” in the region had succeeded. Finally, as if through a “miracle,” the hard work of a generation had borne fruit; individuals who had, for seventeen years, grown up “within the skirt of the *Führer*” now formed the next link in an “everlasting chain” on the “fighting lineage.”⁸⁶

According to official propaganda, the coordination and “education” of German youth within a greater Hungary, including the Batschka, appeared to be complete by 1943. Such propaganda, however, says little about the *Deutsche Jugend*’s actual undertakings,

⁸³ *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Jugend in Ungarn 1943*, 154.

⁸⁴ “*Wir lassen schimpfen gegen uns, wir Jugendliche der Batschka aber wissen, dass uns der Herrgott, der uns zum Kampf erschaffen hat, liebt. Daher sieht die ganze Jugend der Batschka nur ein Ziel: ‘Die Aussenstehenden noch zu uns herüber zu holen und durch Spiel, Sport und Schulungen einen neuen kommenden Menschentyp zu schaffen, der gesund an Körper und Geist ist, und der offen und ehrlich durchs neue, für uns Deutsche so schöne Leben gehen wird.’*” *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Jugend in Ungarn 1943*, 154.

⁸⁵ The KLV will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. According to some estimates, approximately eight thousand German KLV children were ultimately hosted by ethnic German families in the Batschka and the “*Schwäbische Türkei*” (in current-day Tolna, Baranya, and Somogy). These families then received financial assistance from the VDU. Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn, 1938-1944*, 310.

⁸⁶ *Deutsches Volksblatt: Tageszeitung der Deutschen Südungarns*, vol. 25, no. 7401 (23.11.1943), 3.



Fig. 5.2 *Deutsche Jugend* Marching Through a Batschka Town.
Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.

or the manner in which its activities were perceived, adopted, resisted, or ignored within the Batschka. For as one passes to the micro-historical, an even more complex image emerges. Indeed, as local archival sources and oral history interviews show, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* children and youth faced mounting tensions within their communities between 1941 and 1944, as the multiple ecclesiastical, state, and National Socialist actors invested in youth mobilization not only continued their efforts, but bestowed on them a renewed sense of urgency.

D. “From Below” Perspectives on the Batschka’s *Deutsche Jugend*

I. Deutsche Jugend Service: Oral History Recollections

Resi Gerber*, born in Apatin in 1930, had always been a “big German” (“*grosse Deutsche*”). Originally a *Marienbund* member, Resi spent much of her childhood during the 1930s involved in the Catholic girls’ association’s activities. She met with her *Marienbund* group once a week, sang ecclesiastical songs, and occasionally went on excursions with them to neighboring towns to look at churches. “But then the *Kulturbund* came,” she chuckled, “and of course I didn’t go there [to the *Marienbund*] anymore.” As Resi explained, the *Kulturbund* was much more interesting for the town’s “big Germans.” Retrospectively, she does not know “what they promised”; nevertheless, almost all youth had joined the “*Kulturbund*, or *Volksbund* Youth” by the early 1940s and, ultimately, “would have done anything for Hitler.”⁸⁷ Resi herself swiftly rose in the ranks of her girls’ group. She attended weekly youth meetings at Apatin’s “*Heimatshaus*,” where she sang “Hitler songs” (“*Hitlerlieder*”) in uniform, helped with organizational matters related to the “*Heimabende*,” and eventually became “*Kameradschaftsführerin*” (a local youth division leader). She attended sports camps, like one during the summer of 1944 where she did sports “from morning to evening for four weeks.” She completed her “*Sportabzeichen*” (sports certificate) and became “*Sportwartin*” (sports group leader). Resi indeed adored sports: she was particularly successful in “*Korbball*” (basketball), traveling with her team to Apatin’s surrounding villages (like Milititsch, Kernei, and Szentivan), and even scoring goals in competitions designed for older girls.

As Resi explained, “everyone who felt German” joined the *Kulturbund* and its “*Jugend*” (“Youth”) during the early 1940s.⁸⁸ “We were all such Hitler enthusiasts,” Resi recalled; “we thought that in Germany, people live like kings, and much better than us in Yugoslavia!”⁸⁹ Perhaps, she conceded, not everyone was as openly enthusiastic as her. One day, Resi recounted, she bought a sign for her grandparents that most of Apatin’s German households had at their entrance: “*Trittst du hier als Deutscher ein, soll dein*

⁸⁷ “*Mi hen’ für d’r Hitler hän’ mir, hätte mir alles gemacht.*” Resi Gerber*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (21.3.2014).

⁸⁸ “*Was sich als Deutsche g’fühlt hend, die sind alle da hin ‘gange ...*” Gerber, interview.

⁸⁹ “*...wei mer so grossi Hitler [laughs] Begeischerte ware ... [...] M’hen gedacht in Deutschland, da lebe die Leut’ in Saus und Braus! Un’, un’, un’ ... viel besser wie mir da in Jugoslawien g’lebt hen!*” Gerber, interview.

Gruss 'Heil Hitler' sein!"⁹⁰ Her grandfather, she explained, was the town's only weaver, and was in constant personal and business contact with his non-German (especially Serbian) neighbors. Upon receiving the sign, her grandfather was shocked. Explaining to Resi that he did appreciate the gift, he nonetheless calmly told her that he could not display the sign, as his neighbors "are proper and good people," and that he "earned his daily bread" with them as customers. He would therefore place the sign into a drawer and look at it from there every day. "I could not believe it!" Resi elaborated, "because I was such a big German!"⁹¹

Resi's narrative, though more elaborate than many collected over the course of this research, is not unique. Indeed, as with the Western Banat, every interviewee from the Batschka recalled how right-wing organizations, "*Hitler-Jugend*" formations, and Nazi propaganda infiltrated their towns, confronted them with images of the *Reich*, and caused not only displays of mass enthusiasm, but also deep ruptures within their communities. These ruptures occurred between generations and ethnic groups (though definitions thereof were also contested). Crucially— and unlike in the Western Banat— heavy public contestation also erupted within the *Donauschwaben* communities and between youth themselves, as various ecclesiastical, national, and social actors continued to battle over diverse definitions of "Germanness" and the loyalties that these would entail.

As in the Western Banat, the *Deutsche Jugend* had a significant presence in the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* communities after 1941. Even individuals who were too young to join the *Deutsche Jugend*'s youngest cohorts recalled, decades later, how the *Kulturbund*'s youth groups "became very popular during those years." As Jakob Winzer*, born in Filipowa/Filipova/Szentfűlöp in 1939, explained, "people were enthusiastic about the German idea ... especially about defending oneself against the injustice of Versailles." Nobody "saw through [such] ambitions in detail" or truly understood their deeper meaning; the *Donauschwaben*'s main thought simply was that "we are German, we want to stay [German], and we are grateful to all who ... take us on."⁹² Even children

⁹⁰ "If you step in here as a German, your greeting shall be '*Heil Hitler*'!" It is interesting to note that this was one of the only moments during the interview that Resi did not use her dialect, but a standardized high German.

⁹¹ Gerber, interview.

⁹² "Man war von der deutschen Idee ... begeistert. Und insbesondere, dass man sich gegen das Unrecht von Versailles zur Wehr setzte [...] Man hat deren Bestrebungen nicht im Detail durchschaut ... Das hat man nicht mal im Reich getan [chokes up]. Was da als Hintergedanke geplant war, das wurde den Schwaben in Filipowa nicht gesagt [...] Der Leitgedanke war eben: Wir sind Deutsche, wir wollen es

and youth— usually encouraged by their families and peers— joined such organizations. As Hans Brenner*, born in Bukin/Dunabökény/Mladenovo in 1937, explained, especially “when the Germans were present” with their “military” after 1941, “organizers” began “working day and night” on projects “oriented with Hitler.” As a result, a “*Hitler-Jugend*” was also started in his town, including for younger children, since “the Germans had a program for everybody.” Hans, too, “showed up a couple of times,” wore a uniform, and listened to “somebody say something.” As he recalled, the meetings were not “a bad thing” and similar to the “Boy Scouts” activities. However, these groups became “so strong [...] that you either went along or you were ostracized.” Ultimately, stated Hans, joining the “*Hitler-Jugend*” became a “*freiwilliges muss*” (a “voluntary must”).⁹³

For those who did not participate in the *Deutsche Jugend*'s activities, the organization seems to have had a double effect. On the one hand, non-membership in the DJ became a source of discrimination. On the other hand (and perhaps partially due to this discrimination), the DJ nonetheless seemed alluring to non-members. As Johann Weber*, born in 1937 in Torschau/Torza/Torzsa, recalled, his father “was always very critical [...] about politics [...] he knew history and [...] had a good education.” Together with his cousin, Johann's father listened to the radio regularly. “Whenever Hitler ranted and spoke, they always ranted and cursed after him,” he laughed.⁹⁴ As a child he did not quite understand it, however, his father had already “prophesied back then that he [Hitler] and his forces would drive the world into ruin instead of victory.”⁹⁵ His father therefore forbade Johann from joining the *Deutsche Jugend*. Most of his classmates, by then, had joined a “pre-formation [*Vorstufe*] of the *Hitler-Jugend*.” They “received short black trousers and a brown, wide shirt with a strap [*Sturmriemen*]” and met on the town's sports field every Sunday. The following week, they would then confront Johann at school and try to entice him to join them [*mitlocken*]: “Oh! On Sunday! ... Why didn't you also come?,” they said. As a result, Johann also wanted to go. His father, however, refused to give him permission, telling him: “You're not going there! ... That's nothing

bleiben, und wir sind allen dankbar, die sich un ... die sich unserer annehmen.” Jakob Winzer*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (27.3.2014).

⁹³ Hans Brenner*, telephone interview with Caroline Mezger (18.10.2011). Interview conducted in English.

⁹⁴ “*Wenn der Hitler dann gewettert hat un' gesprochen hat, die hinterher gewettert und geschimpft [laughs].*” Johann Weber*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (25.3.2014).

⁹⁵ “*Ich hab das ja als Kind nich' so verstanden, aber ... mei Vater hat mer da später das schon erzählt ... eh, dass die damals schon genau, so wie die's gesagt hat, weil die hat damals schon prophezeit ... dass der mit seine ganzen Mannschaften ... den, die Welt in' Ruin treiben wird anstatt in' Sieg.*” Weber, interview.

[for you] One day you'll thank me for that."⁹⁶ Initially, Johann was quite angry. He found other ways to participate in *Kulturbund* activities: he had his pro-Nazi uncle give him the best cinema seats for his town's screening of "*Baron Münchhausen*," he enlisted his aunt's help in raising silk worms for the *Luftwaffe*.⁹⁷ As Johann reflected, however, he ultimately learned to appreciate his father's stance.

Similar accounts of frustrated desires to join the *Deutsche Jugend* are found in the accounts of Johanna Koch*. Born in Alt-Siwatz/Ószivác/Stari Sivac in 1932, Johanna and her family moved to Bitola, Macedonia in 1935. Her father was in charge of an agricultural mill there, and traded products all the way to Germany. In Bitola, Johanna attended a French convent Kindergarten (despite being Lutheran). During the holidays, she and her mother often traveled to Skopje, where they stayed at the "*Deutsche Haus*" (German cultural house). In Skopje, she especially enjoyed the festivities held in honor of King Peter's birthday: the Sokol marched with torches, music played, and she saw her first ever fireworks. In 1940, however, Bitola was bombed by German forces. Her family therefore decided to move back to Alt-Siwatz, where her sister was born two days before the 1941 entry of Hungarian troops. Had she been born two days later, laughed Johanna, her sister would have been born in Hungary.⁹⁸ Regardless, Johanna thereafter attended a Hungarian convent school in neighboring Bačka Topola/Topolya. In 1942, Johanna enrolled at Werbass' German *Bürgerschule*.

Although Johanna had grown up in a German-speaking household, and her parents had read books to her in German (including the Grimms' fairytales), she had never received a German-language education. Barely able to read and write German, Johanna initially spent most of her free time at the *Bürgerschule* studying and catching up to her peers. As Johanna recalled, most of her classmates were in the "BDM" ("*Bund Deutscher Mädel*") and wore "those dark blue skirts and ... white blouses and a small scarf around their necks." However, "with me, I don't know ... it didn't quite work out yet." Forced to study during her free time, Johanna could not join the BDM girls for their events and "*Kreise*" ("circles"). Instead of a black knot in her scarf like all the other girls, Johanna had a purple one, which "deeply impressed her." Nevertheless, she attended the occasional school event. On November 9th, for example, her entire class met, "pulled a

⁹⁶ "*Du gesch ned dahin ... des ist nix, und ... später wirsch mer noch dankbar sein.*" Weber, interview.

⁹⁷ More on this silk worm production in the section on the *Kinderlandverschickung*.

⁹⁸ Her mother and she, despite having been born in the same town, were born in Austria-Hungary and Yugoslavia.

flag up and down,” and sang songs like “*Nichts kann eine Frau, wenn Liebe und Glaube ...*”⁹⁹ After passing her first year, Johanna finally also was to receive “a white blouse and a blue skirt.” However, as she explained, “it never came to that anymore,” as class was disbanded with the approaching Red Army in October 1944. In any case, as Johanna exclaimed, like everyone around her: “I was so convinced! I was so convinced [...] we [the Germans] will be victorious! I truly believed ... that the whole world is evil, and that the Germans are the only good ones.”¹⁰⁰

While it is apparent that the pupils at Werbass’ *Bürgerschule* indeed became part of the *Deutsche Jugend*, other interviewees presented different interpretations of their time there.¹⁰¹ Anna Kirschner*, born in Neu-Schowe/Újsóv/Nova Sove in 1929, also enrolled at Werbass’ *Bürgerschule*, completing her fourth and final year there in 1944. Asked about youth organizations, she conceded that especially during the early 1940s, “youth assembled and did sports ... and also sang, danced folk dances” at events organized through the “*Schwbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*.” However, she herself “did not pick up on these things.”¹⁰² As “one had told her” later, however, youth did listen to lectures by teachers like Dr. Zimmermann (presumably the same Dr. Zimmermann who had been active with the Lutheran youth groups during the interwar period).¹⁰³ As far as she knew, girls also played “*Korbball*” and “*Vlkerball*” and wore an “*Einheitstracht*” with “white blouses,” “black skirts,” and “black bodices” (“*Mieder*”). She did not attend these events; however, she occasionally attended the Sunday afternoon football matches played between teams of young (generally already war-mobilized) men from the surrounding villages.¹⁰⁴

Other former female Werbass *Bürgerschule* students, in their interviews, focused primarily on their sports activities. Anne Wirth*, born in Tschervenka/Cservenka/

⁹⁹ “Nothing can a woman, if love and faith ...” Johanna Koch*, telephone interview with Caroline Mezger (18.6.2014). Johanna here probably refers to the German BDM’s older cohort, “*Glaube und Schnheit*” (“Faith and Beauty”).

¹⁰⁰ “*Ich war so berzeugt! Ich war so berzeugt! [...] Wir werden siegen! Ich hab’ wirklich gedacht ... die ganze Welt isch bse, und die Deutschen sind die einzigschte Gute [chuckles], na?*” Koch, interview.

¹⁰¹ The connection between the DJ and the Batschka’s German schools is elaborated in the following chapter.

¹⁰² “*Des hab ich nicht mitgekriegt.*” Anna Kirschner*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (20.3.2014).

¹⁰³ See this dissertation’s Chapter II.

¹⁰⁴ Kirschner, interview.



Fig. 5.3 Girls at a Harvest Festival Podium.
Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.

Crvenka in 1927, also attended the *Bürgerschule* during the early 1940s.¹⁰⁵ As she stated, there were youth groups in Werbass, however, she did not really participate in their activities. She only joined the sports group, in which she won awards in long jump, sprints, and long-distance running. Sometimes, large gymnastics festivals (“*Turnfeschte*”) would be held at a nearby field (“*Hutweide*”). She and her colleagues would then wear a uniform and do exercises in front of an audience. There were other kinds of *Kulturbund* meetings (“*Zusammekunft*”), however, they were not “filled with hatred or anything” (“*hasserfüllt oder so*”). Certainly, she and her family were very

¹⁰⁵ In her interview, she repeated several times that she had to flee her hometown right after her second year at the *Bürgerschule* (in 1944). However, she did not recall when she entered the school, and the age she recalled that she was at the time of her flight (fourteen) does not match her birth year. Anne Wirth*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (28.3.2014).

“German-minded” (“*deutschgesinnt*”). However, they were “not as extreme as some [who] were a bit crazy.”¹⁰⁶ As Anne explained, “they started selling signs to the Germans” in her town, signs that read: “*Trittst du hier als Deutscher ein, soll dein Gruss ‘Heil Hitler’ sein!*” Her father bought one “for dear peace’s sake” (“*der liebe Friede Wille*”). After bringing it home, he turned it around and told Anne to use her best handwriting and write an alternative slogan on the back: “*Grüß Gott, tritt ein, bring Glück herein!*”¹⁰⁷ They then placed the sign at their home’s entrance, like most other Germans in the neighborhood. Especially during the final months of occupation, when the German military began confiscating crops, the sign led to comedic scenes. Laughing, Anne recalled how entering German soldiers would tip their hat to the sign, thinking, of course, that they were honoring the original slogan.¹⁰⁸

Other interviewees took a less ironic approach. Friedrich Fischer*, born in Bukin/Dunabökény/Mladenovo in 1928, spent two years at Novi Sad’s *Bürgerschule* and two years at Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* during the early 1940s. During this time, he, too, became a “*Hitler-Jugend*” member. Every Sunday, “professors who were a little bit older and knew about German culture and [...] German poets like Goethe and Schiller” gave lectures to the group. On the premise that a healthy mind and a healthy body “goes together,” they trained frequently in sports. They had uniforms with “a scarf [and] a knot” and “different markings”; they did “field maneuvers” and “learned how to march and use a compass.” While these exercises were clearly also intended as a type of preparation for military service, Friedrich very much enjoyed them. Due to his excellent service, he was even sent to Weimar, Germany in August 1944, with a group of approximately thirty other “*Hitler-Jugend*” members from the Batschka. For one month, they stayed at the *Schloss Belvedere*. They interacted with *Spielmannszug* musicians from Germany who were also hosted at the premises; they learned about the German cultural heritage; they heard the “world’s largest organ” at the Erfurt cathedral; and they ate chocolates, oranges, and bananas.¹⁰⁹ As Friedrich reflected, “we were all sort of duped”: “We [...] thought: *this* is what Germany is like. We were then supposed to come back as ambassadors with

¹⁰⁶ “*Also mer ware sehr deutschgesinnt ... Aber ned so arg ... wie manche biss ’l verrückt ware ... gell?* [laughs]” Wirth, interview.

¹⁰⁷ “*Good day, step in, bring luck in!*” Wirth, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Wirth, interview.

¹⁰⁹ *Schloss Belvedere* indeed has a history related to the (musical) education of Hitler Youths in the framework of *Spielmannszüge*. See: Reinhard Schau, *Das Weimarer Belvedere: Eine Bildungsstätte zwischen Goethezeit und Gegenwart* (Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 78-106.

glowing eyes,” reporting to everyone at home “how good things were in Germany.” In retrospect, of course, while the boys had “had everything” at this camp, this was not the average German experience during the War, and *Schloss Belvedere* “was all a façade.” As he stated, “we were very gullible, as we did not know Germany as such.” Nevertheless, at the time, these experiences were “beautiful.” He and his fellow classmates were “mesmerized” by the new programs offered and became “infatuated ... or fascinated with [...] Germany.” Ultimately, for Friedrich, the period between 1941 and 1944 represented an “awakening of [his] nationality.”¹¹⁰

“Awakenings of nationality” within the framework of organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend* occasionally came at a cost to *Donauschwaben* children and youth not mobilized within its ranks. Katharina Schiffer*, born in Apatin in 1922, explained that while she— like all other “Germans” in her town— was officially enrolled in the *Kulturbund*, she did not attend any of its events. Katharina was raised largely by her grandparents, as her parents worked and lived on a Danube ship. Since she had a Hungarian maiden name, she never attended a German-language school (due to Yugoslavia’s name analysis policies). Instead enrolled in Apatin’s Serbian-language *Volksschule* and *Bürgerschule* sections, as well as Sombor’s Serbian-language *Gymnasium*, Katharina attended Sokol events during the 1930s. “I was a Sokol girl [*Sokolmädchen*]!,” she recalled; “they had a uniform ... probably we also had excursions... it was nice.” As her grandparents forbade her from attending *Kulturbund* youth events, Katharina merely witnessed their activities as an outsider. When she went to Church on Sunday, the “National Socialist [...] girls and boys [...] walked outside the church, in front of the parish hall, back and forth ... and they sang! ... The Hitlerite songs.”¹¹¹ The girls wore a uniform with dark skirts, white blouses, stockings to just above their calves, and “*Haferlschuhe*” (a traditional worker’s shoes); the boys, too, were in uniform. Such activities quickly turned more sinister once she had her own child. Married in 1939 to an ethnic German farmer, Katharina bore a daughter soon thereafter. As soon as her daughter was old enough to play outside with the neighborhood’s other children, Katharina recalled, her daughter was badly teased. Her father had refused to

¹¹⁰ Friedrich Fischer*, telephone interviews with Caroline Mezger (8.11.2009, 24.5.2011). Interviews conducted in English.

¹¹¹ “*Wenn dann mir unser Messe war, dann sind sie ... spaziert ... hi-, äh bei der Kirche un’, vorem Gemeindehaus, hin und her ... Und haben g’sunge! Äh ... Die ... die ... die Hitlerschen Lieder.*” Katharina Schiffer*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (22.9.2014).

volunteer for the *Waffen-SS*; she was therefore tormented by the children of SS volunteers, who denounced their daughter as a “*Badoglio*” and refused to play with her.¹¹²

Bullying at the hands of *Deutsche Jugend* members was also experienced by Georg Schneider*, born in Kernei/Kerény/Krnjaja in 1931. Georg’s father, a veteran of the Habsburg forces and a modest land owner, had been critical of the *Kulturbund*, and refused to join their ranks. As his father once told Georg: “We are German people, and we will remain German people.” German, for him, meant being “Church-oriented,” German-speaking, and in tune with *Donauschwabern* traditions. After April 1941, it also encompassed being a “Hungarian citizen who must do all of [their] duties and learn the language,” though, as his father always emphasized, that would not entail “suddenly thinking like a Hungarian.” As a result, Georg attended a Hungarian Piarist boarding school in Szeged, Hungary, and not a local *Schulstiftung*-coordinated German school.¹¹³ This decision entailed certain hardships. As Georg recalled, every time he returned to his hometown for the holidays, his former classmates would be waiting for him at the train station. “They removed [my school cap], threw it down into the clay [ground], and stepped on it. ‘Why don’t you take a different, German cap, why do you have to wear a Hungarian cap?’” they would taunt him. “Such conflicts were common”, he explained; when youth became a bit older, and “one thought [...] that could be a boyfriend or a girlfriend, one did question, well, is he in the Kulturbund? Or is he in my ... color? What shall I do here?”¹¹⁴

Such discriminations mirrored those that his family experienced more generally. Derided as pro-Hungarian “*Magyaronen*” (his older brother had chosen to serve in the *Honvédség*¹¹⁵) and as “traitors” (his parents had not joined the *Volksbund*), Georg’s family’s home was continuously vandalized, the façade smeared with anti-Semitic graffiti, the windows smashed with stones. Occasionally, young *Kulturbund* men came to their home and offered to paint a sign— prominently remembered by almost all

¹¹² Pietro Badoglio was an Italian general who eventually turned against Mussolini, became Italy’s interim Prime Minister after the 1943 coup against the “*Duce*,” aligned himself with the Allies, and declared war against Nazi Germany in October 1943. More on these *Waffen-SS* mobilizations in the Batschka in the following chapter.

¹¹³ The Piarists, or “Order of Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools”, are a Catholic order established in the seventeenth century specializing in the (generally free) education of children and youth.

¹¹⁴ Georg Schneider*, in-person interview with Caroline Mezger (10.8.2011).

¹¹⁵ More on this decision on whether to serve in the Hungarian or German forces in the following chapter, in the section on *Waffen-SS* recruitment.

Fig. 5.4 House of Sombor's *Deutsche Jugend* Leader in 1942 on "Barát utca" ("Friend street"), with VDU "Victory" Graffiti. Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.



interviewees— onto their façade: “‘V’ for ‘*victoria*’ with a laurel and, written across above that, ‘*der deutsche Sieg*’.”¹¹⁶ At least half of the houses on their street had this sign. Those families who refused sometimes had it painted on their façade against their will in the middle of the night. “That was not so easy,” recounted Georg, “as one had to re-paint the entire gable then, otherwise there still would have been a sign that it was there.”

According to Georg, youth especially were “enthusiastic” (“*begeistert*”) about the *Reich* and its promises. One girl in his neighborhood, for example, repeatedly smashed her own mother’s windows, as her mother refused to join the *Kulturbund*. In Georg’s family, there were also divisions. His cousins, for example, had joined the *Kulturbund* girls’ organization, and marched, sang songs, and entered sports competitions in uniform. Instead of attending church services, they marched to the sports field and sang “*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles ...*” As a result, Georg’s family had little contact with his uncle’s family. As Georg explained, the entry of National Socialism into the

¹¹⁶ “The German victory.” See the embedded photograph for an image of this sign.

Donauschwaben communities provoked profound divisions. Largely due to the *Reich*'s "propaganda," a "true hatred" developed among different factions of *Donauschwaben* society. In most *Donauschwaben* communities, pro-*Kulturbund*, pro-*Reich* "Braune" ("browns") were pitted against anti-*Kulturbund*, pro-Hungarian, pro-Catholic "Schwarze" ("blacks"), branded by their opponents as "Magyaroner." These conflicts took "awful forms, so that windows were smashed, houses ... walls were smeared with 'traitor,' 'Jew,' and so on and so forth." As Georg recalled, such battles "ran right through families: parents no longer spoke with their sons or children, and vice versa ... one neighbor no longer spoke to the other."¹¹⁷

As reports from the early 1940s by local *Volksbund* authorities across the Batschka attest, youthful "enthusiasm" for the Nazi project indeed became problematic. Fearing reprisals by the Hungarian authorities— or, at the very least, a deterioration in the already fraught German-Hungarian relationship in the region— even the *Volksbund*'s branch leaders began circulating warnings against gratuitous acts of vandalism and violence. In July 1943, for instance, the VDU "Gebietsführer" (district leader) in Sombor sent a letter to the VDU *Ortsgruppen* explaining that twenty-one boys had smashed the windows of nine houses in Militics/Srpski Miletić/Milititsch. The houses' inhabitants had been "Drückeberger" ("shirkers"), ethnic Germans who had refused to enlist for military service in the *Reich*'s forces. Nevertheless, youth were "not entitled to take measures against cowards or opponents on their own initiative."¹¹⁸ As a result, the boys were taken as prisoners ("interniert") by the Hungarian authorities. Closing his letter, the *Gebietsführer* urged all youth leaders ("Jugendführer") to clearly explain that vandals would be taken as prisoners by the Hungarian *Gendarmerie* within twenty-four hours of their crime. Furthermore, excessive alcohol consumption among youth, which occasionally fueled such acts, was to be prevented.

Generational cleavages and instances of indifference also plagued the *Volksbund*. One February 1944 letter from the VDU in Pincéd/Pivnice/Pivnitz to Hodschag's district leadership inquired about what to do in situations when youth were enrolled in the *Deutsche Jugend*, but their "heads of household" ("*Familienoberhaupt*") refused to pay

¹¹⁷ "Das ... hat also schlimme Formen angenommen, sodass dann die Scheiben eingeworfen wurden, die Häuser ... Wände wurden beschmiert, 'Verräter,' 'Jude,' und so weiter und so fort ... das ging quer durch Familien. Eltern sprachen nicht mehr mit den Söhnen oder Kindern und umgekehrt und ähm der eine Nachbar sprach nicht mehr mit dem anderen ..." Schneider, interview.

¹¹⁸ "... nicht berechtigt sind, aus eigener Initiative gegen Feiglinge oder Gegner vorzugehen." AMV/KB 937, letter from *Gebietsführer* VDU Zombor (28.7.1943).

the full VDU membership fee for their family.¹¹⁹ Another December 1943 letter to Hodschag's DJ district leadership from Vajska/Vajszka/Wajska lamented the lack of local support for the VDU's youth formations. In a frequently misspelled letter, Vajska's DJ "*Standortführer*" (local leader), Georg Toth, informed Hodschag's DJ leadership that he could not regularly send them the required monthly reports and membership fees, as the local youth was "very weak" ("*ser Schwache Jugend* [sic]"). Whenever he held a *Heimabend*, only five or six boys would attend, as well as perhaps a few more girls. Enclosed with the letter, Hodschag's DJ leaders would find remuneration for the two books they had sent him for Vajska's youth library; payment for the monthly "*Rundschreiben*" (newsletter) was more difficult, however, as the newsletters always only arrived in the (remote) village several days after payment for it was due. Closing his letter with a "*Heil Hitler!*," Georg nevertheless assured Hodschag's DJ leadership that the local girls' group would send them more information on the Christmas packages (presumably for the WHW) that they had prepared.¹²⁰

Overzealousness and apathy were not the only responses with which the VDU and DJ leadership struggled. Acts of violence and vandalism were also directed against the DJ's members and its activities. In June 1942, for instance, the VDU of Szond/Waldau/Sonta reported that, in one night, almost half of the town's "V-signs" (the painted pro-VDU "*der deutsche Sieg*" symbols) had been smeared with excrement. Since then, similar acts had been committed almost every single night. The Hungarian *Gendarmerie*, though informed about the problem, had done little to clarify the situation.¹²¹ Another letter, sent in June 1942, similarly reported of vandalism in Szond. Due to a "prohibition against assemblies" ("*versamlungsverbot* [sic]") pronounced by the local authorities between April 30th and May 3rd that year, the youth group was only able to erect their maypole for the first of May (fashioned as the "*Nationaler Feiertag des deutschen Volkes*," a German national holiday under National Socialism) on May 4th. However, the following night, the maypole was toppled by vandals, and its crowning swastika smashed.¹²²

¹¹⁹ AMV/KB 1071, letter from VDU Pincéd to *Kreisleitung* Hodschag (21.2.1944).

¹²⁰ AMV/KB 1037, letter from VDU Vajska to DJ *Stammführung* Hodschag (19.12.1943). Vajska indeed seems to have been quite notorious in its inability to hand in forms and membership fees on time. In February 1943, Hodschag's female DJ leader ("*Mädelringführerin*") had already complained about Vajska's tardy reporting of the number of "*Jugend voran*" readers in a letter circulated to all local youth leaders. See: AMV/KB 813, "Rundschreiben Nr. 4/1943" (22.2.1943).

¹²¹ AMV/KB 544, letter from VDU Waldau/Szond (7.6.1942).

¹²² AMV/KB 543, "Bericht" from VDU Szond (7.6.1942).

The conflicts between “*Braune*” and “*Schwarze*” were profound and occasionally violent. As Georg Schneider recalled, such major ruptures opened between these two factions that some of his closest friends were children who came from outside of the *Donauschwaben* communities entirely. Specifically, during the early 1940s, Georg befriended “*reichsdeutsche*” children who had been sent to the Batschka through the “*Kinderlandverschickung*” (KLV). Unlike the local *Donauschwaben*, Georg explained, they did not know or care who was in the “*Kulturbund*” and who was not. Children and youth from the *Reich*, furthermore, could not understand why one “German” community would conduct such violent internal battles.¹²³ *Reichsdeutsche* youth, sent by the thousands into the Batschka between 1942 and 1944, thus became yet another player in the already complex and contested *Donauschwaben* youth arena.

2. *The Kinderlandverschickung (KLV) in the Batschka*

Within the sphere of childhood and youth welfare, one of the most pressing challenges faced by European states during World War II was how to keep its future citizens safe from the bombardments that ravaged Europe’s cities. Like other European countries, the Third Reich launched a massive program for the evacuation of children and youth from bombardment in urban areas into rural safety during those years.¹²⁴ Termed the “*Kinderlandverschickung*” (or KLV), the *Reich*’s temporary child relocation program brought some five million children from cities into the countryside from October 1940 onwards.¹²⁵ These children, however, were not only relocated within Germany; rather, as the *Reich* reached across Eastern Europe, tens of thousands of *reichsdeutsche* children were also sent to lands now occupied by, or allied with, the Third Reich. Between 1941 and 1944, at least eight thousand children and youth were sent from the *Reich* to the Batschka and the “*Schwäbische Türkei*” (comprising Hungary’s Tolna, Baranya, and Somogy counties) alone.¹²⁶ These KLV cohorts generally arrived in the Batschka in

¹²³ Schneider, interview.

¹²⁴ For a comparative perspective on the French and British child evacuations, consider: Laura Lee Downs, “Enfance en guerre : Les évacuations d’enfants en France et en Grande Bretagne, 1939-1940,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, vol. 66, no. 2 (April–June 2011): 413-48.

¹²⁵ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 44-48.

¹²⁶ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 310.

groups, organized by school class and/or Hitler Youth troop.¹²⁷ In 1942, they primarily came from Westphalia, in 1943 from Hamburg, and in 1944 from Vienna.¹²⁸

In the Batschka, the KLV cohorts were hosted for up to six months at a time by local ethnic German families. Generally, these families were *Volksbund* members. For every child hosted, these families received a “symbolic” remuneration from the *Volksbund* of two to four pengös per day, though special “honors”— in the form of certificates and ceremonies— were given to those families who refused any kind of compensation for their service.¹²⁹ In their letters, directives, and propaganda, the *Volksbund* framed hosting “*reichsdeutsche*” children as both an honor and a duty. As one 1942 letter by Sombor’s VDU leadership stated, the purpose of the KLV was not only to provide “healthcare and provisions for children,” but also— “in the midst of the heaviest war”— to “pull those children for whose future and life the entire German *Volk* fights out of those territories that are being attacked by English and American bombers almost every day.”¹³⁰ It was only thanks to the “German battle in the East and the German weapons” that the Batschka’s people had not yet experienced the horrors of war; therefore, it would be their “holiest duty” (“*heiligste Pflicht*”) to host as many *reichsdeutsche* children as possible.¹³¹

Considerable resources and propaganda were expended on the *Kinderlandverschickung* in the Batschka. Circularies from the VDU headquarters in

¹²⁷ Additional “KLV” groups traveled to the Batschka from Transylvania and the Carpathians in the framework of health-based vacation colonies. However, the majority of KLV groups hailed from cities within the *Reich* that had been ravaged by bombardment. For archival sources on the former “*Kinder aufs Land*”/“*Kindererholungslager*” operations, consider: AMV/KB 229, “Rundschreiben 4” by VDU Sombor (12.7.1941); AMV/KB 200, “Jahresbericht 1941 über die Tätigkeit des Gesundheitsamtes der Ortsgruppe Ulmenau” (8.1.1942); AMV/KB 533, “Aktion Kinder aufs Land!”, letter from Zombor *Gebietsfrauenleiterin* Trude Kremling (26.5.1942); AMV/KB 857, “Das Jugenderholungswesen in unserer Volksgruppe” (1.3.1943).

¹²⁸ Heinrich Ehrlich, “Das Vereinswesen in Kernei,” *Kerneier Heimatblätter: Mitteilungen an Kerneier in aller Welt*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1967), 15; *Volksdeutscher Kalender 1943: Jahrbuch der deutschen Volksgruppe in Ungarn*, edited by Heinrich Reister (Budapest: Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn, Centrum-Verlag A.G., 1942), 64.

¹²⁹ AMV/KB 861, “Rundschreiben 3- Auszahlung der Pflegegelder” (5.4.1943); AMV/KB 653, “Tätigkeitsbericht vom 15. Sept. bis zum 15. Okt. 1942” by VDU Hodschag; AMV/KB 837, letter to “Leiter der Deutschen Volkshilfe Zombor” (17.3.1943).

¹³⁰ “*Die reichsdeutsche Kinderlandverschickung hat nicht nur die Aufgabe den Kinder [sic] eine gesundheitliche und verpflegungsmässige Betreuung zukommen zu lassen, sondern sie ist heute, mitten im schwesten Kriege, in erster Linie bestrebt, die Kinder, für deren Zukunft und Leben das ganze deutsche Volk im Kampfe steht, aus all jenen Gebieten herauszuziehen die fast jeden Tag von englischen [sic] und amerikaschen [sic] Bomber heimgesucht werden.*” AMV/KB 599, letter from VDU Zombor, “Reichsdeutsche Kinderlandverschickung” (3.8.1942).

¹³¹ Letter from VDU Zombor (3.8.1942).

Sombor to its branch offices across the region regularly announced the arrival of new KLV groups and provided instructions for the organization of their stay. In August 1942, for instance, Sombor's VDU urged the town of Szilberek to report how many KLV classes (composed of forty children each) they would be able to host for the next six months.¹³² By March 1943, eighty KLV children had been hosted there.¹³³ In September 1943, a renewed influx of KLV groups precipitated more correspondence. The VDU in Hodschag, for example, encouraged families to host new groups of KLV children, though inspections would be carried out of these homes beforehand to ensure their suitability. The problem of organizing firewood for these groups' classrooms, furthermore, would have to be resolved soon.¹³⁴

In their reports of the local volunteers' activities, most VDU chapters were positive. In April 1943, Hodschag's *Volksbund* reported that local families were "very happy and eager" to host the "*reichsdeutsche* children." Indeed, more KLV groups than originally planned could now be welcomed; even the smallest "*Ortsgruppen*" in Dernye, Doroszló, and Vajszka had agreed to host one or two groups.¹³⁵ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the VDU's press disseminated even more enthusiasm about the "*Volksgruppe*'s" KLV-related efforts. In May 1942, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* reported on the arrival in Apatin of ninety-eight children from Westphalia. Apparently, Apatin's families had volunteered to host four hundred children, so some disappointment arose when everyone's request could not be met. Nevertheless, these children's arrival was celebrated pompously: the entire VDU elite, the *Frauenschaft* (women's organization), the *Deutsche Mannschaft*, the *Deutsche Jugend*, and Apatin's German *Gymnasium*'s teachers and pupils all gathered at the train station to greet them. Following initial welcome and thank you speeches by the VDU leaders and KLV supervisors, the KLV youth stood in formation and chanted "Westphalia greets Apatin," offering Apatin's Germans "the greeting of our grand motherland."¹³⁶ The KLV children originally had expected to travel to southern Germany, and were surprised when their journey took them to Hungary. However, after seeing that they would be hosted in "purely German cities and villages ... that are similarly organized as the

¹³² Letter from VDU Zombor (3.8.1942).

¹³³ AMV/KB 833, "An das kleine Wochenblatt," letter from Szilberek (17.3.1943).

¹³⁴ AMV/KB 968, "Rundschreiben Folge 41" from VDU Hodschag (9.9.1943).

¹³⁵ AMV/KB 861, letter from VDU Hodschag (8.4.1943).

¹³⁶ "... während die Jugend sofort antrat und uns im Sprechchor 'Westfalen grüßt Apatin' den Gruß unseres großen Mutterlandes entgegenbrachten." "Deutsche Jugend aus dem Reich in Apatin," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6963 (31.5.1942), 5.

Führer's movement,” they quickly felt at home.¹³⁷ In October 1942, when the children left, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* again offered a commentary. Some 8,500 “*Hitler-Jugend*” children had been hosted across Hungary over the previous months; of these, eight hundred girls from Hamburg had stayed in the Batschka and Transylvania. The six months that these KLV youth had spent in the Batschka, concluded the article, “have impressed upon their hearts the ineradicable memories of a friendly land and *Volk*.”¹³⁸ Upon their departure, they were once again greeted by the local youth, who bid them farewell in an elaborate display of mutual loyalty.

As such articles suggest, the KLV program not only served the practical purpose of providing thousands of *reichsdeutsche* children and youth with safe lodgings and food. Rather, the KLV also had a propagandistic function. For as columns of fully *Hitler-Jugend*-uniformed youngsters marched through the *Donauschwaben's* towns, interacted with the local population, and provided the setting for elaborate displays of National Socialist fervor, the KLV cohorts inadvertently became emissaries for the (imagined) *Reich* and a unified German “*Volksgemeinschaft*.”¹³⁹ Occasionally, KLV children themselves engaged in cultural events dedicated to the folklore of their own (*reichsdeutsche*) hometowns. In June 1943, for instance, the KLV girls' groups hosted in Szilberek and Vepröd organized a joint performance for their *Donauschwaben* hosts, at which they presented “scenes from life in Hamburg, songs, and dances.”¹⁴⁰ That same year, a boys' group from Hamburg further entertained the inhabitants of Szilberek with a “*Bunter Abend*” (“colorful evening”). Eighty boys sang, played instruments, and performed shadow games and skits from Wilhelm Busch's “*Plumps und Pimps*”; their camp leader gave speeches and showed photographs that he had taken in Szilberek.¹⁴¹ In December 1943, the KLV cohorts from Dortmund and Hamburg who were staying in (or

¹³⁷ “... die ähnlich wie die Bewegung des Führers aufgezogen ist, daß sie da unten vollkommen reindeutsche Städte und Dörfer finden würden, das haben sie sich gar nicht vorstellen können [...] In Apatin angekommen, hatten sie schon gar nicht mehr das Gefühl, in der Fremde zu sein.” “Deutsche Jugend aus dem Reich in Apatin.”

¹³⁸ “Die sechs Monate Aufenthalt bei uns haben in ihre jungen Herzen unauslöschliche Erinnerungen an ein freundliches Land und Volk eingegraben.” “Der erste Transport der reichsdeutschen Kinder ist heimgefahren,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7077 (18.10.1942), 5. The fact that these KLV children indeed remembered their stay in the Batschka for the rest of their lives is explored in my article: “Entangled Utopias: The Nazi Mobilization of Ethnic German Youths in the Batschka, 1930s-1944,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2016): 105-126.

¹³⁹ These ideas are elaborated upon in more detail in: Mezger, “Entangled Utopias.”

¹⁴⁰ AMV/KB 919, “Bericht” from Szilberek/Ulmenau (30.6.1943).

¹⁴¹ AMV/KB 247, “Bunter Abend der beiden Hamburger KLV-Lager,” report by VDU Ulmenau/Szilberek (no date, presumably 1943).

near Szilberek) organized a Christmas party for their host families. In a room decorated with two festive Christmas trees, the boys and girls sang Christmas songs, recited poems, and performed scenes from “*Turandot*.” The KLV leader also gave a speech “with impressive sentences” on the topic of “wartime Christmas” (“*Kriegsweihnacht*”). This event—like the previous ones—reportedly were a major success: large crowds attended the event, applauded enthusiastically, and demonstrated the “collegial cooperation of our *Ortsgruppe* with our *reichsdeutsche* guests.”¹⁴²

The KLV groups themselves, however, also became the targets of propaganda. As a secret report addressed to the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (VoMi) in June 1943 attests, National Socialist propagandists targeted not only *Donauschwaben*, but also *reichsdeutsche* children and youth in the Batschka. Sometimes, their messages ran counter to the *Reich*’s official propaganda. According to the June 1943 report, for instance, the leader of the film office of the *A.O. der NSDAP* (the NSDAP’s foreign office), a Mr. Poppe, had toured the Batschka’s KLV groups during the previous months with a film cart, and had shown “German weekly bulletins [*Wochenschauen*] and short films.” After a screening in Torschau on May 24th, Poppe gave an utterly questionable speech to the KLV children and “*Volksdeutsche*” present. He denounced Horthy and the Hungarian government, claiming that the Batschka was only given to Hungary administratively, and that Germany’s “friendship with Hungary is only on paper.” According to Poppe, Horthy’s recent visit with Hitler had failed, as they had parted in anger. “This little Hungary,” which had only risen thanks to Germany’s support, was now “making demands on the big Germany”; however, one day Hungary would pay, “if not today, then tomorrow.” Indeed, all present would “soon see Jewish stars.”¹⁴³ Mr. Poppe was immediately fired from his post and sent to Germany. As the report concludes, he would be sent to the front shortly, despite a recent and severe illness.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² “*Der über alles Erwartete [sic] gute Besuch zeugte von dem vortrefflichen Einvernehmen und der kameradschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit unserer Ortsgruppe mit unseren reichsdeutschen Gästen.*” AMV/KB 1041, “Weihnachtsfeier des KLV.-Lagers in der Ortsgruppe Ulmenau,” report by Szilberek/Ulmenau Presse- und Propaganda Office (22.12.1943).

¹⁴³ “*Ich weiss, dass Horthy beim Führer war. Die Aussprache scheiterte. Es kam zum Krach. Ihr werdet es ja noch erfahren. Ihr werdet auch bald Judensterne sehen. Dieses kleine Ungarn, welches es Deutschland verdanken kann, dass es gross geworden ist, will dem grossen Deutschland Bedingungen stellen, aber der Tag der Abrechnung wird kommen, wenn nicht heute dann morgen.*” Report, signed Reichel, to VoMi z.Hd. von SS-Sturmbannführer Kubits (10.6.1943), PA AA, R 100939-2425.

¹⁴⁴ “... *in Marsch gesetzt werden.*” Report (10.6.1943).

Yet the KLV program did not always run smoothly. In October 1942, Hodschag's VDU reported that the remuneration for KLV hosts had caused disputes. Apparently, only the host families in some villages had received money, causing rumors and unrest among those hosts who received nothing.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the KLV children suffered from homesickness and feared for the safety of their families in the *Reich*. In October 1942, for instance, Szilberek's VDU propaganda officer sent a local newspaper a transcription of a letter sent to a KLV boy staying in the district. Written (purportedly) by the boy's mother, the letter assured the boy that his family had enough coal, wood, conserves, and preserved meats to last all winter. The family regularly ate so many potato "*Knödel*" (dumplings) that they barely had an appetite. His father was fine but tired; he even worked every Sunday so that "the victory will soon be ours." However, this was a sacrifice he gladly made as "we know that our beloved *Führer* and his brave soldiers need all of our dedication." As the officer claimed, "a reproduction of the letter will certainly be effective."¹⁴⁶

The *Kinderlandverschickung* seems to have left a deep and lasting impression on the Batschka *Donauschwaben* host communities. Even today, *Donauschwaben* churches (like that of Karavukovo)—which survived the expulsions after October 1944 and the large-scale vandalism of the 1990s—contain graffitied names and dates, which were carved into their interior walls by children from Hamburg and other German cities during their KLV stays.¹⁴⁷ The KLV children, however, also formed lasting memories and, occasionally, lifelong friendships with the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* children and youth. Unlike in the Western Banat—where no comparable "*Kinderlandverschickung*" took place—all interviewees from the Batschka recalled in detail the "*reichsdeutsche*" children who had suddenly visited them in flocks after 1941.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ "Tätigkeitsbericht vom 15. Sept. bis zum 15. Okt. 1942" by VDU Hodschag.

¹⁴⁶ "*Hier in der Heimat wird tüchtig geschafft, dass der Sieg bald unser ist Der Vatti muss fast jeden Sonntag arbeiten. Aber er tut es gerne, denn wir wissen ja unser gelibter Führer und seine tapferen Soldaten brauchen unseren ganzen Einsatz.*" Spelling errors in original. AMV/KB 649, letter with transcript from VDU Szilberek/Ulmenau (4.11.1942).

¹⁴⁷ My own visit to the Karawukowo/Wolfingen/Bácsordas/Karavukovo German Catholic church in April 2013. The carvings are primarily located in the balcony that used to contain the (now largely demolished) organ.

¹⁴⁸ A "*Kinderlandverschickung*"—also remembered by some of these interviewees—was organized in the Western Banat from September 1944. However, it was aimed at bringing children and youth from the Western Banat into safety in other *Reich*-occupied territories. Consider: "Zu EIIa: Reisebericht" (11. 11.1944), BArch R 4901/12820, fol. 23.



Fig. 5.5 *Kinderlandverschickung* 1st and 2nd Grade Cohorts from Germany in Kernei, 1943. Source: *Kerneier Heimatblätter: Mitteilungen an alle Kerneier*. Edited by Johann Schmidt. Vol. 47 (2004). Rüthen: Kerneier Heimatausschuss. p. 56.

Occasionally, the interviewees' families themselves hosted KLV children. Johanna Bauer*, born in Kernei/Kerény/Krnjaja in 1938, recalled the day that the first KLV girls' group arrived in her hometown. All of the girls assembled at her (*Volksbund*-operated) Kindergarten, she explained, and the "*Donauschwab*en families who wanted to invite a German youth" came, too. After each KLV girl's name was called, a "*Donauschwäbin*" (*Donauschwab* woman) would call "here!," and the girl and the woman would be united. Johanna's family hosted the leader of a boys' group in their living room. She did not remember his name. Nevertheless, he always overslept in the morning, so Johanna's mother sometimes urged her to carry the post to him and wake him up, much to his irritation. Johanna does not know what the KLV groups did all day. However, she recalled that they marched through the village in uniform, wearing black trousers, brown shirts, and "a diagonal thing across." The "Batschka Germans," Johanna explains, were always very hospitable; and "when someone came from *Germany*! That was always something very special ... one really did ... appreciate it."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Johanna Bauer*, in-person interview with her brother Michael* and Caroline Mezger (27.7.2011).

Resi Gerber, too, remembered the day in 1943 when a KLV group from Hamburg arrived in Apatin. It was a Sunday, she explained, and technically the thirteen-year-old should have attended Church. However, as she was curious to see the arriving “Germans”— all “young men, maybe fourteen, fifteen years old”— she “went to the *Kulturbund*” instead. “Of course I had to join in!,” she exclaimed; “I wanted to see how they arrive!” The following week, when the priest (her religion teacher) at school noticed her and some of her classmates’ Sunday absence, they were then reprimanded and punished. Resi, however, was quite unfazed. Her own family also hosted boys from Hamburg. They came with their own teachers, she recalled, and received separate tuition. During their free time, they attended “events at the *Kulturbund*,” sang songs, and talked to the *Donauschwaben* youth about their life in Germany. “The war was going on at that time,” Resi explained, so they recounted “how things were bad for them, how they had no food” in Germany. She could hardly imagine it, as in the Batschka, people lived in “absolute abundance” (“*in Hülle und Fülle*”). Whenever the KLV groups left, Resi and her family gave them “a pile of [food]— flour, bacon, ham,” just to make sure that they would also have something to eat in Germany. As a result, the KLV children always exclaimed that the Batschka was a “land of milk and honey” (“*Schlaraffenland*”).¹⁵⁰

The Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* youth “worshiped” the KLV visitors from Germany. As Resi explained, “true friendships” evolved between the kids from Germany and from the Batschka. One boy from Bremen named Walter was so enchanted by his stay in the Batschka that he stayed in contact with his former hosts and neighbors for the rest of his life, attending all events organized in Germany by Apatin’s “*Heimatverein*” (cultural organization) after the war and telephoning Resi and her friends every week.¹⁵¹ Anna Kirschner similarly reported of life-long friendships that evolved through the KLV. Her own family had hosted children from the *Reich* three times: an Edith from Hamburg in 1942, an Ingrid from Hamburg in 1943, and an Oskar from Vienna in 1944. She only saw these children over the Christmas holidays, as she was studying in Werbass. However, even decades later, Edith came to visit Anna in Germany. The KLV children were always “glad and grateful, that they escaped the bombs ... they were happy and always said ‘you’re in paradise here [in the Batschka]!’” When Edith first ate at Anna’s home, her mother placed butter on the table. Astonished, Edith exclaimed: “Oh! What?

¹⁵⁰ Gerber, interview.

¹⁵¹ Gerber, interview.

Margarine!” Chuckling, Anna recalled that the Batschka’s Germans did not even know what margarine was back then.¹⁵² Resi Gerber, however, had already encountered the product. Her father, who worked in Munich, one day brought “Rama” (a margarine brand) back to his family. “We all pounced on it! We only had butter, there was no Rama where we lived,” Resi explained. When her father then returned to Germany, Resi implored him to “bring back more of that yummy butter!” Shaking his head, her father responded that in Germany, people would be ever so happy to have regular butter.¹⁵³

The KLV childrens’ glee about the Batschka’s food abundance was also recalled by Jakob Winzer. His family in Filipowa hosted a young boy twice. The first, a Heinz Janssen from Westphalia, was apparently quite the bully, which is primarily why Jakob remembered him, even by name. Every summer, explained Jakob, his town’s young boys’ heads were shaved, which Jakob hated and caused him to cry every time his hair was cut as a boy. Due to Jakob’s bald head, Heinz teased him and called him a “*Klößekopf*” (“dumpling head”), which “preoccupied” Jakob quite a bit as a child. The following year, his family hosted a boy from Vienna with “an enormous appetite!” The boy was most impressed that he could eat as many “*Krapfen*” (a type of pastry) as he wanted at Jakob’s house. All of the KLV boys were happy to have “escaped the bomb hell [*Bombenhölle*] and the hunger” of their hometowns, Jakob elaborated. In the Batschka, they were “completely integrated” into village life. There were certainly differences between the KLV children from the Ruhr area and the *Donauschwaben*, especially linguistically. However, even in Filipowa, “one felt German and ... only wanted the welfare and luck of Germany.” As a result, families were very happy to host these children.¹⁵⁴

Not all families hosted KLV guests, however. Johann Weber’s father, who had already forbidden him from joining the *Deutsche Jugend*, also rejected his son’s request to host a KLV boy. Johann’s half sister was ten years older and occupied with her own *Deutsche Jugend* girls’ group.¹⁵⁵ While Johann had neighborhood friends, he explained that “it would have been much more interesting” to host a “stranger” (“*Fremder*”) like so many others—including in his own extended family—in Torschau. His father, however,

¹⁵² Kirschner, interview.

¹⁵³ Gerber, interview.

¹⁵⁴ “*Man hat sich als Deutscher gefühlt und ... und wollte das Wohl und Glück Deutschlands.*” Winzer, interview.

¹⁵⁵ Johann’s sister’s DJ membership was not mentioned by Johann. However, she appears on a list of Torschau’s DJ members. AMV/KB 302, “Namensliste der Führung und der Mitglieder (ord. u. ausserord.) des Standortes: Torzsa.” Other such membership lists (from Kisker, Vepröd, Werbass, Kula, and other towns) are currently stored at the Museum of Vojvodina.

refused. Johann's uncle, on the other hand, hosted two girls from Hamburg twice. They primarily interacted with his older female cousins and sister. The girls visited each other's homes, they sang, read, and talked. The girls from Germany were "very nice" and grateful to be in the Batschka, Johann insisted, though he did not have much contact with them as he was so much younger.¹⁵⁶

Johanna Koch, too, recalled that certain families in Sivac hosted boys from Germany. Her own parents could not host anyone, as they lived in a small home with Johanna's grandparents. However, a boy stayed with her aunt for several months. He played with Johanna whenever she came home from Werbass for the school holidays. Apparently, the boy "blossomed" in the Batschka; he received new clothes, was fed, and wrote letters to his mother.¹⁵⁷ Hans Brenner from Bukin similarly recounted how his aunt took care of "*Jugendliche* from Hamburg [sic]." Hans visited his aunt regularly to see the "Hamburg boys." As he explained: "I would listen to them, talk to them. They spoke a nice German [so] I could ... learn a little more German [laughs] and the good German." To him, these interactions were "fascinating."¹⁵⁸

Fascinating, too, were the KLV groups' public spectacles. Georg Schneider, himself teased by his *Deutsche Jugend*-mobilized peers, recalled his own childhood enthralment at the sight of columns of KLV boys marching through his hometown. Clad in a light brown shirt and shorts, these groups pulled up a flag ("*Fahnenhissen*") every morning and pulled it back down ("*Fahneneinzug*") every evening. These groups were "integrated into the *Kulturbund*," Georg explained, and their leaders often also "had a strong influence on the *Kulturbund*" in his town.¹⁵⁹ Georg himself interacted with the KLV boys. The boys "talked a lot about Germany, which for us [in the Batschka] was [...] something completely new ... interesting." They told Georg how "Germany is cleanliness [...] punctuality and ... especially also honesty, as in Germany, things like theft do not occur."¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the KLV youth— who were all between twelve and

¹⁵⁶ Weber, interview.

¹⁵⁷ Koch, interview.

¹⁵⁸ Brenner, interview.

¹⁵⁹ "... sind die integriert gewesen in den Kulturbund und dann auch äh ... die leitenden Persönlichkeiten, die haben auch sehr starken Einfluss oft in' Kulturbund dann noch genommen ..." Schneider, interview.

¹⁶⁰ "... die sehr viel von Deutschland erzählten, das war ja dann von uns, für uns etwas ganz neues, ähm ... interessant." "Deutschland ist Sauberkeit, was sie so da unten, da unten beanstandeten, nicht? Dann ähh die Pünktlichkeit und äh ... äh ... vor allem auch die Ehrlichkeit, dass es in Deutschland zum Beispiel Diebstahl oder so etwas nicht gibt." Schneider, interview.

fifteen years old— “achieved a special initiative, namely the feeding of silk worms.”¹⁶¹ Every afternoon, the KLV cohorts collected mulberry leaves to feed the silk worms raised by *Donauschwabern* in his village. Once the silk worms were fully grown, the local DJ branch would send them in boxes to the VDU headquarters. From there, they would find their way into the *Reich*’s war machinery, as their silk was woven into the *Luftwaffe*’s parachutes.¹⁶²

Unlike in the Western Banat, the Batschka’s *Donauschwabern* children and youth were thus in continuous contact with *reichsdeutsche* youth between 1941 and 1944. Sent from the Third Reich’s bombarded cities into the comparatively bountiful Batschka, these youth not only became the recipients of safety and nutrition; they also became emissaries for the *Reich*. Regardless of their personal involvement and stance towards the Batschka’s *Deutsche Jugend*, all children and youth from the Batschka remembered the KLV cohorts with admiration and awe. Organized into impressive Hitler Youth formations, with seemingly perfect German accents and plenty of stories from the “motherland,” the KLV youth offered the Batschka’s youth their first personal contact with the land that for them, so far, had only existed in the imaginary. Not all of the KLV members’ reports from the *Reich* were positive, as bombardment and wartime shortage had left an indelible mark on their lives. Nevertheless, with their personal knowledge of the German *Reich*, language, and culture— as well as their reports of *reichsdeutsche* moral, technological, and hygienic superiority— they provided the Batschka’s youth with tantalizing tales from their supposed motherland, and with an image of “Germanness” admired especially by the young. The hosting of KLV children, furthermore, was not only interpreted as a service to the *Reich* by VDU members; it also became yet another platform upon which *Donauschwabern* families could assert their “Germanness” in their (often ethnically and nationally ambiguous) environments.

However, this particular interpretation of “Germanness”— tied increasingly to an adherence to National Socialism and a loyalty to the *Reich*— existed in tension with the Batschka’s Hungarian authorities. Especially in the youth arena, battles once again unfolded about the duties of the German minority towards their new host state. Nowhere did this become as apparent as with the *Donauschwabern*’s mandatory *levante* service.

¹⁶¹ “Eine ganz besondere Aktion, was sie geleistet haben, war die Seidenraupenfütterung.” Schneider, interview.

¹⁶² See: AMV/KB 916, letter from *Mädelringführerin* in Hodschag to VDU headquarters (26.6.1943).

3. Conflicts with the Levente: “From Below” Perspectives

The relationship between the *levente* and the Batschka’s ethnic German minority had never been an easy one, even from a micro-level perspective. *Levente* service for DJ members had become, at least theoretically, mandatory for all youth in the Batschka after April 1941. As discussed above, however, this service only became a contractually regulated affair for DJ members in April 1942. Much confusion and resistance seems to have erupted within the German minority between those two dates. In July 1941, for instance, Sombor’s VDU leader wrote to all VDU branches stating that any orders forcing *Kulturbund* youth into organizations like the *levente* were invalid, as the Vienna Accords had clearly granted the German minority the right to care for its own youth.¹⁶³ Like their adult counterparts, furthermore, *Kulturbund* youth could not join another political party, club, or organization without the prior knowledge of the “*Volksgruppenführung*” (*Kulturbund* leadership).¹⁶⁴

Following the *Deutsche Jugend-levente* agreement of April 1942, the VDU headquarters immediately ordered the Batschka’s branch leaders to report the names of all boys living in their district who were aged twelve to fifteen, fifteen to eighteen, and eighteen to twenty-three (presumably to prepare not only for *levente*, but also for *Honvédség* recruitment drives). Furthermore, a *levente* leader was to be appointed for each district, who was to have already completed military training, be under the age of thirty-five, and speak the Hungarian language.¹⁶⁵ All boys would be required to participate in *levente* training for four hours per week; they would have to wear the *levente* hats, but could also wear VDU insignia during these sessions.¹⁶⁶ Many VDU branches indeed quite quickly sent the required lists, including one in late April 1942, which reported 150 twelve- to fifteen-year-olds, 82 fifteen- to eighteen-year-olds, and twenty over eighteen-year-olds; the *levente* leader proposed reportedly was already a candidate for the *Deutsche Mannschaft* (DM).¹⁶⁷ Other towns became delinquent, and required

¹⁶³ The source here presumably refers to the First Vienna Award of November 2nd, 1938 and the Second Vienna Award of August 30th, 1940, whereby Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy ceded parts of southern Czechoslovakia and northern Transylvania to Hungary, and guaranteed the German minorities there certain cultural and educational rights.

¹⁶⁴ AMV/KB 229, “Rundschreiben Nr. 4” by Gebietsführung für die Batschka-Baranya, Sombor (12.7.1941).

¹⁶⁵ AMV/KB 505, “Bericht über die Ortsleiterbesprechung am 26.4.1942 in Hodschag”; AMV/KB 353, letter by SDKB-VDU Kreisleitung (ca. October 1941).

¹⁶⁶ AMV/KB 514, letter from VDU Hodschag (8.5.1942).

¹⁶⁷ AMV/KB 506, letter, “Leventeausbildungskurs” (27.4.1942).

multiple warnings by the VDU leadership to finally send the required lists.¹⁶⁸ Even then, however, discussions took place among the local *Volksbund* leaders about the implementation of the new *levente* policies. At a meeting of the Batschka's VDU *Ortsleiter* (local leaders) in late April 1942, for instance, a consensus was reached that the *levente* hats would not really be necessary. Furthermore, questions were raised as to who would be leading these *levente* formations; certainly, if the leaders were to be recruited from the *Donauschwaben*'s own teachers, and if orders only came from the "higher *levente* organization," there would occasionally be "things ... that do not have to be followed."¹⁶⁹

Unsurprisingly, reluctance by the VDU leadership to comply with the Hungarian state's *levente* decrees reflected, and perhaps further spurred, popular disobedience. In October 1942, Hodschag's VDU leader reported that *levente* training was indeed taking place—only "with the caps, things will be quite difficult." In some districts, youth were ordered to purchase these caps; however, "the youth, or rather the parents, do not really want to take the bait."¹⁷⁰ Conflicts also occurred over the ethnic German *levente* leaders. In July 1942, for example, a Georg Hehn had been sent home from his *levente* leader training camp in Zenta/Sonta. Apparently, the camp commander had forced him to leave as "he did not match the camp's spirit." This, however, was surprising to the VDU leadership, as Georg had completed four grades at Szabadka/Subotica's *Gymnasium* and knew Hungarian well.¹⁷¹ Disputes also developed over the *levente*'s mandatory celebrations. In December 1942, for instance, Paripas' school director, Franz Milla, and the local *levente* leader, a Mr. Becsei, organized a church service and lunch in honor of Regent Miklós Horthy's name day. After the *levente* church service, however, most of the "*Volksbund*" youth skipped the lunch and simply disappeared, causing a major spat between the VDU and the school and *levente* directors.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ AMV/KB 510, letter from VDU Kreisleitung Hodschag (1.5.1942).

¹⁶⁹ "Die Ortsleiter waren aller der Meinung, wenn es schon Levente-ausbildung geben muss, aber diese Mützen werden diese Burschen nicht aufsetzen. Auch wurde die Frage aufgeworfen, wenn unsere Lehrer diese Ausbilder sein werden, die Weisungen kommen doch von den oberen Levente-organisation, ob da nicht manchmal etwas sein wird, was nicht befolgt werden kann." Errors in original. "Bericht über die Ortsleiterbesprechung am 26.4.1942 in Hodschag."

¹⁷⁰ "Die Jugend, besser gesagt die Eltern, wollen da nicht recht anbeissen." AMV/KB 653, report by VDU Hodschag (14.10.1942).

¹⁷¹ AMV/KB 591, letter, "Betrifft. Levente-Führer-Ausbildung. Vertraulich" (27.7.1942).

¹⁷² AMV/KB 715, "An die Gebietsführung Zombor—Bericht" (7.12.1942).

Occasionally, conflicts over *levente* service turned violent. In April 1943, Vajska/Wajska/Vajszka's *Volksbund* reported how a group of ethnic German boys dispersed and walked towards the towns' "Adolf Hitler Gasse" (Adolf Hitler street) after their *levente* training.¹⁷³ The *levente* "sargeant" ("zászlós") shouted at them and ordered them to return to him, exclaiming "svábok mint vissza" ("Swabians come back"). He then confronted one of the boys, a Georg Offenberger, and asked him why he had removed his *levente* cap. Georg responded that he had simply wanted to order his hair. The sargeant then promptly hit him in the face twenty times, "until his ear swelled up." He thereafter ordered all the "German boys" to do push ups in front of a "large crowd of spectators." During the exercises, the *zászlós* shouted insults at the boys in Hungarian: "Piszkos svábok; vagy magyarok lesztek, vagy gané" ("Dirty Swabians; you'll either become Hungarians or shit."). In the end, he ordered the boys to lie face-down on the ground, whereupon he placed his boot on their necks and pushed their faces into the mud.¹⁷⁴

Levente service, at least on an official level, thus became one of the most severely disputed aspects of youth mobilization in the Batschka. Considering the prevalence of *levente* service conflicts and *DJ-levente* legislation in the archival record, however, it is astonishing how little the *levente* seems to have impacted this project's interviewees. Despite the mandatory nature of *levente* service between 1941 and 1944, not one of the individuals interviewed remembered participating in the organization. Even interviewees who recalled *levente* formations in their towns and villages found any insinuation that the *Donauschwaben* might have been involved in the organization strange. Resi Gerber, for instance, recalled that "the Hungarians also had their [youth organization]." She misremembered their name as "*Honvéd*"; nevertheless, the groups were insignificant to her, as "we [the Germans] had practically nothing to do with them." According to Resi, only Hungarians joined that group.¹⁷⁵ Katharina Schiffer, too, recalled that "the Hungarians" in Apatin had their own *levente* formations, in which they wore a "*Bocskai-*

¹⁷³ In the Batschka, too, the VDU re-named streets and towns to make them more "Germanic."

¹⁷⁴ AMV/KB 862, "Protokoll über Schikanierung deutscher Levente-Burschen nach der Übung am 5. April 1943" (5.4.1943).

¹⁷⁵ "Die Ungare hend auch ihre ... ihre g'habt ... Aber mit den hen mir praktisch gar nix zu tun g'hat." Gerber, interview.

Kapp” (the traditional *levente* hat, the “*bocskai sapka*”).¹⁷⁶ However, only Hungarians were part of the organization.¹⁷⁷

Georg Schneider remembered the *levente* in more detail. According to Georg, the *levente* had been established as a kind of “*Pendant*” (“counterpart”) to the *Kulturbund*’s youth organization. However, the *levente* “had no big attraction” under the “*Donauschwaben*,” even among “the non-*Kulturbund* members” (“*Nichtkulturbundlern*”). Everything in the *levente* was in Hungarian, Georg explained, and few felt comfortable with that language. Furthermore, the *levente*’s own nationalist teachings often even went too far for the *Kulturbund*’s opponents. As Georg explained, when one had to hear within the *levente*’s ranks that “*magyar földön élsz, magyar kenyeret eszel*” (“on Hungarian soil you live, Hungarian bread you eat”), even anti-*Kulturbund* *Donauschwaben* thought: “You stupid guy, what’s that supposed to mean? I eat-, produce my own bread, right?”¹⁷⁸ As a result, almost no *Donauschwaben* joined the *levente*.

To a degree, the non-involvement of ethnic Germans in the *levente* matches archival reports on the general disinterest of the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* in participating in the *levente*’s training, festivities, and cap-wearing. However, considering the amount of legislation and the reports of very violent conflicts in the archival record, the gap between individuals’ (lack of) memories and the actual legal situation of the early 1940s is astounding. In part, this gap may have arisen from the very short time period in which *levente* service would have actually been enforced, namely between the DJ-*levente* agreements signed in April 1942 and the *Reich*’s takeover of the Batschka in March 1944. Once implemented, however, even the degree of enforcement of these regulations would have presumably varied tremendously from village to village, and from youth leader to youth leader. Many of the interviewees, furthermore, would have been too young to be mobilized in the *levente* themselves, making its activities and formations not only peripheral “nationally,” but also irrelevant age-wise. Finally, many pro-Hungarian youth activities would have been conducted not in the framework of an extra-curricular youth

¹⁷⁶ For a short *Donauschwaben* memoir on the “*bocskai*” cap, see: Josef Mayer, “Die Bocskai-Kapp,” *Die Apatiner Bürgerschule 1875-1944*, edited by Josef Volkmar Senz (Straubing: Apatiner Gemeinschaft e. V., 1984), 82-83.

¹⁷⁷ Schiffer, interview.

¹⁷⁸ “*Und dann ist also doch bei den auch Kulturbundgegnern der Gedanke aufgekommen, äh, du blöder Kerl, was soll das? Ich ess’, m, produziere mein Brot selber, nicht?*” Schneider, interview.

group, but— as we shall see in the next chapter— within the reinvented minority classroom.

E. Conclusion

Following the surprising, chaotic, and brutal entry of Hungarian troops into the Batschka in April 1941, the Batschka's *Kulturbund* authorities suddenly faced a novel administrative reality: the Batschka, despite German hopes that it would become a "Reichsgau," was now a Hungarian territory, to be governed from Budapest and ruled according to Hungarian law. As in the Western Banat, the *Kulturbund* rapidly re-organized itself within the new state, re-formulating its previous men's, women's, and youth groups, and inserting its leadership into the greater German-Hungarian "Volksbund." Nevertheless, the Batschka's *Volksbund* (still called the "Kulturbund" by the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* after 1941) encountered very different challenges than its *Volksgruppe* counterpart in the Western Banat. Unlike the *Volksgruppe*, the Batschka's *Volksbund* was not granted the status of a semi-autonomous, *Reich*-installed governing elite. Rather, it became part of Hungary's VDU, and— though empowered through the Batschka's incorporation into an Axis state— did not become an authoritative body that autonomously determined the local German minority's affairs. At least until March 1944 (when Germany occupied Hungary), the Batschka's *Volksbund*'s activities were circumscribed by Hungarian law, monitored by the Hungarian authorities, and kept in check by the Hungarian *Gendarmerie*.

In the youth arena, too, the *Volksbund*'s embeddedness in the Hungarian state definitively affected their operation. As in the Western Banat, an estimated ninety percent of ethnic German youth were enrolled in the *Deutsche Jugend* and its subsidiaries between 1941 and 1944. The Batschka's *Deutsche Jugend*, however, was only one branch of the Hungarian state's youth mobilization scheme: all youth, regardless of nationality, also were required to join the *levente*, and thus had to engage actively with the Hungarian nation-building project. As both archival and oral history sources indicate, these multiple national obligations caused major tensions within the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* communities. Pro-National Socialist "Braune" thus were pitted against individuals indifferent or opposed to the National Socialist project. Largely due to the continuation of Hungarian and (as we shall see) Catholic projects in the region, this latter category

became identified as the pro-Hungarian, pro-Catholic “*Schwarze*” (whether or not non-*Volksbund* members actually ascribed to either philosophy). Conflicts between “*Braune*” and “*Schwarze*” also occurred among youth: as oral history sources illustrate, the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* became highly aware of such categories even as children, as they felt the repercussions of their (non-) association with the *Deutsche Jugend* in their daily interactions with their neighbors, classmates, and peers.

Notwithstanding the major differences between individual *Donauschwaben* on the matter of *Volksbund* and *Deutsche Jugend* membership, certain experiences were common to almost all of the Batschka’s ethnic German children and youth. To begin with, most expressed scepticism towards the Hungarian nation-building project, as embodied by the suddenly mandatory *levente* service. All individuals interviewed insisted that they were, and always will be, “German,” though definitions thereof varied tremendously even between 1941 and 1944. Active service in Hungarian youth groups was therefore not only almost universally unpopular, it was also frequently entirely avoided by the *Donauschwaben*, even if they did not identify with the official “German” (*Deutsche Jugend*) alternative. It is also within this context that the *Kinderlandverschickung* groups from Germany found widespread acclaim. *Donauschwaben* children and youth, regardless of their relationship to the local German Nazi formations, developed an earnest attraction to these *reichsdeutsche* youth. With their “perfect” German and stories from the “motherland,” the KLV youth became not only a model of “Germanness,” an exotic object of fascination, and a source of lifelong friendship; rather, with their indifference to local intraethnic conflicts, they were also individuals whom all *Donauschwaben* youth could connect to and identify with. And here again, children and youth became (political) actors: they promoted, delineated, ascribed to, and rejected not only the “national” sensibilities advocated by activists, educators, and administrators, but also those conjured by themselves and their peers.

The Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* children and youth, however, could not escape the Hungarian nation-building project entirely. Even though not one interviewee recalled serving in the *levente* between 1941 and 1944, almost all individuals interviewed attended school. After April 1941, the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* maintained German-language schools and classrooms under the auspices of an ethnic German *Schulstiftung*, like their counterparts in the Western Banat. However, the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* performed a much more delicate balancing act in the assertion of their minority educational rights. Unlike in the (even after 1941) relatively poorly state-monitored extra-curricular sphere,

state regulations in the curricular sphere, once again, were less easily circumvented. Furthermore, the extra-curricular sphere not only remained variegated in a “national” sense; it also remained a battle grounds between various political and religious activists. As a result, the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* youth were continuously presented with a variety of (national) obligations and options that, after April 1941, still were influenced heavily by both the Hungarian state and the Catholic Church.

Chapter 6

The Batschka's Ethnic German Youth in Schools, Church Organizations, and the Military, 1941-1944

A. Introduction

Already caught within a web of national contestation within the extra-curricular sphere, the Batschka's children and youth found no respite in other areas of their lives during the region's Axis occupation. Between 1941 and 1944, the *Volksbund's* educational institutions in particular became sites of an uneasy Hungarian-German coexistence, wherein the nationalization projects of Horthy's Hungary ran parallel to the Third Reich's imperial ambitions. The frequently fragile balancing act performed by *Donauschwaben* educators between new-found, often pro-*Reich* "German" identity-building, minority activisms, and compliance to the host state(s) hence also threatened to teeter into an abyss in the formal, curricular sphere.

Unlike the Western Banat's *Volksgruppe*, the Batschka's ethnic Germans never attained complete educational autonomy. Rather, and as under previous state administrations, most of the *Donauschwaben's* schools once again were nationalized, purged of the previous administrations' educational materials, teachers, and curricula, and linguistically transformed. Grievances wrought by such changes, however, were rapidly addressed: especially in relation to secondary education, the Third Reich once again intervened, bringing National Socialist teachers, pedagogical methods, and literature to the *Donauschwaben* community's core.

The rising influence of National Socialism, however, met considerable formal resistance from within the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* society. As this chapter illustrates, it was not only teachers and educational administrators who protested the upsurge of Nazism among their pupils and peers; rather, the Catholic Church, too, launched its final attacks on the ideology and activities of the *Volksbund*. Youth, again, were central to the Church's struggle: Catholic youth groups and publications pitted themselves against National Socialism and pro-*Reich* definitions of local "Germanness," while

simultaneously claiming for themselves the title of “bastion of Germandom.” Conflicts conducted on paper then were carried into the *Donauschwaben* communities. A violent bifurcation occurred within the *Donauschwaben* communities between two nationally-defined factions: the pro-*Reich*, *Volksbund*-aligned “*Braune*” (“browns”), and the nominally pro-Hungarian, pro-Catholic “*Schwarze*” (“blacks”).

Conflict between these *Donauschwaben* factions, especially among youth, gave rise to vandalism, violence, and hatred. Families were torn apart, neighbors denounced each other, and school children engaged in fist fights and teasing. Such conflicts would have dire consequences. Besides fueling a (mutual) radicalization, these disputes ultimately played into the Third Reich’s military mobilizational schemes. For as Heinrich Himmler and his associates demanded more and more “human material” for the Third Reich’s battles, tens of thousands of the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben*— including youth— took up arms and departed for service on Germany’s military fronts and in its concentration camps. Individuals unwilling to go, ultimately, were given no choice: by late 1944, “Germanness,” whether self-identified or externally ascribed out of opportunism or spite, would entail German military service, and an inclusion into Germany’s greatest crimes.

B. The Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* Schools

1. Reformulating the Batschka’s German Schools in Horthy’s Hungary

In April 1941, considerable change once again swept across the *Donauschwaben*’s educational landscape, blowing open the doors of the region’s ethnic German classrooms and throwing the tenuously organized minority education system into renewed turmoil. Reintroduced Hungarian rule brought considerable and sudden changes, striking illustrations of which can be found in the matriculation books of the region’s ethnic German schools. In the fall of 1940, teachers at institutions like Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* had received pre-printed, Serbo-Croatian (Cyrillic and Latin-typeset) matriculation books from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia’s state press (the “*Državne štamparije Kraljevine Jugoslavije*”). In these, they had registered each student’s personal information and grades by semester and subject. The teachers, who initially listed all students as Yugoslav citizens of German nationality (“*nemcija narodnost, jugoslovensko podanstvo*”), had dutifully entered all information in Cyrillic Serbian. However, during

the spring semester of 1941, a rupture appeared on these pages: suddenly, the entries were written by a different hand, and in Hungarian. The grade scale, previously “5” for “excellent” and “1” for unsatisfactory, was reversed.¹ By the 1941/1942 academic year, the forms, too, were transformed. Now printed by the Hungarian state in German and Hungarian, the matriculation books listed the same students as Hungarian citizens with German as their mother tongue (“*Muttersprache*,” or “*anyanyelve*”). All grades, reports, and notes were further entered both in Hungarian and German.² By 1942/1943, these books were printed exclusively in Hungarian, and completed by hand in Hungarian and German.³

The abrupt changes in the school matriculation books reflect the shifting conditions faced by the Batschka’s ethnic German school system. On March 31st, 1941, all schools had already been closed by the Yugoslav school authorities in anticipation of upcoming military skirmishes.⁴ In mid-April 1941, as soon as Hungarian troops had taken over the Batschka, a re-structuring of the school system began. As an April 19th letter by *Schulstiftung* head Adam Maurus to the German Foreign Office attests, these changes were not necessarily to the benefit of the local minority teachers. Apparently, all of Novi Sad’s teachers were “ordered” to assemble earlier that month for an information session led by the Hungarian military authorities and a “*Madjarone*” (pro-Hungarian) school official named Jung. There, the teachers received orders to close their previous matriculation books and, from now on, to continue these in Hungarian only. As all *Volksschulen* and *Mittelschulen* (primary and middle schools) were now considered Hungarian state schools, all teachers would become Hungarian state employees; for this, however, they would need to know fluent Hungarian. If they did not know Hungarian, they would be fired. From now on, pupils would be required to study Hungarian for six hours per week from the first grade onwards; if teachers had no appropriate textbooks yet, they would simply have to “do Hungarian [*madjarische*] exercises.” For the time

¹ Consider: ANS F. 181 v. 12 (1940-1941), “Schulmatrikel 1940-1941,” *Lehrerbildungsanstalt Neuwerbass*.

² Consider: ANS F. 207 v. 9 (1941-42), “Matrikel-Anyakönyvek,” *Deutsche Bürgerschule Neuwerbass*.

³ See: ANS F. 181 v. 15 (1942), “Osztálynapló,” *Lehrerbildungsanstalt Neuwerbass*; ANS F. 181 v. 14 (1942), “Osztályozó naplója az 1942/43-ik iskolai évben,” *Lehrerbildungsanstalt Neuwerbass*.

⁴ Anton Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium: Ein Beitrag zur donauschwäbischen Schulgeschichte* (Straubing: Apatiner Beiträge, 1977), 18.

being, furthermore, all Batschka schools would be placed under the supervision of the school authorities in Pécs/Fünfkirchen.⁵

Despite these new stipulations, some ethnic German schools immediately recommenced their tuition in late April. Apatin's *Gymnasium*, only established in 1940, was able to reopen on April 23rd, 1941. Its director, Josef Prokopetz, acted temporarily as a Hungarian teacher and introduced six weekly hours of Hungarian tuition, along with the two mandatory weekly lessons on Hungarian history and geography.⁶ In Werbass, students in their final year were given a four-week crash course and put on a fast track to graduation.⁷ In July and August 1941, the Batschka's "*Kulturbund*" further organized a summer training camp for German teachers in Futok. As the instructional letter sent to all interested participants stated, the camp's main goal would be Hungarian language training. All teachers "who could be considered German from a *völkisch* standpoint" were urged to come; however, "explicit opponents" ("*ausgesprochene Gegner*") would not be welcomed. Moreover, male participants would need to bring boots, dark trousers, and a white shirt; women were to bring their "*Einheitskleid*." People with Hungarian language skills or lecture ideas were further encouraged to write directly to the head of the German teacher's association ("*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Lehrer*") and the head of the educational office ("*Schulamt*").⁸

By the fall of 1941, the previously ambiguous status of the Batschka's schools was largely regulated. All schools in the region would now come under the purview of Szeged's senior school authority ("*Oberschulamt*"), headed by Dr. Ánjos Balogh. He, in turn, established an administrative branch in Novi Sad to oversee the Batschka's schools.⁹ All primary schools—regardless of prior language of tuition— were to become Hungarian state schools, and all teachers Hungarian state employees.¹⁰ A unified curriculum— later slightly altered— was introduced, which stipulated (among other subjects) six hours per week of Hungarian, two of history, three of geography, and three of physical education.¹¹ In October 1941, Novi Sad's school authorities further circulated

⁵ Letter from A. Maurus to German Foreign Office, "Bericht über Schulfragen" (19.4.1941), PA AA, R 100937.

⁶ Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 18.

⁷ Lotz, *Werbass 1785-1975*, 141.

⁸ AMV/KB 230, letter from Peter Hetzel and Florian Krämer, "An alle Kreis- und Ortsleiter des Gebietes!"

⁹ Lotz, *Werbass 1785-1975*, 141; Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 32.

¹⁰ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 154.

¹¹ Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 33.

directives that concerned the Batschka's minority schools in particular. According to these, all schools with students of different mother tongues were required to open sections ("Abteilungen") in these pupils' respective native languages (if, of course, there were enough students of any given language to warrant such a measure).¹² Hungarian students were to be educated in separate Hungarian school sections only, and they would not be permitted to attend school in any other language. However, non-Hungarian students who spoke Hungarian fluently enough to "not present an obstacle to the progress of Hungarian students" could be admitted to Hungarian classrooms with their parents' written permission. If these students did not speak Hungarian well enough, they could nevertheless be placed, with their parents' consent, into special Hungarian-language sections for non-native Hungarian speakers. Schools were to change their names to reflect the official administrative shifts and be called, for instance, "Royal Hungarian State German-Language Primary School in Újsóvé, Torsza, etc." Furthermore, German-language schools would be allowed to use state-approved German-language books; however, they would be required to follow the state-mandated curriculum for minority schools.¹³

By December 1941, news of such changes had reached Germany's *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* (DAI). A report from December 5th filed with the DAI thus described how Hungary's educational ministry had dictated new lesson plans for the middle, technical, secondary, and teachers' training schools in its "southern territories" ("Südgebiet"). Even the territories' pre-existing German and Serbian schools, the report explained, now were to focus primarily on "learning the Magyar language." For that reason, a large number of hours were being expended each week on the "Magyar language and literature," as well as on the "Magyar history and geography." Other subjects, like philosophy, chemistry, and handwriting, had been struck temporarily from the lesson plan to make way for the Hungarian lessons.¹⁴ Special textbooks had been created for the Batschka's schools that summarized the necessary "material" as concisely as possible. Moreover, all students were now expected to engage in three hours of *levente* exercises per week. As described in the DAI report, ethnic German newspapers like the *Deutsches Volksblatt* had already expressed their dissatisfaction with the measures: the Batschka's

¹² The number of students necessary to open a minority language section was not specified here. AMV/KB 334, letter from VDU *Gebietsführung* Batschka in Zombor (8.10.1941).

¹³ Letter (8.10.1941).

¹⁴ These changes in subjects are also discussed in: Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 32-33.

Fig. 6.1 German Student's Report Card Under Hungarian Administration, 1941. Source: Private collection, Max Becker*. Censored by author as per agreement signed by interviewer and interviewee.

German school authorities apparently doubted that these new measures were even legal under the Second Vienna Accords of August 1940, which had granted Hungary's ethnic German children the right to be educated in German-language schools.¹⁵

Despite *Donauschwaben* concerns about the renewed nationalization of their schools, it was partially thanks to these Vienna Accords— as well as the Hungarian alliance with Germany— that the Batschka's ethnic Germans nevertheless maintained a considerable German-language school system after April 1941. Even during the 1920s, the Hungarian state had maintained three types of schools: type “A,” in which the main language of instruction was the minority language and Hungarian was taught as a second language; type “B,” in which some subjects were taught in the Hungarian and some in the minority language; and type “C,” in which Hungarian was the main language of

¹⁵ “AW Folge 43 v. 5.12.1941: Ungarn. Der Lehrplan für die Schulen der Batschka,” BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 81. For more on these accords, including a transcription of the relevant provisions, see: Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 12-14; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 150.

instruction and the minority language was taught as an additional subject. As in Yugoslavia, such educational provisions gave rise to continuous grievances, as the German minority lamented the lack of type “A” schools, qualified German-speaking teachers, and control over the German-language curriculum.¹⁶ As in Yugoslavia, furthermore, such objections helped inspire political and cultural initiatives, most notably the establishment of the *Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn* (VDU) in 1938. With the Vienna Accords of 1940, the VDU’s educational office (the “*Schulamts*”) was declared the highest ethnic German office in charge of Hungary’s German-language schools. Henceforth, the VDU was to oversee the establishment of new German-language schools and to help coordinate the ethnic German schools’ finances, teaching initiatives, and curricula. As previously, ultimate authority in these matters lay with the Hungarian state.¹⁷

When the Batschka was incorporated into Hungary in April 1941, the majority of Yugoslavia’s German-language secondary schools became Hungarian. The Yugoslav *Donauschwaben*’s most prominent educational institutions— including Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*, *Gymnasium*, and *Bürgerschule*, Apatin’s *Gymnasium*, and Futok’s agricultural school— thus all suddenly fell within the VDU’s domain.¹⁸ As a result of this enlargement, the VDU appointed its first full-time head of the *Schulabteilung*, Josef Schmidt, on July 1st, 1942.¹⁹ The Batschka’s Yugoslav-era *Schulstiftung* was dissolved and incorporated into the VDU’s *Schulabteilung*, which was temporarily headed by VDU leader Franz Basch.²⁰ Most of the Batschka’s previous *Schulstiftung* functionaries, including its founding member Dr. Stefan Kraft, remained in Novi Sad and acted as regional *Schulabteilung* officials. However, some previous *Kulturbund* functionaries accepted educational offices with the VDU in Budapest: Josef Senz, the interwar pro-Nazi educational agitator, *Unsere Schule*-contributer, and postwar *Donauschwaben* school historian from Apatin, thus became head of the VDU’s primary

¹⁶ As Weltzer indicates, by 1930, only 95 native German speakers were employed as German teachers in Hungary, 37 of whom taught in non-German speaking districts. Perhaps 0.5% of Hungary’s teachers were native German speakers, while 5.5% of Hungary’s population were. Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 10-12.

¹⁷ See previous chapter for more information. Also see: Ludwig Ziwich, “Die Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt in Neuwerbaß von 1941 bis 1945,” *Durch Selbsthilfe zur Selbstverwaltung: Beiträge zur donauschwäbischen Schulgeschichte*, edited by Christian Ludwig Brücker (Munich: AG Donauschwäbischer Lehrer im Südostdeutschen Kulturwerk e.V., 1981), 91-92.

¹⁸ Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 16.

¹⁹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 151.

²⁰ Transcription, “Aussend. Wochensp. Folge 24 v. 25.6.1941,” BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 80.

school section and the head of its department of “schooling, writings, and educational materials” (“*Hauptabteilung Schulung, Schrifttum, Lehrmittel*”).²¹

Financially, the Batschka’s ethnic German schools were supported by a combination of public and private funds. The Batschka’s German-language primary schools and classrooms— which existed in sixty-one Batschka communities in April 1941— were nationalized, and its teachers all became state employees.²² School buildings were generally taken over by the Hungarian state, while their inventories, furniture, and classroom materials were to be supplied by the “political community” (“*Gemeinde*”) or, in the case of ecclesiastical schools, the Church.²³ By the 1941/1942 academic year, these classrooms educated some 18,283 German-speaking children. Conversely, the Batschka’s German-language secondary schools and classrooms were financed primarily by the Hungarian-German *Schulstiftung* (the “*Schulstiftung der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Ungarn*”), whose statutes were renewed on August 1st, 1942 to include Hungary’s annexed territories. Officially recognized in its expanded form by the Hungarian state on March 15th, 1943, the *Schulstiftung*’s assets were composed of its previous (school) properties, private donations, subsidies and contributions from the Hungarian state, and funds from the *Reich*. Secondary school teachers received both a Hungarian state salary, and an additional salary and pension fund from the *Schulstiftung*, which almost doubled their income.²⁴ By 1942, these schools had incorporated over 2,200 students, many of whom now came from Hungary’s other territories.²⁵

The new status as Hungarian state employee entailed altered employment requirements. Especially the new Hungarian language requirement seems to have caused consternation among the Batschka’s *Volksbund* leadership, as those generations of teachers who had been educated only under the Yugoslav, and not the Habsburg system (and who were therefore also more likely to support the *Volksbund*) could not fulfill this requirement. Even decades later, Josef Senz lamented in his school history of the

²¹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 151, 179-180. See this dissertation’s chapter on Yugoslavia’s interwar minority schools for more on Senz’s interwar activities.

²² Filipowa— *Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 289; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 154.

²³ For (secret) lists of school inventories, classrooms, pupils, etc. assembled by the Batschka’s *Volksbund* chapters in early 1942, consider: AMV/KB 480, letter from VDU Szilberek to VDU *Gebietsleitung* Batschka in Sombor, “Streng Vertraulich!” (2.4.1942).

²⁴ The Hungarian state salary paid to German minority school teachers was lower than that paid to teachers at a regular Hungarian state school.

²⁵ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 153-156; Ziwich, “Die Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt,” 94-95.

Donauschwaben that up to eighty German teachers from the Batschka spent 1941 to 1944 in a limbo, as they did not receive official certification from the Hungarian state. This mass dismissal of German teachers, claimed Senz, had been largely orchestrated by “pro-Magyar, in other words anti-German teachers.”²⁶ Filipowa’s *Heimatbuch* similarly reported that all local Serbian teachers lost their positions; however, even the “pro-Germans [‘*deutschgesinnten*’] left Filipowa to a shocking extent” in 1941. At least Josef Senz had been sent to Budapest that year to help prevent the “German-speaking culture” from losing too much ground.²⁷

Filipowa’s dismissed German teachers left in an enormous public uproar. As a November 1941 *Deutsches Volksblatt* article, transcribed and filed by the DAI, reported, even Filipowa’s last German teacher (Martin Braun) now had to leave. In order to bid him farewell, Filipowa’s *Volksbund* leadership and the local VDU sports team had assembled for a “simple but dignified ... sendoff.”²⁸ Braun, along with Filipowa’s other German teachers, had reportedly stood at the forefront of the “*völkischen Kampfes*” (“*völkisch* battle”) from the beginning. Even though they were now all leaving, their struggle would bear fruit, as “they imprinted on Filipowa’s youth that they are a German youth, and nobody in the world will be able to eradicate this anymore!”²⁹ After some introductory remarks and speeches, Braun took the stage and gave a rousing speech:

The first time I stood, in a hidden room, in front of a handfull of fanatically obstinate fighters for our *Volk*; the second time I am now standing in front of an enormous number [of people] who were gradually swept up by the same fanatical fighting spirit ... But it was clear to us even then that we had been called upon to become the first carriers of the National Socialist thought in this town! ... Our *Volk* will only have a future on the basis of the idea of the *Führer*! ... One can torture us, one can lock us up, one can even try to destroy us, but our enemies will never succeed in finishing us if we stand together in faith in our great *Führer* Adolf Hitler! ... He will bring us to the German victory!³⁰

²⁶ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 154.

²⁷ Filipowa—*Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 289.

²⁸ “*Schlicht und doch erhaben war dies Abschiednehmen.*” “Filipowa ohne deutsche Lehrer,” transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (14.11.1941), BArch R 57/neu/16.

²⁹ “*Sie haben der Jugend Filipowas eingepägt, dass sie eine deutsche Jugend ist und das wird niemand mehr auf dieser Erde auszumerzen im Stande sein!*” Transcription (14.11.1941).

³⁰ “*Das erste Mal stand ich, in versteckten Raume, vor einer Handvoll fanatisch verbissener Kämpfer für unser Volk, und das zweite Mal stehe ich heute nun vor einer gewaltig angewachsenen Zahl, die von dem gleichen fanatischen Geist verbissener Kämpfer allmählich erfasst worden ist ... Uns aber war damals eines klar: Wir wussten, dass wir berufen waren, erste Träger des nationalsozialistischen Gedankens in*

Martin Braun reportedly left Filipowa soon thereafter and moved to Serbia, where he found another position as a school teacher.³¹

It was not only the new Hungarian language requirement and local politics that caused shifts in the German-language schools' faculty, however. After April 1941, all teachers originally from Yugoslavia's other regions were sent back to their home territories. Furthermore, many German-speaking teachers moved to regions like Croatia or the Western Banat voluntarily, as they would receive higher salaries and a larger degree of autonomy under these regions' reformulated German minority school systems.³² Military mobilization further drew German-speaking teachers away from the classroom, though much of this recruitment was stopped in 1942 as teachers received an exemption from active military service.³³ Faced with intracommunity tensions, Hungarian language requirements, and low salaries, other German-speaking teachers from the Batschka even moved to "mainland" Hungary ("*Rumpfungarn*") to find employment at private academies there.³⁴

The teachers who left generally were replaced by teachers from Hungary, many of whom knew little German and had little patience for the German nation-building project.³⁵ Occasionally, violent disputes erupted between Hungarian teachers and their ethnic German pupils. As one January 1943 *Volksbund* report explained, Vajnska's primary school teacher had scolded her pupils for not being able to pray in Hungarian—after all, they were eating Hungarian bread. Angered, most of her students replied that they were not eating Hungarian bread, as their parents "were earning it." In response, the teacher told the pupils that she hoped that "God would make Germany lose the war, and

diesem Dorfe zu sein! ... dass unser Volk nur auf der Grundlage der Idee des Führers eine Zukunft haben kann! ... Man kann uns quälen, man kann uns einsperren, man kann uns sogar zu vernichten versuchen, nie aber wird es unseren Feinden gelingen, uns zu erledigen, wenn wir zusammenhalten in dem Glauben an unseren grossen Führer Adolf Hitler! Ihm gehören wir, er soll uns führen und wir geloben ihm zu folgen! Er wird uns führen in den deutschen Sieg!" Transcription (14.11.1941).

³¹ Transcription (14.11.1941).

³² *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 289; Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 154.

³³ Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 23, 25. This exemption was lifted again in April 1944, after the Batschka was occupied by Germany and the region's schools closed. AMV/KB 1097, letter from VDU Batschka *Schulamt* Zombor (25.4.1944). More on these military mobilizations later in this chapter.

³⁴ *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 289.

³⁵ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 154; *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 289.

make the Russians come here and slaughter all of the Germans.”³⁶ That same day, the VDU *Ortsleiter* reported the incident to the local notary, who telephoned the school director and confronted him about the teacher’s actions. Agreeing that the teacher’s words were terrible, the director nevertheless emphasized that the pupils had to be able to pray in Hungarian. Apparently, both the notary and the school director concurred that the teacher was “a sick wench” (“*krank ... Frauenzimmer*”), and that the school should attempt to find a “*volksdeutsche* teacher.”³⁷

Comparable incidents between Hungarian educators and ethnic German pupils pepper the VDU’s early 1940s correspondence. In October 1942, Vajska’s Hungarian primary school teacher received a citation for reportedly telling her students: “If you want to learn German, then go to the *Reich*.”³⁸ Similarly, in March 1943, *Deutsche Mannschaft* officials denounced in writing Paripás’ primary school headmaster, Milla Ferenc. Much to the irritation of the local *Volksbund* administration, Milla had inquired with his ethnic German first graders why some of the school’s students ignored each other. The children reported that those pupils who visited the “*Heim*” (VDU youth “home”) and had pro-*Volksbund* parents were advised by their *Heim* leaders to interact neither with children who did not frequent the *Heim*, nor with those whose male relatives had refused to join the German military.³⁹

Pupils’ participation in the “*Kulturbund*” seems to have been a major sticking point within the Batschka’s ethnic German classrooms in other ways, too. In one undated VDU report, the teacher Irene Stumpfögger was denounced for forbidding her students from “visiting the *Kulturbund*.” Not content with making such statements within her own classroom, she was now purportedly even “influencing other teachers at the German school sections [and enticing them] to bar their students from visiting the *Kulturbund*.” This, however, was problematic, as most of these children’s parents encouraged them to participate in the *Kulturbund*. If students ignored her demand, Ms. Stumpfögger beat

³⁶ “*Sie möchte gern haben und Gott soll es geben das Deutschland den Krieg verlieren soll, das die Russen da her kommen möchten und die Deutschen alle Schlachten werden und die Deutschen sollten nie kein Glück nicht haben.*” Orthographic and grammatical mistakes in original. AMV/KB 780, letter from VDU *Ortsleiter* Vajska, “*Tahtbestandaufnahme*” [sic] (29.1.1943).

³⁷ “*Tahtbestandaufnahme*” (29.1.1943).

³⁸ AMV/KB 629, VDU Hodschag “*Tätigkeitsbericht*” (14.10.1942).

³⁹ AMV/KB 847, “*Abschrift*” by DM Batschka, Hodschag (29.3.1943). Thereafter, Milla Ferenc appeared repeatedly in the files of the VDU as a “traitor.” See, for instance: AMV/KB 1091, letter from VDU Paripasch, “*ungarischen Lehrer Ladislaus Becsei*” (12.4.1944); AMV/KB 282, “*Verzeichnis der gefährlichen Volksverräter mit Angabe ihrer Wohnung*”; AMV/KB 1080, letter from VDU Paripás, “*Volksveräter*” [sic] (31.4.1944), p. 2.

them; if they attended her class wearing a swastika, she reportedly tore off these signs “and threw them in the oven.”⁴⁰ Such conflicts, as well as the perceived lack of German language training, caused exasperation among the Batschka’s VDU officials. By March 1943, Hodschag’s VDU reported that insults against ethnic Germans like “*magyar kenyér, büdös sváb*, usw.” (“Hungarian bread, stinking Swabian, etc.”) were unrelenting. In relation to the German schools’ academic level, too, “very, very much needs improvement”; one could only hope “that our primary schools will become ‘*Volksschulen*,’ and not just ‘institutes for mental enfeeblement’ [‘*Verblödungsanstalten*’], as they have been so far.” Parents, in any case, were frustrated and under the impression that “we are always those people with whom others can do what they want.”⁴¹

Aware of these conflicts, local and *reichsdeutsche* agencies attempted to recruit (*Reich*-loyal) teachers into ethnic German school service. Locally, the German-language press encouraged both current and future German teachers to dedicate themselves to the Batschka’s German-language classrooms. In January 1942, for example, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* circulated a call for applications (“*Konkursausschreiben*”) for “*volksdeutsche*” teachers qualified for and interested in teaching at the German school sections at the *Volksschulen* in Apatin, Hodschag, Tschervenka, Kerény, and Siwatz. Candidates were to send not only an application form and copies of their grades and diplomas; they were also to supply their parents’ marriage certificate, a “certificate of good moral conduct” (“*Sittenzeugnis*”), and a certificate of good health.⁴² Other newspaper articles encouraged young *Donauschwaben* to educate themselves at the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werbass and become teachers. As one April 1942 *Deutsches Volksblatt* article stated, the Batschka’s German “*Volksgruppe*” had “felt on its own body how detrimental the completely insufficient and un-*völkisch*, sometimes even nationally antagonistic [*volksfeindliche*] work of schools and teachers of the past have been to our

⁴⁰ AMV/KB 237, letter titled “Lieber Kamerad!”

⁴¹ “*Was die Schulen anbelangt, wäre sehr, sehr viel zu verbessern. Wenn nicht die Hoffnung bestünde, dass es doch mal so wird, dass unsere Volksschulen doch mal ‘Volksschulen’ werden und nicht ‘Verblödungsanstalten’ wie dies bisher immer noch der Fall ist, würden manche Eltern sagen: ‘Ja, wir sind halt immer diejenigen, mit denen man machen kann, was man will.’*” AMV/KB 852, “Tätigkeitsbericht vom 1. Jänner bis zum 31. März 1943” by VDU Hodschag.

⁴² “Konkursausschreiben zur Besetzung freier Lehrstellen,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6857 (17.1.1942), 5.

Volksgruppe.”⁴³ In order to prevent such situations and ensure “the creation of a more beautiful *völkisch* future,” it would be the responsibility of today’s youth to become “German teachers who are intricately tied to and aware of the *Volk*.”⁴⁴ The first step to a personal contribution by the Batschka’s German youth, explained the article, would be to send an application to a German *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Third Reich, too, once again became active in the recruitment of German teachers for the Batschka’s German-language schools. During the summer and late fall of 1943, a flurry of correspondence arose between Germany’s Foreign Office, the VoMi, the VDA, and the *Reich*’s educational ministry related to the recruitment of German-speaking teachers in Hungary, including the Batschka. According to one August 1943 letter from the VoMi, previous years had seen the successful and large-scale delivery of *reichsdeutsche* teaching materials to Hungary by the VDA. However, the “teacher question” was still largely unresolved, as— due to decades of Magyarization— only one twentieth of Hungary’s “German youth” was being educated in a German-language classroom (in the Batschka, this proportion was much higher due to the region’s Yugoslav-era minority educational legacy).⁴⁵ In order to alleviate the pressure on current German-speaking teachers, the *Reich* would send twelve *reichsdeutsche* teachers to Hungary, all of whom would receive official permission from Germany’s Foreign Office. The teachers were expected to “be especially hardworking and politically proficient [*volkspolitisch befähigt*]”; preferably, they would have already gathered teaching experience and a “Magyar education” in one of the “borderland territories of the Danube and Alpine *Gaue*.”⁴⁶ Hungary’s *Lehrerbildungsanstalten*, *Gymnasien*, and *Bürgerschulen* would be given priority in the allocation of these teachers.

⁴³ “... weil wir es leider am eigenen Leibe erfahren haben— wie verhängnisvoll sich die völlig unzulängliche und unvölkische, ja manchmal volksfeindliche Arbeit von Schule zu Lehrer der Vergangenheit auf unsere Volksgruppe ausgewirkt hat.” “Aufruf an die volksdeutsche Jugend. Volksdeutscher Junge, werde Lehrer deines Volkes!” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6936 (28.4.1942), 6.

⁴⁴ “Die Gestaltung einer schöneren völkischen Zukunft unserer Volksgruppe liegt nicht zuletzt in den Händen einer volksverbundenen und volksbewußten deutschen Lehrerschaft.” “Aufruf” (28.4.1942).

⁴⁵ For a comparison of Hungarian and Batschka enrollment percentages, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 155.

⁴⁶ “... fachlich besonders tüchtigen und volkspolitisch befähigten Lehrkräften. Unter ihnen wären solche mit früherer madjarischer Ausbildung aus den Grenzkreisen der Donau- und Alpengaue besonders geeignet.” Letter from VoMi to *Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung* (9.8.1943), BArch R 4901/12825.

All teachers hired, furthermore, would receive not only a Hungarian state salary, but also additional VDA payments, to be transferred to the teachers' bank accounts in the *Reich*.⁴⁷

In August 1943, additional correspondence in the *Reich* clarified the most urgent open teaching positions. Most of these were located not only in Hungary's other recently occupied territories (including Sächsisch Regen/Reghin/Szászrégen and Klausenburg/Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár in Transylvania), but also—and primarily—in the Batschka. Werbass' *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* recruited one teacher of pedagogy, Apatin's *Gymnasium* sought a natural science teacher, Novi Sad's *Bürgerschule* needed both a mathematics and a natural science teacher, and Werbass' *Bürgerschule* required a physics and chemistry instructor.⁴⁸ Though these teachers' employment depended on the permission of both the Hungarian and the German authorities, it seems like some teachers succeeded in obtaining all necessary authorizations. Indeed, by November 1943, the *Reich's* educational ministry ("*Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung*") confirmed that the VoMi had already sent a biology teacher to Apatin's *Gymnasium*.⁴⁹

The *Reich* did not only support *reichsdeutsche* teachers who traveled to the Batschka after April 1941, however; they also continued financing *reichsdeutsche* teachers who had already been stationed in the territory for some time. Today, the German Foreign Office's archives are still replete with the personal files of instructors who had been under the *Reich's* employ at various German schools in the Batschka and the Western Banat during the early 1940s. Unfortunately, most of this documentation will be under lock and key for decades to come due to Germany's privacy protection laws.⁵⁰ One file, however, is accessible. It belongs to a key figure at Werbass' *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*: Dr. Walter Nowack.⁵¹ Born in Halle-Saale (Germany) on January 5th, 1891, to a Lutheran telegraphy secretary and his wife, Nowack served as staff sergeant ("*Vizefeldwebel*") during World War I. Upon completing the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Halle, he studied

⁴⁷ Letter (9.8.1943).

⁴⁸ Letter, "Vermerck: Reichsdeutsche Lehrkräfte für das volksdeutsche Schulwesen in Ungarn" (6.8.1943), BArch R 4901/12825.

⁴⁹ Note from *Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung* (10.11.1943), BArch R 4901/12825.

⁵⁰ These laws stipulate that individuals must have been deceased for thirty years to access such files. If no date of death can be verified, the files can be opened 110 years after the person's date of birth. I have verified this data with the home "*Gemeinden*" of the people listed on these files' inventory and, ultimately, was only able to view Walter Nowack's file.

⁵¹ For a (very different) take on his life, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 177.

pedagogy, German, and philosophy at the universities of Halle and Berlin. He married in 1922. In 1933, he was sent to Zagreb to act as an “advisor” to the school of the German “*Volkstumsorganisation*” (national minority organization) there.⁵² In 1935, he received a job as a professor at “Novi Vrbas” (Werbass’) *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*; all of his relocation costs were covered by the German Foreign Office.⁵³ By now a former member of the NSDAP, the HJ, and the NSKK (the “*Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps*,” a motorized paramilitary organization under Hitler’s leadership), Nowack became a Hungarian citizen after April 1941, with Hungary’s incorporation of the Batschka. Thereafter, he served as professor at the reformulated *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in “Újverbász” (Werbass).⁵⁴

Walter Nowack, too, was swept into the chaos and devastation of 1944. On April 1st, 1944, his regular teaching job at the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* was interrupted, as the Hungarian authorities ordered the Batschka’s schools to end their school year due to the ongoing German occupation and relentless bombardment alarms.⁵⁵ Due to a special decree by the Hungarian ministry of education, students in the final year were allowed to complete their teaching certificate; Nowack and his fellow professors therefore held special preparation classes and exams for these students between May and August 1944. In September, Nowack was one of the last individuals left at Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*, as most of the other teachers had been drawn into military service. His job, in part, now entailed sending home any students who had shown up for the new school year. In part, he was also to arrange for the transportation of the school’s archives to the Hungarian “motherland,” as ordered in a directive by Novi Sad’s *Schulstiftung* (it seems this never happened, as the documents are now in the Archive of Novi Sad). On October 7th, 1944, Werbass, too, was evacuated due to the approaching Russian and Partisan troops. The LBA’s remaining professors (except for Nowack) accompanied some 130 students to Aicha (by Reichenberg/Liberec in the Sudetenland) as part of a

⁵² Handwritten letter from Walter Nowack to German Foreign Office, “Rückkehrbeihilfe” (31.12.1944); completed questionnaire, “Fragen”; completed questionnaire “Dr. Nowack.” All: PA AA, R 63850.

⁵³ “Abschrift” of letter from German Foreign Office to Nowack (18.2.1935), PA AA, R 63850.

⁵⁴ Completed questionnaire, “Dr. Nowack”; “Durchdruck Ausw. Amt, Berlin” (5.2.1944), PA AA, R 63850.

⁵⁵ Ziwich, “Die Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt,” 102; Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 25.

“*Kinderlandverschickung*.” In early December, Nowack also joined them, where he acted as a teacher at their provisional “*Lehrerbildungsanstalt*” until the spring of 1945.⁵⁶

Walter Nowack was shocked and angry about this turn of events. In December 1944 and January 1945, he sent a string of forms and (“*Heil Hitler!*”-capped) letters to the German Foreign Office, demanding reimbursement for his travel expenses, funds for his reintegration into Germany (“*Rückkehrbeihilfe*”), and compensation for “all of [his] personal belongings, which [he] had lost like all of the Batschka’s inhabitants!”⁵⁷ Initially, the Foreign Office and Nowack were unsure about who would be responsible for such payments, as Nowack’s employment had depended on the German Foreign Office’s school section (“*Schulreferat*”) until 1942, and on the VoMi thereafter.⁵⁸ However, Nowack ultimately received a “*Rückkehrbeihilfe*” of 1,260 *Reichsmark*; if he had wanted to receive compensation for his lost possessions, he would have had to write to the “*Rückwandereramt der Auslandorganisation der NSDAP*” in Berlin separately.⁵⁹ After 1945, Nowack moved to Bavaria, where he continued his teaching profession and died in 1961.⁶⁰

Especially within the Batschka’s VDU-coordinated secondary schools, the *Reich*’s presence was striking after April 1941. Unlike in Hungary’s public primary German-language classrooms, which ostensibly utilized school materials printed by the Hungarian state, the VDU’s *Bürgerschulen*, *Gymnasien*, and *Lehrerbildungsanstalten* were able to import school books from the *Reich* with permission from the Hungarian authorities.⁶¹ *Volksdeutsche* teachers further established their own teachers’ association, the “*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Lehrer*” (occasionally termed the “*Deutsche Erzieherchaft*”), which met periodically for refresher classes, wrote educational pamphlets for lessons in German language and “*Heimatgeschichte*,” and published the

⁵⁶ As recounted by the LBA’s director, Konstantin Fiedler, and reproduced in Ziwich, “Die Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt,” 104-106. For Fiedler’s biography, see: Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 174.

⁵⁷ “*Ich darf bemerken, daß ich mein gesamtes Hab und Gut wie alle Bewohner der Batschka verloren habe!*” Letter from Nowack to German Foreign Office (31.12.1944), PA AA, R 63850.

⁵⁸ It is primarily these kinds of discussions that gave rise to the correspondence in Nowack’s file. Letter from “Kult Pol S, Krummhuebel” (25.11.1944), PA AA, R 63850. For documents on this Foreign Office-VoMi switch, see: letter signed by Twardowski to “Kult A 36 gRs” (1.4.1941), PA AA, R 100934; letter from *Gauamtsleiter* Triska (5.4.1941), PA AA, R 100934.

⁵⁹ Letter to Nowack, “Auf den Antrag vom 31.12.1944” (15.3.1945), PA AA, R 63850; letter signed “Quandt,” “Auf das Schreiben vom 30.12.1944” (20.1.1945), PA AA, R 63850.

⁶⁰ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 177.

⁶¹ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 158. For an example of such a book, see: *Volk und Reich der Deutschen*, as described in this dissertation’s section on the Western Banat’s schools.

journal *Der volksdeutsche Erzieher in Ungarn*.⁶² The association's aims were clear: as one of its members proclaimed in an October 1941 *Deutsches Volksblatt* article, it was "the task of this *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Lehrer* to reformulate the educational work in our schools according to National Socialist principles."⁶³ For this, it would be necessary to make certain adjustments to the German schools' curricula. First, German language, literature, and culture lessons would have to be expanded. Second, as "we are Germans" and "our history is therefore the history of the great German *Volk*," history curricula would need to be rewritten to "mirror the strength in soul and spirit that we also carry with us in our genes."⁶⁴ Third, courses in the natural sciences were to reflect the new "scientific research on race and heredity." Ultimately, it was time for the Batschka's teachers to stand up against "English-Jewish warmongering" and— like teachers in the Banat and Croatia— to create an autonomous German school system.⁶⁵

Interestingly, after April 1941, the Western Banat's school system indeed seems to have served as a model for the Batschka's ethnic German school authorities. Articles in the *Deutsches Volksblatt* thus periodically printed reports on the Banat's apparently flourishing German-language school system. In March 1942, the *Volksblatt* reproduced the Western Banat's *Schulstiftung* and German minority school statutes, presenting them as a positive example of German autonomy in a former Yugoslav state.⁶⁶ In November 1942, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* offered a more detailed analysis of the Banat's new German school system. Following "decades of continuous Serbian oppressional politics," the Western Banat had finally succeeded, through military assistance, in "the immediate removal of all foreign [*Fremdvölkisch*] teachers and all non-German educational materials from the German classrooms." Now with the "right to the independent organization of their school system," the Banat's authorities had immediately changed

⁶² Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 157-159. Unfortunately, I could not find any issues of this periodical.

⁶³ "Aufgabe dieser Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Lehrer war, die Erziehungsarbeit in unseren Schulen nach nationalsozialistischen Grundsätzen neu zu gestalten." P. Heide, "Um unsere Schule," transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (5.10.1941), BACh R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 81.

⁶⁴ "*Wir sind Deutsche. Unsere Geschichte ist daher die Geschichte des grossen deutschen Volkes. In den geschichtlichen Taten des deutschen Volkes widerspiegeln sich die seelischen und geistigen Kräfte, die auch wir als Ahnenerbe in uns tragen.*" Heide, "Um unsere Schule."

⁶⁵ "*Englisch-jüdischen Kriegshetze.*" Heide, "Um unsere Schule." For similar sentiments, as expressed at a major teachers' meeting in Sombor, see: "Über 200 volksdeutsche Lehrer der Batschka tagen in Zombor," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6845 (1.1.1942), 5. A transcription of this article can also be found in the DAI's files: BACh R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 82.

⁶⁶ "Das deutsche Schulwesen im Banat," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6898 (11.3.1942), 5.

the language of instruction, reformulated curricula, opened additional schools, and paved the way for a new “schooling in *Weltanschauung*.”⁶⁷ However, the image of a privileged and seemingly superior German language school system in the Western Banat was not only constructed in the Batschka’s early 1940s press; decades later, former school officials like Josef Senz lamented how the Western Banat’s high German school standards were never achieved in the Batschka.⁶⁸

While the Batschka’s German-language schools and classrooms never enjoyed the same autonomy as those in the Western Banat, considerable efforts were put in place—especially at the secondary school level—to ensure their “German” (and National Socialist) nature. Schools like the newly established German *Gymnasium* in Apatin hence required that students bring their parents’ VDU membership booklet—with a record of all donations made to the VDU—to their enrollment appointment.⁶⁹ Novi Sad’s newly established German-language *Bürgerschule* requested an application portfolio that encompassed not only an oral and written entrance exam and prior report cards, but also a “*Volkstumszeugnis*” (“certificate of belonging to the *Volk*”) drafted by the pupil’s local VDU *Ortsgruppenführer*.⁷⁰ The *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werbass had the most stringent requirements of all: besides entrance exams, report cards, and their birth certificate, applicants had to provide evidence from their local VDU branch that they and their parents were paying VDU members, that they had done a “*Sommereinsatz*” (summer labor service on the “home front”), and that they had participated in a summer “selection camp” organized by the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*.⁷¹ Girls interested in becoming *Kindergarten* teachers and “*Kinderheim*” (“children’s home”) directors at the LBA faced additional requirements: as well as fulfilling those listed above, they were to demonstrate a “good musical ear and voice,” have no physical impairments (“*Gebrechen*”), and submit

⁶⁷ “Das deutsche Schulwesen im Banat,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7103 (19.11.1942), 2.

⁶⁸ Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben*, 154.

⁶⁹ “Prüfungen und Einschreibungen im Deutschen Gymnasium in Apatin,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6968 (7.6.1942), 3.

⁷⁰ “Aufnahmeprüfung und Einschreibungen in der deutschen Bürgerschule zu Neusatz,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6976 (17.6.1942), 5.

⁷¹ “Einschreibung, Aufnahmeprüfung und Unterrichtsbeginn in der Neuwerbaßer Deutschen Lehrerbildungsanstalt,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7378 (26.10.1943), 6; “Deutsche Jungen, deutsche Mädels, meldet Euch für die Lehrerausbildung! Ausleselager der Lehrerbildungsanstalten,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7279 (27.6.1943), 4. For more on these “*Sommereinsätze*,” consider: “Aufruf an die Studenten und Studentinnen zum Ferieneinsatz,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6947 (10.5.1942), 5.

a “certificate of good moral conduct” (“*Sittenzeugnis*”) penned by the local (German) authorities.⁷²

Those students who were accepted into the VDU’s schools were required to pay tuition fees, the amount of which was based on the parents’ (taxable) property and income. Families in need of monetary assistance could request financial aid with their children’s application form.⁷³ Already available under the Hungarian administration, such scholarship programs were extended considerably with the German occupation of the Batschka in the spring of 1944. Thereafter incorporated into the *Reich*’s NSV (“*Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*”) system, the Batschka’s ethnic German students received the right to apply for NSV educational loans.⁷⁴ Here, the selection criteria were also clearly designed to promote a German “*völkisch*” superiority: once again, applicants had to provide a report by their VDU *Ortsleiter* on their “*völkisch* achievements” (“*völkische Leistungen*”) and their families’ “character.” The loan’s amount would be determined according to the “hard work and learning success” (“*Fleiß und Lernerfolg*”) of the particular student. However, the sons and daughters of “our soldiers,” especially those mobilized in the *Waffen-SS*, would be treated preferentially.⁷⁵

As in the Western Banat, students’ formal education was not only to be crafted within the classroom; dormitories, too, were to play a prominent role. Like during the Habsburg and Yugoslav eras, institutes of secondary and higher education were frequently located far from pupils’ hometowns. In order to attract students from across the Batschka, a system of VDU-operated ethnic German dormitories was put in place after April 1941. Now termed “*Nationalsozialistische Erziehungsstätten*” or “*Nationalsozialistische Erziehungsheime*” (“National Socialist Educational Sites” or “National Socialist Educational Homes”), the dormitories were partially composed of previous Yugoslav *Schulstiftung*-led dormitories (like the boys’ dormitory at the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werbass), and partially of newly established institutions. In 1941, Novi Sad’s *Bürgerschule* thus received a NS-*Erziehungsheim*, while in 1942, such dormitories were opened for Apatin’s *Gymnasium* and Hodschag’s *Bürgerschule*. In

⁷² “Deutsche Mädel, werdet Kinderheimleiterinnen!,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7302 (25.7.1943), 4.

⁷³ “Das deutsche Kind gehört in die deutsche Schule!,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6966 (4.6.1942). This system was already developed under Yugoslav rule. Consider: Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 31.

⁷⁴ Established in 1932, the NSV became one of the Third Reich’s main providers of social insurance and care. The KLV, for example, was largely organized by the NSV.

⁷⁵ AMV/KB 1129, “Rundschreiben Nr. 5/44” to *NSV-Ortsleiter des Gebietes Batschka* (26.6.1944).



Fig. 6.2 *Deutsche Jugend* Girls Studying, Novi Sad. Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection. On back wall: “Jeder deutsche Junge, jedes deutsche Mädchen: sie müssen durchdrungen sein von dem heiligen Pflichtbewußtsein, Repräsentanten unseres Volkes zu [werden]!” (“Every German boy, every German girl: they must be permeated by the holy duty of [becoming] representatives of our *Volk!*”)

1943, Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* inaugurated one for girls.⁷⁶ As explained in the *Deutsches Volksblatt* in May 1942, these *Nationalsozialistische Erziehungsstätten* could not at all be compared to the “dormitories” of the previous age. Today’s *Erziehungsstätten* had a precise goal: to support the “National Socialist movement” by producing “belligerent, soldierly human beings” raised in mind and body according to the new “*Weltanschauung*.”⁷⁷

In order to help ensure the National Socialist nature of these *Erziehungsstätten*, entry requirements were stringent. In May 1942, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* published a call for applications for the *Erziehungsstätten*. According to the call, applicants had to be between ten and eighteen years of age and enrolled in a German-language school. They had to be “healthy,” “physically well-developed,” and “racially valuable” (“*rassisch wertvoll*”). To verify these criteria, applicants would need to submit a letter of support

⁷⁶ Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 35-38.

⁷⁷ “Unsere nationalsozialistischen Erziehungsstätten,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6944 (7.5.1942), 5.

from their VDU “*Gebietsführer*” (regional leader) and an “ancestral certificate” (“*Ahnennachweis*”) going back to their grandparents. Furthermore, they would have to undergo “a thorough medical and racial inspection” as soon as they arrived for their entrance exams.⁷⁸ These entrance exams consisted primarily of a sports and a “character” test.⁷⁹ Residence at a dormitory would cost approximately sixty-five pengős per month, however, families in need could write to the dormitory directors and request a reduction in these fees.⁸⁰

As in the Western Banat, active *Deutsche Jugend* membership was required of all ethnic German dormitory residents. Letters of support by a DJ leader thus became a prerequisite for VDU dormitory membership.⁸¹ The dormitory directors, usually teachers below the age of forty, acted as National Socialist youth leaders and helped oversee the residents’ daily sixteen-hour schedules. This included not only regular school attendance and homework hours, but also athletic training, “*Formaldienst*” (which included DJ paramilitary exercises), a National Socialist cultural program, and evening lessons in German history and “*Weltanschauung*.”⁸² All dormitory residents wore a *Deutsche Jugend* uniform at public events, in the dormitory, and at school.⁸³ However, their public appearances and excursions did not only occur within Hungary: like their counterparts from the Western Banat, the Batschka’s NS-*Erziehungsanstalt* students were occasionally also treated to a trip to the *Reich*, where they toured places like Vienna, Munich, the Alps, Lake Constance, Stuttgart, Berlin, Bamberg, and Nuremberg.⁸⁴

By September 1942, the Batschka’s German press claimed that some 2,700 children of the “*Batschkadeutschtum*” (“Batschka Germandom”) had been incorporated

⁷⁸ “... *genauer ärztlicher und rassischer Untersuchung*.” “Aufnahmebedingungen in die NS-Erziehungsstätten des VDU,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6952 (17.5.1942), 4.

⁷⁹ Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 42.

⁸⁰ In the early 1940s Batschka, a non-landowning family (father, mother, and children) who worked year-round on a farm received substantial payment in kind, in addition to approximately 250 pengős in cash per year. *Erinnerungen an die Heimat Gara: Beiträge zur Geschichte einer überwiegend deutschen Grenzgemeinde in der Nordbatschka/Ungarn*, edited by Stefan Keiner (Langenau: Garaer Heimatortaussschuß, 1991), chapter 5.6. For the sources, see: “Aufnahmebedingungen” (17.5.1942). Similar calls for applications can be found under: “Anmeldung für die NS-Erziehungsstätten,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6961 (29.5.1942), 3; “Mitteilungen des Amtes der NS-Erziehungsstätten des VDU,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7033 (26.8.1942), 4.

⁸¹ “Die Aufnahmeprüfungen des NS-Erziehungsheimes Neusatz,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7378 (26.10.1943), 6.

⁸² Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 50-55.

⁸³ *Neusatzer Klassenbuch. Mit Bildern aus dem kurzen Leben der Neusatzer Deutschen Bürgerschule*, edited by Helmut Bischof (Sandhausen: Werbe-Druck WIBA, 1986), 15, 19, 35.

⁸⁴ Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 59-60.

into the VDU's private middle and secondary schools. Finally, after years of oppression, it was possible to raise the next generation in "schools permeated by the National Socialist spirit." "Every day," "volksdeutsche" students could now "dedicate themselves to [their] classwork and educate [themselves] according to the National Socialist creed."⁸⁵ School centers like Werbass engaged in enormous public festivities for events such as Hitler's birthday. In April 1942, for example, hundreds of ethnic German students assembled on Werbass' marketplace in full DJ uniform, marched through the streets accompanied by their teachers, the *Deutsche Mannschaft*, and *levente* officials, and listened to speeches on their "confession of faith" ("*Bekanntnis*") to "*Führer, Volk und Vaterland*."⁸⁶ Even in the Catholic center of Apatin, *Gymnasium* officials professed to fostering the "Nordic-Germanic human being" within its classrooms.⁸⁷ Indeed, on December 20th, 1941, the *Gymnasium* organized an elaborate "*Julfeier*" celebration. Appearing in uniform, the *Gymnasium* students, school director and teachers, and local VDU elite all met at a local inn's hall, which was decorated with a Christmas tree and advent wreath. Winter solstice songs were sung; speeches were held on the grand German *Volk* and the *Führer*'s imminent victory; and fanfares and "endless applause" framed the entire event. Afterwards, Santa Claus handed out over five hundred gifts to the students present.⁸⁸

By the 1942/1943 academic year, a range of transformations had occurred in the Batschka's ethnic German school system. Once again part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Batshka's primary schools became Hungarian state schools, led by Hungarian state employees and coordinated under the auspices of the Hungarian educational ministry. Teachers without the requisite language skills were replaced, curricula were purged of their Yugoslav legacy, and all schools—regardless of minority status—were obliged to offer Hungarian language lessons, Magyar cultural programs, and *levente* training. Especially within the sphere of public primary schools, these changes caused considerable cleavages, as German-speaking students struggled to accept the Hungarian national project and (pro-) Hungarian teachers exhibited little patience for budding pro-

⁸⁵ "... vom nationalsozialistischen Geiste durchdrungenen Schulen ..."; "... jeden Tag im Sinne des nationalsozialistischen Bekenntnisses an eure Schulaufgaben gehen und euch bilden." "Die Batschka stellt über 2,700 volksdeutsche Mittelschüler," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7046 (11.9.1942), 3.

⁸⁶ "Großappell zu Führers Geburtstag im deutschen Schulzentrum Werbaß," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6933 (24.4.1942), 3.

⁸⁷ "Schlußfeier des Apatiner deutschen Gymnasiums," *Batschkaer Zeitung*, vol. 42, no. 26 (26.6.1941), 6.

⁸⁸ "Julfeier des Deutschen Gymnasiums in Apatin," transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (28.12.1941), BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 90.

German radicalism. However, within the *Volksbund*'s educational sphere, such differences were less profound. Supported by the *Schulstiftung* and propped up by money, materials, and manpower from the *Reich*, the *Volksbund*'s secondary schools and dormitories remained centers of pro-Nazi education, often led by the very activists who had initiated the *Erneuerer*'s pro-*Reich* agitation during the interwar period. Incorporated into the Hungarian state and formally under Hungarian administrative and legislative control, the *Volksbund*'s educational institutions became sites of a conflicted coexistence between Hungary's and Germany's nationalist missions. As we shall see, such transformations, inconsistencies, and (self-) contradictions— already numerous at the diplomatic and administrative levels— became almost infinitesimal at the individual, subjective level.

2. Oral History Reflections

As in the Western Banat, changes in the school system after April 1941 immediately were felt by children and youth, who— largely due to changes in instructors, curricula, and subjects taught— first understood through the classroom that they had been incorporated into a different state. As Johanna Bauer, born in 1938 in Brestowatz/Bački Brestovac/Szilberek/Ulmenau, recounted, her father was a teacher who, due to his job, had already moved away from the family's native Kernei to teach at the primary school in Brestowatz. After April 1941, he suddenly had to learn Hungarian to become a Hungarian state employee. However, as he could not acquire the necessary language skills quickly enough, he lost his job. Thereafter, her father moved to Pécs to work as a German teacher for the *Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft* ("Danube shipping company") and to, as Johanna recalled, "preserve the Germandom" there.⁸⁹ These changes presented a shock to the family: Johanna's relatives, she explained, had always been very strategic about learning the local languages, as her mother had been sent to both a Serbian and a Hungarian boarding school during her youth so that her family would have at least one person who could speak to the local bureaucracies ("*Ämter*"). Her father's Hungarian skills, however, were insufficient, so that he was left unemployed for some time.

Nevertheless, Johanna attended a German language Kindergarten in Parabutsch/Parabuć (today's Ratkovo) for a number of years. As she recounted, "it was a completely

⁸⁹ "*Um das Deutschtum zu erhalten.*" Johanna Bauer, interview.

normal Kindergarten, and then came *Führer's* birthday.” One day in April, all of the Kindergarten’s girls were dressed as different flowers with cloth and paper costumes. Clad as a forget-me-not, Johanna stepped onto a stage erected for Hitler’s birthday celebrations and recited a poem:

*Vergissmeinnicht mit blauem Stern,
Kommt her geeilt von nah' und fern.
Vergesst es nicht, seid dankbar dran,
Was Adolf Hitler euch getan.*⁹⁰

“That was it,” Johanna explained with tears in her eyes; she was then allowed to return to the audience and sit next to her parents. “Strangely enough, I already had to cry back then,” Johanna recalled; however, “as it was Hitler’s birthday,” she was not allowed to just burst into tears. Struggling to maintain composure, Johanna watched the rest of the poems and “*schwulstigen Ansprachen*” (“bombastic speeches”) and developed a sore throat from fighting back her tears— perhaps, she reflected, she remembered the event so well because of that pain. In any case, her Kindergarten was always quite active with “things related to National Socialism,” holding festivities for Hitler, and helping to organize the town’s *Kinderlandverschickung* program.⁹¹

Unlike in the Western Banat— where the German-language school system, including the Kindergartens, was entirely taken over by the *Volksgruppe*— the Batschka’s German-speaking minority maintained a variety of Hungarian, VDU, and religious Kindergartens. As Jakob Winzer recalled, his hometown (Filipowa) had two German-language Kindergartens when he was a child: a religious Kindergarten maintained by the local convent, and a secular, presumably “*Kulturbund*”-led one that had been established more recently. Parents were free to decide which Kindergarten their child would attend. In the Kindergarten led by the “sisters,” one sang religious songs; in the *Kulturbund* Kindergarten, “one sang more German *Volkslieder*.” However, even in the latter institution, children certainly did not “speak about *Mein Kampf*.”⁹² Jakob

⁹⁰ “Forget-me-nots with blue star; Quickly come hither, from near and afar; Do not forget, be thankful too; For all that Adolf Hitler has done for you.” Johanna Bauer, interview.

⁹¹ Johanna Bauer, interview.

⁹² Winzer, interview. However, at least according to the VDU Kindergartens’ own programmatic literature, the aim of these Kindergartens was to “rear [children] according to National Socialism and service to the *Volksgemeinschaft*” (“*Also in kurzen Worten zusammengefasst, dient der Kindergarten der Deutschen Volkshilfe: ... 2. Erziehung zum Nationalsozialismus und damit zur [sic] Dienst an der*”).

himself attended the religious Kindergarten, as his family lived right across the street from the convent. His father was “thoroughly German-friendly,” though he “was not a friend of the excesses of the National Socialists, as he always called it.”⁹³ While he sent Jakob’s older siblings to German institutions like Budapest’s *Jakob-Bleyer-Gymnasium* and Belgrade’s German *Gymnasium*, he had no problem with sending his youngest to a convent Kindergarten.

Such pragmatism seems to have been quite common. As Johann Weber explained, he simply attended the nearest Kindergarten, which was within walking distance from his family home even for the three- to six-year-old Johann (and his dog, who occasionally accompanied him).⁹⁴ The Kindergarten was German-speaking and its main “*Erzieherin*” (pre-school teacher) was Johann’s aunt. However, a Hungarian woman also worked at the Kindergarten, as she was doing an apprenticeship there. The children spent most of their days playing, singing, and doing crafts. Once, they even presented a play, in which Johann acted the leading role. Dressed as a doctor in a top hat, Johann played a Dr. Pillermann and recited a poem that he still recalled in its entirety over seventy years later—a poem that was originally from a Habsburg-era German-language schoolbook for the Kingdom of Hungary.⁹⁵ When Johann entered first grade at Torschau’s German primary school, he suddenly had to learn Hungarian for one hour per day. This contrasted sharply with his sister’s school experience as she—born ten years earlier—had to learn Serbian for an hour per day. As a result, his family was multilingual.⁹⁶

As in the Western Banat, even slight divergences in birth year had a considerable impact on the education and linguistic knowledge of a particular *Donauschwabe* in the Batschka. Most parents (educated before the mid-1930s) thus had Serbian—and often also Hungarian—skills that their children did not. As Jakob Winzer recalled, his parents, though native German speakers, wrote letters and postcards to each other in their own “secret” language—a German-Hungarian mix written in Cyrillic script. “*Édes, kedves galambom*” (“my sweet, dear dove”), his father would always write to his mother, Jakob

Volksgemeinschaft.” AMV/KB 857, “Volkswohlfahrt: Mitteilungsblatt für die Dienststellen der Deutschen Volkshilfe,” edited by *Deutsche Volkshilfe des VDU*, vol. 1, no. 3 (3.1943).

⁹³ “... *mein Vater, der durchaus deutschfreundlich gesinnt war, war trotzdem kein Freund der Überspannungen der Nationalsozialisten, wie er’s immer genannt hat.*” Winzer, interview.

⁹⁴ Weber, interview.

⁹⁵ The poem appears in: *Deutsches Lesebuch für die II. Klasse der Volksschulen mit deutscher Unterrichtssprache* (Budapest: Király Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda Kiadása), ABV.

⁹⁶ Weber, interview.

chuckled. Jakob's generation, he explained, would rarely feel comfortable enough in Serbian (and Cyrillics) and Hungarian to engage in such correspondence.⁹⁷

Some of this multilingualism was not born out of choice or social interactions, but out of government-enforced policy. Katharina Schiffer's life story presents one example of this. Born in Apatin in 1922, Katharina had a Hungarian maiden name, and was barred from attending her town's German-language schools during the 1930s due to Yugoslavia's name analysis policies.⁹⁸ After completing a German-language Kindergarten (which was exempt from this policy at that time), she enrolled in Apatin's Serbian-language primary school (*Volksschule*) and then Apatin's *Bürgerschule*'s Serbian-language section. In these schools, her first name was "stupidly" turned into a Serbian-language equivalent; however, her instructors— who were all Serbs— were all very good teachers.⁹⁹ Almost all of Apatin's German speakers attended a German-language school, Katharina explained. However, she and four other students in her classroom with Hungarian family names could not enroll there, so that they learned German as a "foreign language" in their Serbian school. Upon completing her education in Apatin, Katharina spent two years at a convent school in Sombor, as her grandparents wanted her to become a nun. Katharina, however, had other plans: at age seventeen, she "fell in love with [her] husband" and married him, so that her education— as well as her "youth" more generally— ended quite abruptly.¹⁰⁰

Choosing a school was not, however, merely a decision made out of convenience or dictated by policy; it was also interpreted as a strategic and political choice. As Georg Schneider, born in 1931 explained, his older brother was born in 1921. As his father— who had served in a Hungarian unit during World War I, despite not knowing Hungarian— believed that it would help his son to know the state language, he sent his older brother to a German primary school and then to a Serbian secondary school. Theoretically, his brother's fluent Serbian skills should have been very useful. However, as soon as his brother was old enough for military service, the Batschka was once again Hungarian, so that he joined the Hungarian *Honvédség*. By the time Georg had completed his town's four primary school grades (in German), the Batschka was already Hungarian.

⁹⁷ Winzer, interview. Probably this would have also been different had Jakob's generation not been expelled from this multilingual region at a young age.

⁹⁸ See the chapter on interwar schools for more information.

⁹⁹ For more on these teachers— whom she mentioned in the interview— see: Senz, ed., *Die Apatiner Bürgerschule 1875-1944*.

¹⁰⁰ Schiffer, interview.

Georg thus faced the decision of either attending a *Volksbund*-directed German-language secondary school, or continuing his education at a Hungarian institution. Most youth “with talent and the necessary preconditions” (“*Begabung [...] und auch die Voraussetzung*”) attended the German *Gymnasien* and *Bürgerschulen* in Apatin or Werbass. These schools, elaborated Georg, had financial and personal connections to Germany. While some students returned from these institutions and “had nothing to do with the *Kulturbund* and National Socialism, and sometimes even became priests [...] the majority returned and were implemented as agitators” among their villages’ youth.¹⁰¹ Georg’s family had belonged to that faction of *Donauschwaben* society derided as pro-Hungarian “*Magyaroner*”— Georg did not attend *Deutsche Jugend* events, his brother had not joined the *Waffen-SS*, and his parents were not in the *Volksbund*. Georg therefore decided to attend a Hungarian institution.

Between 1942 and 1944, Georg was enrolled at Szeged’s Hungarian Piarist boarding school.¹⁰² Before his departure, his father warned Georg not to “suddenly begin thinking like a Hungarian.” As his father explained, “you are a Hungarian citizen, must fulfill all of your duties and learn the language, but don’t think of [forgetting your mother tongue] ... You are German, and you will stay German.”¹⁰³ As Georg stated, that is how it was. He went to Szeged, enrolled at the Piarist school, and first of all had to learn Hungarian as quickly as possible. However, when his teachers would tease him with “are you a Hungarian child?” (“... *magyar gyerek vagy te?*”), he would respond resolutely with: “No, no. I am a Swabian” (“*Nem, nem. Én sváb vagyok.*”). In his own town, Georg was then ironically taunted by his former classmates for not being “Swabian” enough. Even decades later, when they reconvened at *Donauschwaben* meetings in Germany, they would tease him: “*Na, du Magyaroner?*” As Georg explained, his response to this was always similar: “Let it be, at all times I was as good a German as you, and I still am so

¹⁰¹ “... *Manche sind zurückgekommen, die haben mit Kulturbund und Nationalsozialismus gar nichts zu tun gehabt, sind zum Teil sogar Priester geworden, nicht? Aber der grössere Teil ist dann doch zurück gekommen und sind dann praktisch als Agitatoren eingesetzt worden bei den einfachen Jugendlichen im Dorf.*” Schneider interview.

¹⁰² As described in the previous chapter, the Piarists, or “Order of Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools”, are a Catholic order established in the seventeenth century specializing in the (generally free) education of children and youth.

¹⁰³ “*Aber komm ja nicht damit, dass du plötzlich irgendwie ungarisch denken willst ... Du bist Deutscher und du bleibst Deutscher ... Bist wohl ungarischer Staatsangehöriger und musst alle deine Pflichten erfüllen, musst die Sprache erlernen, aber komm mir nicht auf die Idee ...*” Schneider, interview.

today.”¹⁰⁴ Besides, he now had a skill that all of his former classmates wish that they had acquired: fluent Hungarian.

All pupils in the Batschka, whether they were enrolled at a Hungarian state school or a German private institution, had to learn Hungarian after 1941. Even students who had otherwise enjoyed an almost exclusively German-language education, and later joined Werbass’ elite National Socialist institutions, suddenly had to study the language. As Anna Kirschner (born in 1929) recalled, she had not been able to attend Kindergarten, as her town temporarily did not have one when she was young. Her mother and sister (born in 1921), however, had been able to attend their town’s Kindergarten.¹⁰⁵ Upon entering first grade, Anna first learned the Gothic and *Sütterlin* scripts using chalk and tiny blackboards; in second grade, pupils received paper, pencils, quills, and inkwells to practice their calligraphy. In third grade, they learned the Latin script, in fourth grade, the Cyrillic. While their lessons were in German, history was always taught in Serbian. “We memorized,” Anna recounted, “and we did not at all understand what we were learning.”¹⁰⁶ In 1941, Anna enrolled at the *Bürgerschule* in Werbass. As the *Bürgerschule* had not established a girls’ dormitory, Anna stayed with a German Methodist host family, which accommodated students for payment.¹⁰⁷ At school, Anna learned the usual subjects: German, mathematics, history, physics, geography, chemistry, and biology. However, she now suddenly also had to learn Hungarian. Furthermore, a new subject was introduced: “*Wehrkunde*.”¹⁰⁸

Termed in school curricula and matriculation books as “*Honvédelmi ismeretek*” (“defense sciences”) or “*Honvédlehre*,” the “*Wehrkunde*” subject was aimed at boys and taught once per week (girls usually did crafts during those hours).¹⁰⁹ Designed to provide the theoretical and physical training necessary for Hungary’s future soldiers, it was presumably partially through these lessons that Werbass’ German students completed the necessary weekly number of *levente* hours. Furthermore, time was set aside every week

¹⁰⁴ “Well, you *Magyaroner*?”; “*Lass’ mer das sein, so guter Deutscher wie du bist war ich alle Zeit und bin’s auch heute noch.*” Schneider, interview.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the temporary closings of German-language schools and Kindergartens under Yugoslav rule, see this dissertation’s Part I.

¹⁰⁶ Kirschner, interview.

¹⁰⁷ For more about the delayed establishment of girls’ dormitories, see: Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 35-36.

¹⁰⁸ Kirschner, interview.

¹⁰⁹ ANS F. 181 v. 14 (1942), “I. Órend” and “II. Órend”; ANS F. 207 v. 11 (1943-44). See also: Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 22, 33.

within the *Bürgerschulen* and *Lehrerbildungsanstalten* for events entitled “*Kriegs- und Leventeverpflichtung*” (“war and *levente* duties”).¹¹⁰ In addition to five or six weekly hours of Hungarian lessons, students at private German institutions thus spent a considerable amount of time fulfilling their obligations as new Hungarian citizens. For some students, this transformation was striking: Anne Wirth, for instance, began attending Werbass’ *Bürgerschule* in 1940. Her parents, she explained, were adamant that Anne learn proper German; they therefore purchased an old bus with some of their neighborhood’s other ethnic German families, so that they could drive their children the twenty kilometers to Werbass and back every day. Her first year in Werbass, Anne had to learn Serbian, and two of her “professors” (in geography and natural sciences) were Russians who had fled the Russian Revolution.¹¹¹ During her second year— when “the Hungarian troops were already there”— she suddenly had to learn Hungarian. Some of her teachers, too, were exchanged.¹¹²

For other students, Hungarian lessons were not the true post-April 1941 novelty at Werbass’ German-language institutions. Johanna Koch, for instance, had already experienced a fairly eventful childhood, moving with her family from Sivac to Bitola (Macedonia) and back, and attending a French and then a Hungarian convent school. By the time she enrolled in Werbass’ *Bürgerschule* in 1942, Johanna had learned Serbo-Croatian, French, and Hungarian. While she spoke German at home and her parents read Grimms’ fairytales to her as a child, Johanna had received no formal German language instruction. “It was difficult for me,” Johanna explained, “as I knew German very, very poorly.” Continuously mixing up different languages— even while doing mathematics— Johanna spent most of her free time learning German and catching up to her peers. In Werbass, she lived with a host family, with a Dr. Werner and his wife and three children. Although her mother came once per month to bring her fresh laundry and some pocket money, Johanna was very homesick— after all, she was only ten years old, “and suddenly, I was just, practically pushed away.” Nevertheless, Johanna made some friends, with whom she ate pastries and went to the cinema— to see films like “*Baron Münchhausen*”— on the weekends.

¹¹⁰ See, for instance: ANS F. 181 v. 14 (1942), “1942 évi September hó 14.-tól, September hó 18.-ig.”

¹¹¹ According to the Yugoslav census, there were 36,333 Russians living in Yugoslavia in 1931. See: Zoran Janjetović, *Emperor’s Children, Kings’ Stepchildren: National Minorities in Yugoslavia 1918-1941*, 2nd edition (Bismarck, ND: University of Mary Press, 2011), 73.

¹¹² Wirth, interview.

As Johanna explained, most teachers at the *Bürgerschule* were “very, very convinced of Germany” (“*sehr, sehr deutsch überzeugt*”). Especially her German professor—a little man (“*kleines Männchen*”)—impressed her as being pro-German. Presumably this man was Adalbert Gauss, the interwar pro-Nazi *Schwäbischer Volkserzieher* contributor.¹¹³ In any case, he always waved his fist in the air and emphatically exclaimed: “Germany has never won a real war, but *this* time, we will be victorious! [...] We will be victorious!”¹¹⁴ In retrospect, Johanna believes that most of the *Bürgerschule*’s teachers were “sponsored” by Germany.¹¹⁵ They conducted a real “brainwashing” (“*Gehirnwäsche*”) in their classrooms, “working at” (“*bearbeiten*”) and “vaccinating” (“*geimpft*”) the pupils until she herself “truly believed [...] we will be victorious!” Under the impression that Germany is a “wonderland” (“*Wunderland*”), Johanna was hugely disappointed when she finally saw Germany after her *Vertreibung* in 1945. Gazing at the bombed, impoverished, and dirty landscape around her, Johanna realized: “My God, that was all just propaganda!”¹¹⁶

Some students, it seems, were in fact quite happy to act as vehicles of propaganda. Resi Gerber, a *Deutsche Jugend Kameradschaftsführerin* and *Sportwartin* in her native Apatin, only received six years of primary education at Apatin’s *Volksschule*. Upon completing primary school in 1942, she worked for some time at her uncle’s undertaker’s shop, before finding employment at a shoe factory. Unlike many of her peers, who continued their education at Apatin’s new German *Gymnasium* or one of Werbass’ academies, Resi therefore only received an education at a state school. In fourth grade, she recalled, her teacher was “a Hungarian.” Already “a big *Deutsche Hitler-Jugend* [sic]” member, Resi always went to class wearing a swastika pin. Without a word, her teacher would come up to her, tear off the swastika, and throw it in a drawer. The next day, Resi would simply appear with a new one; every time, her teacher removed the sign again. One day, explained Resi, she had had enough. Her mother had just purchased Resi a new, bright blue jacket. Resi therefore went to her uncle, an iron smith who “was also such a big German” (“*grosse Deutsche*”), and asked him to forge her a swastika. She then

¹¹³ This is my reconstruction based on archival materials. For the German teacher’s name in the appropriate matriculation books, see: ANS F. 181 v. 15 (1942). For more on Gauss, see this dissertation’s section on interwar educational initiatives.

¹¹⁴ “*Deutschland het noch nie n’richtigen Krieg gewonnen, aber dieses Mal werden wir siegen! [...] Diesmal werden wir siegen ...*” Koch, interview.

¹¹⁵ “*Die sind anscheinend [...] g’sponsort wore.*” Koch, interview.

¹¹⁶ “*Mein Gott, des isch ja all’s Propaganda!*” Koch, interview.

sewed the swastika onto her jacket. The next day, when her teacher attempted to tear the swastika off, it was stuck. The teacher “took out a pocket knife and cut it off, and cut out an entire piece of my jacket!”¹¹⁷ As she stated, this was also the reason why she eventually decided to flee in October 1944: “I was afraid of him [...] and thought that he would betray me [to the Partisans] and then ... God knows what would happen.”¹¹⁸

The Partisans, it seems, indeed loomed in most young *Donauschwaben*'s consciousness as a potential threat, despite the frequently propagated imminent German victory. As Friedrich Fischer recalled, he completed several years of primary school in his native Bukin and the neighboring town of Batschka Palanka/Bačka Palanka/Bácspalánka, before enrolling at Novi Sad's German *Bürgerschule* in 1941.¹¹⁹ Unlike most of his peers—who focused during their interviews on stories of interethnic cooperation during the occupation years—Friedrich explained how especially after 1941, “there were some really bad [...] feelings” in the Batschka. While “the Hungarians left us [the Germans] alone,” the “Yugoslavs, the Serbian people [...] kept eyes on us—we were not liked.” Already in Palanka, where the “German speakers” had been in the minority, Friedrich had experienced some “jealousy or despise [sic],” as his non-German peers always referred to him as a “*nemci*” (“German,” used pejoratively). However, after 1941, things “escalated very much”: “Marshal Tito” began fighting “the German troops, or the supply routes of the German army,” and—in retaliation—the German army began shooting ten (Yugoslav) prisoners for every German soldier killed. As a result, recalled Friedrich, “we feared [...] Josip Bros [...] much more than anything else.” And indeed, Friedrich stated, Marshal Tito and his troops later “came to the Batschka and took over our properties and land.”¹²⁰

Despite such fears and conflicts, Friedrich recalled that the early 1940s were a “privileged time” for him, especially in relation to his education. Under Yugoslav rule, German-language education had been severely lacking. As Friedrich explained, the “Yugoslavs” gave students “their books,” none of which taught German speakers how to read or write in German, or contained any narratives about German history. Previously,

¹¹⁷ “*Da hat er's Taschenmesser raus und hat's abgeschnitten und hat mer e ganzes Stück von der Jacke raus g'schnitten.*” Gerber, interview.

¹¹⁸ “*Und des is', war der Grund warum ich von daheim [chuckles] g'flüchtet bin, weil ich Angscht von dem g'habt hab. Ich hab gedacht der verratet mich und dann ... passiert weiss Gott etwas da [sharp inhale].*” Gerber, interview.

¹¹⁹ Friedrich is mentioned and pictured in a volume on Novi Sad's *Bürgerschule*, compiled decades later by the school's former students. See: Bischof, *Neusatzer Klassenbuch*.

¹²⁰ Fischer, interview (2011).

Friedrich had only “heard of Kraljević Marko [...] a fictitious warrior of Yugoslavia,” and of the battles that the “Yugoslavs” fought against the “Turks.” “We did not know ... *anything* about German history,” emphasized Friedrich. However, “after the Germans came in and they saw how in need for German ... everything, from the dictionary to German books [we were], they were just amazed!” Suddenly, Friedrich and his peers received German-language materials, and the ability to “go out into the open [...] with our beliefs.” Even on Sundays, when his “Hitler Youth” convened, “professors” now taught them about “German poets like Goethe and Schiller and also [...] Dürer, the painter.” After 1941, the Batschka’s Germans were finally “empowered [...] to receive all this from Germany [...] and it was beautiful.”¹²¹

In Novi Sad, Friedrich stayed in a “three-story home close to the park.” There, he and all of his male classmates underwent rigid training: every morning, they woke up at the crack of dawn, ran, and did “calisthenics.” After a cold shower, they “marched” to the school in a group of approximately sixty boys, where they had breakfast and began their lessons. As Friedrich recalled, “it was very, very healthy”; the dorm’s and school’s windows were left ajar year-round, there was no hot water, and all the physical training helped strengthen students both mentally and physically.¹²² After completing his education at the *Bürgerschule*, Friedrich enrolled at Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in 1943.¹²³ Again, Friedrich was housed at a dormitory about one kilometer from the school building. Every morning, he and his classmates marched from the dorm to the school, where they had breakfast and sang “our songs.” The girls were housed in a separate dormitory; however, all students were part of the “*Hitler-Jugend*.”¹²⁴

As Friedrich reflected, “the school was sort of ... controlled by [...] Germany.” Especially for boys, the school and dormitory were “sort of geared [...] to train us to become [...] soldiers.” In retrospect, the Batschka had simply been “a storage area for Germany” in terms of supplies, food, and manpower. However, especially after April 1941, the Batschka’s Germans were made “a player of [their] nationality.” Suddenly educated in German schools, incorporated into Nazi youth groups, and— as in Friedrich’s case— brought to Germany on field trips, the Batschka’s ethnic German youth quickly

¹²¹ Fischer, interview (2011).

¹²² These descriptions are similar to those by other former dormitory inhabitants. Consider: *Neusatzer Klassenbuch*, edited by Bischof, 19, 34; Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 54-55.

¹²³ Friedrich’s name and grades appear in the LBA’s matriculation books. See: ANS F. 181 v. 13 (1943), “Oszályozó naplója 1943/1944,” *Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt der Schulstiftung, Neuwerbass*.

¹²⁴ Fischer, interview (2011).

developed a fascination with Germany, perceiving that it was “a beautiful experience ... that Germany wanted us.” “We sort of worshipped the Germans [...] because they brought everything down there to us, and it was free,” Friedrich stated— “and we just ate that all up, the knowledge that we got from that.” Occasionally, the *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* had difficulties recruiting enough teachers, as most “young people” had joined the “German army.” His chemistry teacher, for instance, was a brilliant man who had worked at a chemical factory, but who had never taught high schoolers before. Sometimes, their education was therefore perhaps “a bit iffy.” Nevertheless, as Friedrich stated, “the Germans” brought “all the material and progress [from] Germany”; they taught students “new things,” supplied them with German books about German topics, and “so naturally, we thought the world at that time of Germany.” Ultimately, it was thanks to this education that Friedrich experienced “an awakening of [his] nationality.” Even today, when he is asked about his origins in his current U.S. hometown, Friedrich states that he is “from Germany.”¹²⁵

Unlike in the Western Banat, where most ethnic German students were incorporated into *Volksgruppe*-led schools and dormitories, the Batschka’s young people’s post-April 1941 educational experience remained very nationally and linguistically variegated. Now incorporated into the Hungarian state as (new) Hungarian citizens, the Batschka’s children and youth not only had extra-curricular obligations ranging from *levente* service to *Deutsche Jugend* membership; they also enrolled in a range of Hungarian, German, religious, secular, public, and private schools. At times, the institution in which students enrolled was determined by happenstance, a lack of options, or simple matters of convenience. Occasionally, however, student enrollment became an explicitly politicized and nationalized decision, interpreted both by the students themselves and the individuals in their surroundings as a statement on the nature of their “Germanness,” their relationship to the old and new “host states,” and the loyalties that these would entail. However, it was not only different nations and states that remained active in shaping such choices. Indeed, and unlike in the Western Banat, the Church launched one final, forceful, and fraught attempt to salvage the religious self-identification of the *Donauschwaben* youth.

¹²⁵ Fischer, interview (2011).

C. The Church: Resistance, Involvement, Apathy

1. Restructuring the Batschka's Catholic and Protestant Churches

The upheaval that marked every segment of the Batschka's life and population also affected the region's churches. Already accustomed to the redrawing of boundaries, changes in political systems, and conditions of war, the *Donauschwaben's* churches nevertheless were caught off guard by the events of late March and early April 1941. Publications like *Die Donau*—Adam Berenz's Catholic newspaper—could barely keep up with daily events in its weekly editions. On March 29th, 1941, the newspaper simultaneously printed breaking news on Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact and Prime Minister Cvetković's pro-Third Reich speech, and on Dušan Simović's coup, the installment of Peter II as new head of state, and the formation of a new Yugoslav government.¹²⁶ One week later, *Die Donau* reported on King Peter II's festive inauguration and circulated safety precautions to be taken during (the *Luftwaffe's*) bombardment of the territory. "Whatever will fall upon us," one article wrote, "we should not be surprised. The measure of insult towards God, the measure of sins, the measure of sacrilege, has long been overfilled." Nevertheless, "in these difficult times," it would become apparent how "the Catholic *Weltanschauung* is victorious."¹²⁷

As would become evident over the next three years, however, any victory on the side of Catholicism could not be brought about spontaneously, but only through the concerted efforts of the local clergy. For as the *Donauschwaben's* churches once again faced novel state structures and conditions of war, it became increasingly difficult for them to regain the ground that they had lost—in cultural, social, and political influence—over the course of the interwar period. Between 1941 and 1944, especially the Catholic Church hardly faced the same challenges in the Batschka as in the Western Banat, as Horthy's Hungary embraced Catholicism more readily than Nazi Germany as an instrument of state politics.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, in light of the ongoing mass mobilization of

¹²⁶ *Die Donau*, vol. 7, no. 12 (29.3.1941).

¹²⁷ "Was immer über unser Geschlecht kommt, wundern brauchen wir uns nicht darüber. Das Maß der Beleidigung Gottes, das Maß der Sünden, das Maß der Gottesfrevel ist längst gerüttelt voll ... in diesen schweren Zeiten zeigt es sich auch wieder einmal ganz deutlich, wie siegreich die katholische Weltanschauung ist." "In diesen schweren Zeiten," *Die Donau*, vol. 7, no. 13 (5.4.1941), 1.

¹²⁸ For more on the position of the Catholic Church in Horthy's Hungary, consider: Spannenberger, *Die katholische Kirche in Ungarn 1918-1939*.

ethnic German youth into Nazi projects in the Batschka, any maintenance of a local Catholic (German) identity among the future generations there, too, was fraught with public struggle and potential failure. Conversely, the Protestant Churches—already more scattered in their cultural, political, and social efforts—mounted very little formal resistance to National Socialism at all, disappearing both in the written record and in popular memory as major mobilizers of children and youth.

After Hungarian troops swept through the Batschka in April 1941, the local churches were once again forced to await the forging of new borders, state systems, and ecclesiastical decrees to consolidate their official activities. Particularly Yugoslavia's Protestant denominations faced difficulties during this time. The majority of Yugoslavia's Lutherans (or forty-five thousand people) now suddenly were ceded to Hungary, making their previous legal framework (under the German Evangelical Church of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) nonsensical. Moreover, their leader, Bishop Popp, lived in Zagreb and became head of the Independent State of Croatia's Lutheran Church, temporarily leaving the Batschka's Lutherans without a leader and without an official Church. During the summer of 1941, the Batschka's Lutherans were incorporated into the Hungarian Evangelical Church, and placed under the leadership of Bishop Sándor Raffay in Budapest. However, the Batschka's Lutherans balked at this measure. Fearing further "Magyarization" and a loss of national autonomy, they declared an independent "German Evangelical Church of Southern Hungary" ("*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche Südungarns*") on August 21st, 1941. Pastor Heinrich Meder (the interwar Lutheran youth organizer) and Franz Hamm (the *Kulturbund* activist) became its ecclesiastical and secular heads, respectively. The Hungarian government accepted this Church in practice; however, Bishop Raffay would have none of it, creating a stalemate between the Batschka's and Hungary's Lutheran Churches for the remainder of their coexistence (until late 1944).¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 131-132. For an account of these events, as archived with the DAI, consider: "Autonomes Deutsch-Reformiertes Seniorat des Südgebietes," transcription from *Deutsches Volksblatt* (22.8.1942), BArch R 57/neu/1071 Bd. 103. For a detailed study of these conflicts between Hungary's and the Batschka's Lutheran churches, as well as the involvement of *Reich* ecclesiastical offices, consider: Ágnes Tóth, "Konfessionelle Unabhängigkeit oder Manipulation durch die Staatsmacht? Bestrebungen der evangelischen Deutschen in der Batschka 1941-45," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas*, vol. 11-12 (2012): 113-141.

The incorporation of the Batschka's Calvinists into Hungary was slightly less convoluted. As part of the "Reformed Christian Church of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia," the Batschka had already formed its own district, the largely German Southern "Seniorat." While Yugoslavia's Reformed Church was only officially dissolved on January 28th, 1943, its Calvinists were incorporated into the new (occupying) states fairly quickly. After April 1941, when Yugoslavia's Northern and Southern *Seniorate* fell to Hungary, the "German" district received a special status, whereby priests were to be of German nationality, German was to remain an official language of administration and service, and ecclesiastical offices could be appointed independently. The previous Yugoslav Reformed Bishop Ágoston, was released from his office but remained "Bishop" in name after 1943; the new head of the Batschka's Calvinist Church became Hungary's Bishop László Ravasz.¹³⁰

Perhaps the most publicized transition into Hungary of all was that of the Batschka's Catholic Church. Already in May 1941—once the upheavals and violence of the previous month had subsided—the Catholic press applauded the region's reincorporation into the Hungarian state. Once again, claimed an article in *Die Donau*, the region was part of Hungary. Once again, the people's "state flag is the red-white-green tricolor." As a result, all of the region's loyal citizens were now to "raise a worthy state flag and profess themselves to the thousand-year Hungarian fatherland!"¹³¹ By June, the already enthusiastic Catholic press erupted into celebration, as it became clear that "our diocese is once again under the leadership of the Archbishop of Kalocsa." The previous "absolutely arbitrary" borders of Trianon—which had ripped the Batschka from its historic Kalocsa Diocese and "folded it into the former Yugoslav state formation"—were now annulled.¹³² While according to ecclesiastical law, the Batschka's Catholics had always remained under the Archbishop of Kalocsa, it was only now, with "the liberation by the Hungarian *Wehrmacht*" and the abdication of Subotica's Apostolic Administrator "Ludwig" Budanović, that this ecclesiastical fact was once again reflected in earthly law. The Vatican itself had appointed the Archbishop of Kalocsa, Gyula Zichy, as the head of

¹³⁰ Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*, 132.

¹³¹ "Unsere Landesfahne ist die rot-weiß-grüne Trikolore. Möge sich jeder treue und ergebene Staatsbürger bei gegebener Gelegenheit durch das Hissen einer würdigen Landesfahne zum tausendjährigen ungarischen Vaterland bekennen!" "Die Fahne," *Die Donau*, vol. 7, no. 18 (17.5.1941), 1.

¹³² "Durch die absolut willkürlich vorgenommene Trianoner Grenzziehung wurde der weitaus größte Teil des Kalocsa-Bácszer Erzbistum dem gewesenen jugoslawischen Staatsgebilde einverleibt." "Unser Bistum wieder unter der Leitung des Erzbischofes von Kalocsa," *Die Donau*, vol. 7, no. 21 (7.6.1941), 1.

the Batschka's Catholic Church.¹³³ Finally, the “banishment from our beloved Hungarian fatherland” was over, and the Batschka's Catholics could once again partake in the “millennial Hungarian fatherland.”¹³⁴

This public enthusiasm for the Hungarian state, predictably, caused major irritation within the *Donauschwaben* communities. Already ostensibly positioned against the National Socialist project, the Batschka's Catholic Church now had the backing of a new state structure to offer the *Donauschwaben* an alternative focus for their ideological and national loyalties. Combined with mounting tensions over educational and cultural matters— especially in the youth arena— contestation between the Church and the *Volksbund* reached a boiling point between 1941 and 1944. Nowhere did this become so apparent as with Adam Berenz, *Die Donau*, and the Catholic youth organizations.

2. Adam Berenz and the Catholic Church's Resistance

Started in 1935 under the auspices of Yugoslavia's “Catholic Action,” Apatin's Catholic newspaper *Die Donau* continued its weekly circulation even after the Batschka's 1941 cession to Hungary. Now termed *Die Donau: Wochenblatt für das katholische Deutschtum Ungarns* (“The Danube: Weekly Paper for the Catholic Germandom in Hungary”), the publication's focus remained similar as under Yugoslav rule: besides an apparent switch in host state loyalty, the paper's main themes still included the battle against Communism, “neo-heathenism,” and National Socialism, and the fight for Catholic piety, religious definitions of “Germanness,” and the maintenance of “family values.”¹³⁵ Like during the interwar period, *Die Donau*'s primary concern lay with the rise of National Socialism, especially among the *Donauschwaben*'s young, and the concomitant decline in religious authority. As stated in one June 1942 front-page article:

For years, we have been emphasizing ceaselessly and tirelessly that underlying this fight, to which we have committed this paper, is the great fateful question: will our local Germandom

¹³³ Following Gyula Zichy's death in May 1942, he was replaced by Archbishop József Grösz in May 1943. “Wir haben einen neuen Oberhirten,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 5 (5.1943), 99.

¹³⁴ “... daß wir nach dreiundzwanzigjähriger Verbannung zu unserem geliebten Vaterland Ungarn ... zurückkehren durften”; “Tausendjährigen ungarischen Vaterlandes.” “Unser Bistum,” *Die Donau* (7.6.1941).

¹³⁵ For an example of *Die Donau*'s anti-Communism, see: “Bolschewismus,” *Die Donau*, vol. 7, no. 28 (26.7.1941), 1. For more on family values, see: “Die Rettung der Familie ist die Rettung der Nation,” *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 45 (7.11.1942), 1. For more on the “heathen worldview,” consider: “Die heidnische Weltanschauung,” *Die Donau*, vol. 9, no. 4 (23.1.1943), 1.

also retain its Christian life form in future, or succumb to a modern heathenism? Since the so-called “*Erneuerungsbewegung*” has appeared on the scene and has announced the principles of the so-called “new German *Weltanschauung*” in writing and in speech, it has been clear to us beyond the shadow of a doubt that the final aim of this movement’s actions is none other than the complete, total, and radical de-Christianization of our local German *Volk*.¹³⁶

Particularly youth— simultaneously purportedly the most impressionable and vulnerable demographic and the *Donauschwaben*’s future generation— were in danger of de-Christianization. In some cases, the source of this de-Christianization was the children’s own parents. Misled by their own lack of Christian faith and the *Erneuerer*’s propaganda, their parents’ treason towards their Christian roots occasionally already started with their children’s baptism, as they chose not supposedly “Jewish” names like “Josef, Johann, Jakob, Michael, Gabriel, Maria, [and] Anna,” but Germanic ones tied to legends of “Nordic heroism.”¹³⁷ However, in many cases, the cause of the current youth’s pro-heathen orientation was also to be found outside of the family: in the youth group, in the classroom, and in a society more generally marred by the “new German *Weltanschauung*.”¹³⁸

To salvage youth, one would first have to save society more generally. To that effect, Adam Berenz— Apatin’s Chaplain and *Die Donau*’s editor— launched increasingly virulent attacks against the “*Erneuerer*” and their teachings on the pages of his publication. Writing in an office that is now the site of the *Deutscher Bürgerverein* “*Adam Berenz*”’s archive, he engaged in heated and public debates with the editors of

¹³⁶ “*Seit Jahren betonen wir ununterbrochen und unermüdlich, daß dem Kampfe, in dessen Dienst wir unser Blatt gestellt haben, die große Schicksalsfrage zu Grunde liegt: ob unser hiesiges Deutschtum auch in Zukunft die christliche Lebensform beibehalten oder einem modernen Heidentum verfallen soll. Seit die sogenannte ‘Erneuerungsbewegung’ auf den Plan getreten ist und die Grundsätze einer sogenannten ‘neuen deutschen Weltanschauung’ in Wort und Schrift verkündet hat, war es uns klar und außer allem Zweifel stehend, daß das Endziel der Tätigkeit dieser Bewegung kein anderes ist, als die vollkommene, totale und radikale Entchristlichung unseres hiesigen deutschen Volkes.*” “Langsam wird man doch darauf kommen ...,” *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 23 (6.6.1942), 1.

¹³⁷ “*Wier [sic] erheben schärfsten Protest,*” *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 30 (25.7.1942), 1. Major campaigns were started by the *Volksbund* to encourage parents to give their children (hyper-) Germanic names. Consider: AMV/KB 532, “*Rückverdeutschung der Familiennamen,*” “*Rundschreiben 6/42*” from VDU Zombor (26.5.1942); AMV/KB 1206, newsletter, “*Gebt den Kindern deutsche Namen,*” signed Ing. Spreitzer. Sometimes, this propaganda seems to have been effective. Indeed, the Bauer siblings interviewed for this dissertation both had such overly Germanic names (drawn from Nordic hero legends) that their names caused them shame over the course of their lifetime. For this reason, their names’ anonymization does not reflect the original spirit of their given names.

¹³⁸ “*Was soll es aus einer solchen Jugend geben?,*” *Die Donau*, vol. 7, no. 13 (5.4.1941), 5.

the Batschka's pro-National Socialist press. One of his main opponents was Mathias Gass, founder and editor of Apatin's *Batschkaer Zeitung*.¹³⁹ In a weekly column entitled "Im Lichte des Scheinwerfers" ("In the Spotlight"), Berenz and his colleagues derided Gass and his pro-Nazi accomplices at the *Deutsches Volksblatt*, denouncing their "Weltanschauung" and the erosion that it had caused to the *Donauschwaben's* moral fabric.¹⁴⁰ Occasionally, attacks on Gass occupied entire front-page spreads in *Die Donau*. In July 1942, for instance, a full-page article was published which criticized the *Batschkaer Zeitung's* anti-Christian and anti-Hungarian attitudes: as (new) Hungarian citizens, it would be everyone's duty to exhibit nothing but loyalty, respect, and friendship towards the Hungarian state.¹⁴¹

Elaborate and scathing anti-Berenz responses were quick to follow. Unfortunately, almost none of the *Batschkaer Zeitung* issues have survived to the current day.¹⁴² One of the few extant issues, however, is almost entirely dedicated to "Herr Berencz-Berenz" ("Mr. Berencz-Berenz"), a man apparently so entrenched in pro-Hungarianism that the *Batschkaer Zeitung* referred to him with a Hungarian-German double name. Published on February 7th, 1942, the paper first of all circulated mockery and implicit calls to violence against Berenz. The "glowing preacher of hatred ... Berencz-Berenz," wrote Gass, was nothing but a "spiteful ... hater in priest's vestments," a man "with the sanctimonious demeanor of a censor commissioned by the Everafter."¹⁴³ Through his simultaneously "proud" and "misguided" words and actions, Berenz had long since turned himself into "a person expelled from the *volksdeutsche* community."¹⁴⁴ As such, he and his words in *Die Donau* were like "irritating flies, gnats, and other blood-sucking pests"—at some point, everyone would develop the urge "to hit them." "Yapping dogs," after all, "simply receive beatings."¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Mathias Gass had already founded the newspaper in 1899. He is currently still buried in Apatin's former German cemetery.

¹⁴⁰ Consider, for instance: "Im Lichte des Scheinwerfers," *Die Donau*, vol. 9, no. 49 (4.12.1943), 2.

¹⁴¹ "Nur nicht so naiv, meine Herren ..." *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 27 (4.7.1942), 1.

¹⁴² In all libraries and archives checked for this dissertation, only two issues of the *Batschkaer Zeitung* were available.

¹⁴³ "... glühende Haßprediger ... Hasser im Priesterkleide ... Herr Berencz-Berenz"; "... der scheinheiligen Miene eines jenseitsbeauftragten Sittenrichters." "So, Herr Berencz-Berenz, nun haben wir das Wort!," *Batschkaer Zeitung*, vol. 43, no. 6 (7.2.1942), 2-6.

¹⁴⁴ "... aus der volksdeutschen Gemeinschaft ausgestoßenen [sic] Menschen." "So, Herr Berencz-Berenz" (7.2.1942), 2.

¹⁴⁵ "... lästige Fliegen, Schnacken und andere blutsaugerische Plagegeister ... möchte man am liebsten selbst [sic] zuschlagen ... Kläffende Hunde kriegen eben Hiebe." "So, Herr Berencz-Berenz" (7.2.1942), 2.

The article, however, also presented its own interpretation of the *Donauschwaben*'s nationalization efforts over the past twenty years. The *Kulturbund*, claimed Gass, was not by definition opposed to Christianity. Indeed, from its foundation in 1920, "Catholic Germandom was loyal to the Church and appreciative of its priests." Whenever the *Kulturbund* held an event, a priest was present; after the *Partei der Deutschen* was inaugurated, the party immediately pushed for autonomous "*Religionsunterricht*" (religion classes) in schools; following *Kulturbund* youth meeting on Sundays and religious holidays, the youth formations always "marched ... to Mass." However, it was largely due to the Church's own activities that the region's Germans turned away from priestly authority. Indeed, when all German schools— including the religious institutions— were nationalized by Yugoslavia in 1920, the clergy did not "lift one finger" to help salvage the German school system. Instead, they immediately supported the "anti-German ... Bunjewatz" priest "Lajtscho Budanowitsch" (Lajčo Budanović). Even when Budanović ordered the creation of the "*Christusjugend*"— a thoroughly anti-German and anti-Hungarian enterprise— the region's German priests "expended the greatest possible efforts to lure the *Kulturbund* youth into these ... Slavic stultification endeavors [*slawischer Verdummungsbestrebungen*]." To add insult to injury, one of *Die Donau*'s patrons, the Habsburg Countess Henriette Chotek, then traveled between Catholic churches and convents to hold "foaming-at-the-mouth diatribes against the new German *Reich* ... in front of audiences that were infiltrated by Jews."¹⁴⁶ Perhaps, suggested the article, the reasons for young people's absence from Church events and participation in the *Erneuerer*'s Sunday excursions, meetings, and activities were to be found with Berenz's "anti-German politics." In any case, Berenz and his "*'Donau'-Weltanschauung*" were not to be equated with the Catholic Church.¹⁴⁷

Such condemnations notwithstanding, Berenz and his colleagues invested major time, resources, and labor into what remained of the potentially Church-loyal *Donauschwaben* youth. Even *Die Donau*, targeted at the Catholic *Donauschwaben* community at large, recurrently highlighted the activities and struggles of youth on its pages. Building on the image of a trans-national, Hungarian-loyal Catholicism, *Die Donau* published announcements by Hungary's bishops for the country's youth. In March

¹⁴⁶ "Die Gräfin Henriette Chotek ... hielt in katholischen Kirchen und Klöstern vor einem Publikum, das von Juden durchsetzt war (Palanka), geifernde Hetzreden gegen das neue Deutsche Reich." "So, Herr Berenz-Berenz" (7.2.1942), 3.

¹⁴⁷ "So, Herr Berenz-Berenz" (7.2.1942), 3.

1942, for example, a joint statement by Hungary's bishops urged *Die Donau's* youngest readers to become "heroes of [their] faith" and— under the Church's leadership— to become "warriors of God and role models of Christian virtue."¹⁴⁸ In this mission, parents, too, would need to assume certain responsibilities. Through their faith and guidance, parents were to prevent their children from being "seduced" by "enemy propaganda through the radio and anonymous flyers." A "foreign spirit" ("*fremder Geist*") had already "repeatedly attempted to recruit the youth." However, this "spirit" both ran counter to the "Christian Hungarian state" and to the efforts of the Catholic youth organizations, "which would never offer its youth to adventurous experiments." Ultimately, warned the bishops, "faithlessness would be the undertaker of our [alternative] fatherland."¹⁴⁹

To help mobilize Catholic youth, *Die Donau* printed announcements of upcoming events, such as the ongoing girls' and boys' pilgrimages to Doroslo (now spelled "Doroszló").¹⁵⁰ It reported on Catholic youth activities, such as festivities held by Futok's Catholic youth groups in honor of St. Aloisius on June 21st (a day on which the *Deutsche Jugend* presumably would have held their summer solstice celebrations).¹⁵¹ It celebrated the hosting of yet another joint *Christusjugend* and *Marienbund* Christmas event in Apatin, where Catholic youth organizations reportedly continued to "lead, teach, and raise children in a truly Christian spirit."¹⁵² It encouraged "boys and girls" to purchase the *Jugendruf* periodical, "the only German Catholic youth paper in the country," which had now been extended to a two-color, twenty-four-page monthly publication.¹⁵³

However, even more significantly, *Die Donau* publicly denounced those youth activities which it deemed unacceptable, and encouraged those young people who engaged in virtuous deeds to continue with their undertakings. In August 1942, the paper

¹⁴⁸ "... *Kämpfen Gottes und Vorbildern christlicher Tugend.*" "Gemeinsamer Hirtenbrief der Bischöfe Ungarns über die Erziehung der Jugend," *Die Donau* (14.3.1942), 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ "Der Unglaube war der Totengräber unseres Vaterlandes." "Gemeinsamer Hirtenbrief" (14.3.1942), 2.

¹⁵⁰ The town is close to a fountain that, since the Middle Ages, was believed to carry healing waters after the Virgin's appearance at the site. "Katholische Frauen und Mädchen!," *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 25 (20.6.1942), 3; "Auf nach Doroszló!," *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 26 (27.6.1942), 6; "Katholische Männer und Jungmänner!," *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 35 (29.8.1942), 7.

¹⁵¹ "Aus unseren Gauen," *Die Donau* (11.7.1942), 6. This confluence of events on June 21st once again illustrates the manner in which the Church had originally also appropriated pagan festivities and holidays.

¹⁵² "... *ihre Kinder in wahrhaft christlichem Geiste geführt, belehrt und erzogen werden.*" "Apatin-Christusjugend und Marienbund," *Die Donau* (2.1.1943), 7.

¹⁵³ "Der Jugendruf," *Die Donau* (7.2.1942), 3.



Fig. 6.3 The *Jugendruf* Periodical.
Caption: “Courage is a sword with which one conquers the world.” Source: *Jugendruf*. Vol. 9, No. 9 (September 1943).

condemned those “youth, who always tend towards radicalism,” who— apparently no longer “interested” enough in “smearing on walls and smashing windows”— had drawn eye glasses and mustaches and attached various accessories (hats, neckties, etc.) on the saints’ statues in Bácsszentiván/Batschsentiwan/Prigrevica.¹⁵⁴ In January 1943, a letter to the editor similarly described how boys now frequently scribbled words like “Judas” on their neighbors’ houses, engaged in stone-throwing, and no longer greeted the town priest with the customary “*Gelobt sei Jesus Christus!*” (“Praised be Jesus Christ!”). Such behavior, wrote the author, was unacceptable and was to be counteracted (if necessary) with corporal punishment (“*körperliche Züchtigung*”).¹⁵⁵ Later that month, another letter to the editor reported how Militics’s *Marienbund* and *Christusjugend* members were being bullied and teased. However, Catholic youth were not to slink away from such challenges; rather, they were to become “fighters for Christ, for the Church, and for our Catholic *Weltanschauung!*”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ “Die Sache wird immer klarer und eindeutiger ...,” *Die Donau*, vol. 8, no. 32 (8.8.1942), 1.

¹⁵⁵ “Stimmen aus dem Leserkreise,” *Die Donau*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2.1.1943), 6.

¹⁵⁶ “... Kämpfer zu sein für Christus, für die Kirche und für unsere katholische Weltanschauung!” “Stimmen aus dem Leserkreise,” *Die Donau*, vol. 9, no. 5 (31.1.1943), 5.

It was not only *Die Donau* that helped foster the development of such “fighters for Christ.” The *Jugendruf*— which had been published since 1934— not only continued, but expanded its journalistic efforts after 1941. Under the direction of Chaplain Mouillon (in Hodschag) and Chaplain Buschbacher (in Bácsszentiván), the *Jugendruf* departed only slightly from its late 1930s format and focus. New, after 1941, were primarily topics such as the *levente*, the ongoing war and the frontline sacrifices of *Donauschwaben* soldiers, and the continually rising threat of Bolshevism.¹⁵⁷ As in previous years, the *Jugendruf* also published announcements and reports related to the Catholic youth groups’ activities. Prominent here, too, were the male and female pilgrimages to Doroslo, a site of Marian apparitions, which in July 1942 had reportedly attracted some six thousand women and girls alone.¹⁵⁸ Both readers (in their letters to the editors) and the editors themselves further reported on the successful hosting of religious Christmas youth celebrations, weekly *Heimabende*, summer agricultural labor service, religious retreats in Futok and Palanka (which were apparently attended by 160 girls in March 1943), and the gathering of the local “German youth” under the *Christusjugend*’s banner.¹⁵⁹ The *Jugendruf* celebrated its volunteers in Bácsszentiván, the local Catholic girls’ group, who personally sent every *Jugendruf* issue to subscribers around the country. It encouraged Catholic youth to remain loyal to their church’s youth group and published chilling tales of regret by those who had turned their back against their *Marienbund* chapter.¹⁶⁰ In February 1944, the *Jugendruf* further lamented the plundering and burning by Partisans

¹⁵⁷ For more on the *levente*, see: “Die Landesleitung der Levente-Mädchen,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 8, no. 8 (9.1942), 184; “Der Landeskommendant der Levente-Jugend,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2.1942), 42; “Religiöses Leben der ungarischen Staatsjugend,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 9 (9.1943), 208; “Die Hilfsbereitschaft der Levente-Jugend,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 10, no. 6 (6.1944), 129; “Die Levente-Jugend von Budapest,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 10, no. 10 (10.1944), 195. For more on the ongoing war, consider: photo with caption on Johann Lenz from Bácszentiván, *Jugendruf*, vol. 8, no. 11/12 (12.1942), 258; “Soldatenglaube,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1.1943), 2; “An die scheidenden Soldaten,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 5 (5.1943), 109; “Kriegsweihnacht,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 12 (12.1943), 276. For articles on Bolshevism, see: “Was ist Kommunismus?” and “Sterbende Jugend,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 8, no. 3 (4.1942), 62-65; “Was ist Bolschewismus?,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 4 (4.1943), 96; “Bolschewismus und Familie,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 6 (6.1943), 132-133.

¹⁵⁸ “Über die Mädchen- und Frauenwallfahrt nach Maria-Doroszlo (5. Juli),” *Jugendruf*, vol. 8, no. 7 (8.1942), 158.

¹⁵⁹ Reports from individual towns on Christmas celebrations, *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1.1943), 18-19; editorial, *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 3 (3.1943), 50; “Jugendgruppen berichten,” *Jugendruf* (3.1943), 67; “Hundertsechzig Mädchen” and “Futaker Mädchen berichten über ihren Kurs,” *Jugendruf* (4.1943), 89, 91; “Ein Bauernmädchel aus der Südbatschka schreibt,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 7 (7.1943), 158; “Unter Christi Königsbanner,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 10 (10.1943), 219.

¹⁶⁰ *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 5 (5.1943), 107.

of the Trappist Maria-Stern monastery in Banja Luka, the former site of its youth leader education camps.¹⁶¹

Amid such reports was a clear message: the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* youth were not only to remain on the forefront of the Catholic crusade, but also to fashion themselves as a vanguard of local "Germandom." Unlike *Die Donau*, which primarily professed its loyalty to the Hungarian state, the *Jugendruf*'s main focus remained the German *Volk*, and youth's critical role in its reinforcement. Indeed, as the *Jugendruf* wrote in November 1943:

*Deutsch sein, heißt stark sein,
Heißt kämpfen fürs Recht,
Heißt alles verdammen,
Was niedrig und schlecht. [...]*

*Deutsch sein, heißt fromm sein,
Heißt glauben an Gott,
Heißt feststehen, nicht wanken,
Wenn die Hölle auch droht.*

*Deutsch sein, heißt Menschsein,
Heißt mitleidsvoll sein,
Herrgott, o lass mich
Ein Deutscher stets sein.¹⁶²*

Being German, according to the *Jugendruf*, was largely a matter of piousness and a steadfast Catholic comportment. Youth was thus urged to "stand with us, you German, Catholic youth!" and to form a "defensive wall" strong enough to withstand any measure of attack.¹⁶³ Famous German men of the past— like Goethe and Bismarck— already had realized that only Christian faith would lead to greatness; faithlessness, conversely, would lead to weakness and cowardliness.¹⁶⁴ Even the ancient "victorious Germanic tribes"

¹⁶¹ "Vom Sturm der Partisanenkämpfe," *Jugendruf*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2.1944), 30.

¹⁶² "To be German means to be strong, means to fight for [what is] right, means damning everything, which is lowly and bad ... To be German means to be devout, means to believe in God, means standing still and not wavering, even when Hell is threatening. To be German means to be human, means to be empathetic, dear God, oh let me always be a German." *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 11 (11.1943), back cover.

¹⁶³ "Trutz," *Jugendruf*, vol. 8, no. 6 (7.1942), back cover; "Junge, sei eine Burg," *Jugendruf* (8.1942), back cover.

¹⁶⁴ "So urteilen deutsche Männer," *Jugendruf* (4.1942), 58-59; "Die Bibel im Urteil Grosser Deutscher," *Jugendruf* (10.1943), back cover.



Fig. 6.4 *Jugendruf* Volunteers in Bácsszentiván.
Source: *Jugendruf*. Vol. 9, No. 5 (May 1943). p. 109.

(“*germanische Siegervölker*”) ultimately acknowledged this fact, and knelt in front of the “Lord-God.”¹⁶⁵ However, besides employing such cultural, religious, and historic motifs of Germanness, the *Jugendruf* also insisted on the importance of *Volk*, ancestry, and blood. As it proclaimed in April 1943: “He who denies our descent from Christ’s blood works toward our demise just as much as he who wants to deny our blood-based bond to the *Volk*.”¹⁶⁶ The Catholic youth groups’ work therefore was to be directed “to the Kingdom of Christ in *Volk* and homeland.”¹⁶⁷ Another 1943 article went even further. As it stated, unlike the Jews— who had once been the “chosen people,” before they turned against their calling and “brought [Christ] to the cross”— the Christians would have to loyally stand by the Lord and his commandments. “Any attempt to cast the Christian spirit out of the German kind [*Art*],” ultimately, would “be paid for with degeneracy [*Entartung*].”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ “Germanische Siegervölker,” *Jugendruf* (10.1943), 220-221.

¹⁶⁶ “Wer unsere Abstammung aus Christi Blut leugnet, der arbeitet genau so an unserem Untergang, wie derjenige, der unsere Blutsverbundenheit im Volke leugnen wollte.” *Jugendruf* (4.1943), 82.

¹⁶⁷ “Für Christi Reich in Volk und Heimat!,” *Jugendruf* (6.1943), back cover.

¹⁶⁸ “Jeder Versuch, christlichen Geist auszutreiben aus deutscher Art, bezahlt sich mit Entartung.” “Sind die Juden das ausserwählte Volk?,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 3 (3.1943), 55. For similar anti-Semitic sentiments, consider: “Man sagt,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 10, no. 6 (6.1944), 121. Such statements bear considerable similarities to the German Christians’ doctrines described by Bergen, particularly their anti-Semitic and pro-Aryan teachings that emphasized strength, manliness, and a “racially pure” virility. See: Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 61-68, 142-171.

Such sentiments reflected those of the *Deutsche Jugend* to an eerie extent by the early 1940s. Nevertheless, one of the *Jugendruf*'s main battles remained that against the spread of Nazi youth projects. The publication thus urged its readers to attend Mass on Sundays and no alternate (*Deutsche Jugend*) programs, to pray every day, and to avoid the “idolatrous” behavior that had otherwise become so common among youth.¹⁶⁹ Some of its articles discussed the superiority of God’s commandments over any worldly, man-made “*Weltanschauung*,” and threatened that turning away from the Catholic Church would not only entail treason to one’s family and community, but also bring about ultimate hellfire.¹⁷⁰ In their admonishments, the *Jugendruf*'s editors were also often gender-specific. In July 1944, for instance, Moullion and Buschbacher wrote an editorial that criticized girls’ involvement in mass sports events. “Girls’ gymnastics,” the editors claimed, “should only be carried out in halls or in open spaces where the public is excluded.” Gymnastics shows and competitions for girls were to be rejected; exercising and bathing in unsuitable clothing, too, was to be avoided, as such activities would “awaken an entirely unfeminine way.”¹⁷¹ Ultimately, it was only through a stringent adherence to Catholic morality, and to God, Christ, and the Virgin, that youth would find themselves victorious against the perils of “insanity ... faithlessness, and neo-heathenism.”¹⁷²

Battles between the Church and the National Socialists were not only conducted in the press. Such conflicts were also carried out in the *Donauschwaben* communities. Reports of these contestations were preserved in reports written both by the *Volksbund* and the *Donauschwaben* priests. In its newsletters, correspondence, and reports, the *Volksbund* kept a very close eye on the Church’s activities, reporting regularly on measures that were taken to decrease its influence. In August 1942, for instance, Hodschag’s VDU reported that while *Die Donau* was still “widely circulated,” the *Volksbund* was “trying wherever possible to decrease the number of subscribers.” Luckily, at least the youth was now nearly entirely “with us”; the “*Schwarzfront*” (“black front,” comprising Catholics and “*Magyaroner*”), was now almost exclusively composed

¹⁶⁹ “Das erste und wichtigste am Sonntag ist die heilige Messe!” *Jugendruf* (8.1942), 150-151; “Schützen und Schätzen,” *Jugendruf* (11.1943), 252-254.

¹⁷⁰ “Was ist Weltanschauung?,” *Jugendruf* (4.1942), 51; “Warum bin und bleibe ich katholisch?,” *Jugendruf* (1.1943), 6-7.

¹⁷¹ “... sie wecken zumeist ganz unweibliche Art.” “Mädchenturnen,” *Jugendruf* (7.1944), 138.

¹⁷² “Unser Aufbruch,” *Jugendruf*, vol. 9, no. 9 (9.1943), 196.

Fig. 6.5 Photos from a Pilgrimage to Doroslo.
Source: *Jugendruf*. Vol. 8, No. 7 (August 1942). p. 158.



of “old broads” (“*alten Weiber*”).¹⁷³ The following month, Hodschag’s VDU similarly reported that the annual young men’s pilgrimage to “Doroszlo” had taken place; however, very few people had attended the event, and many of those were not youngsters, but “old men.” As the participants held their processions through various *Donauschwaben* towns, conflicts occasionally erupted: in one village, wrote Hodschag’s VDU leader, people shouted at the procession, claiming that “you’re only going there [to Doroslo] because you don’t want to emigrate [to the Third Reich]” (something, as we shall see, that was promised to those who “volunteered” for the German military).¹⁷⁴ Once the Third Reich

¹⁷³ AMV/KB 610, “Taetigkeitsbericht” by VDU *Kreisleitung* Hodschag (16.8.1942).

¹⁷⁴ AMV/KB 629, “Taetigkeitsbericht vom 15. Aug. bis zum 15. Sept. [1]942” by VDU *Kreisleitung* Hodschag.

had reached the Batschka— with the occupation of Hungary in March 1944— such monitoring of Church activities did not subside. On the contrary, as Szond’s VDU reported triumphantly in August 1944, “the Church in our community has been cut off from the rest of the world, is no longer making propaganda.” While this seemed like a success, certain Church authorities nevertheless continued to make *Kulturbund*-critical remarks, claiming publicly that the organization was meddling in too many affairs and was hence doomed to failure.¹⁷⁵

Church authorities, too, kept records about the unfolding Church-*Volksbund* conflict. Already during the 1930s, priests like Filipowa’s Peter Müller had maintained an annual log of their communities’ activities, reporting on the establishment of the *Kulturbund*, the increasing *Reich* presence in their towns, and the rise of the “*Erneuerer*” (such as of Filipowa’s National Socialist teacher, Martin Braun).¹⁷⁶ After 1941, such topics dominated accounts like those by Peter Müller. As Müller described, following the April 1941 armed conflicts between Yugoslav, Hungarian, and German forces, the taking of (pro-*Kulturbund*) hostages in Filipowa, and the Batschka’s incorporation into Hungary, Filipowa’s inhabitants primarily turned against one another. Especially from February 1942 onwards— when the region’s ethnic German SS recruitments were made official— Filipowa was divided by violence and conflict between pro-*Kulturbund* and “*Schwarze*” factions. Windows were smashed regularly, and flyers were distributed with inscriptions like: “He who reads *Die Donau*, he who twists the *Führer*’s reputation and uses it for his own dirty purposes, that [person] is an enemy of Germandom.”¹⁷⁷

Priests themselves occasionally directly involved themselves in these conflicts, provoking the *Volksbund*’s ire. In August 1942, for instance, Peter Müller urged the congregation in one of his sermons to revoke their *Kulturbund* membership if they did not want to be forced to emigrate to the *Reich* one day. That same evening, a group of men— including the town’s “*Kulturbund*” head, the school director, and various other “*Erneuerer*”— paraded to the priest’s home, demanding to speak to him. After he refused to greet them, the men apparently marched to a nearby field, held a “big demonstration,” and demanded the priest be hanged. Even Belgrade’s radio station eventually reported on

¹⁷⁵ AMV/KB 1143, “Bericht” from Szond (5.8.1944).

¹⁷⁶ For more on this, see the interwar dissertation chapters. *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo Bački Gračac in territorio Dioecesis Bačiensis sitae*, ABV. Martin Braun— also discussed in this chapter’s school section— is mentioned as an “*Erneuerer*” and youth agitator on page 37 of Filipowa’s parochial history.

¹⁷⁷ “*Wer die Donau liest, der den Ruf des Führers verdreht und für seine schmutzige Zwecke gebraucht, der ist deutschfeindlich.*” *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 49.

this incident, condemning this “parson [*Pfaffe*] who politicizes from his pulpit.”¹⁷⁸ Afterwards, attacks against priests like Müller continued. Müller’s windows were smashed in December 1942. Following the *Wehrmacht*’s 1944 entry into the Batschka, priests were called to serve in the *Waffen-SS*. Bukin’s Chaplain Paul Pfuhl, wrote Müller, thus was arrested in July 1944 and forced to undergo a military medical examination. The priest protested, claiming (mistakenly) that as a Hungarian citizen, he would not be required to join the SS. As Müller concluded, “everything is like a madhouse.”¹⁷⁹

Priests’ anti-*Volksbund* stance carried tangible consequences for them. Already in April 1942, the Batschka’s VDU headquarters in Sombor had ordered its branches to send a list of the “blind, dumb, imbecile, and Jews” in their communities.¹⁸⁰ Such lists were quick to follow, were continuously updated and—especially following Germany’s arrival in Hungary in March 1944— were extended to list all “*Volksverräter*” (“traitors to the *Volk*”) and “*Gegner des Deutschtums*” (“opponents to Germanism”) with their name, address, and (occasionally) a brief description of their offence. Such “infractions” included not joining the *Volksbund*, being married to a Jew, being a “Serb” or “100% communist,” having a Magyarized name, or refusing to join the German military forces.¹⁸¹ In some cases, the “most dangerous *Volksverräter*” were listed separately, and the names of those “who will not stop their treason to the German *Volk* until a stop is put to their activities” were underlined in red.¹⁸² Both before and after March 1944, clergymen were placed on these lists: Hodschag’s priest Josef Nägele was thus blacklisted as a “*Volksverräter*,” as was Vajska’s priest (“Dr. Petö Benö”), who was listed as a

¹⁷⁸ *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 49. This incident is also described in: *Heimatbuch: Filipowa—Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 280-281.

¹⁷⁹ “Alles ist wie ein Narrenhaus,” *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 52.

¹⁸⁰ AMV/KB 500, “Blinden, Taubstumme, Schwachsinnige und Juden,” letter from VDU *Gebietsleitung* Batschka to VDU *Kreisleitung* Hodschag (22.4.1942).

¹⁸¹ AMV/KB 281, “Namensverzeichnis derjenigen die noch nie Mitglied des Volksbundes waren [sic]”; AMV/KB 279, “Namensliste der Volksverräter der Ortsgruppe-Hodschag” [sic]; AMV/KB 282, “Verzeichnis der Juden mit Angabe ihrer Wohnung”; AMV/KB 282, “Verzeichnis der gefährlichsten Gegner mit Angabe ihrer Wohnung”; AMV/KB 1008, “Liste der Juden,” from Szilberek; AMV/KB 1008, “Liste der gefährlichen Volksverräter mit Angabe der Wohnung” [sic] (1.4.1944); AMV/KB 1081, “Namensliste [sic] der gegen das Deutsche Volk und deren Kriegführung Feindlichgesindten [sic] Personen aus Vajska, Bogyan”; AMV/KB 1080, “Juden in Paripasch,” letter from VDU Paripas (31.3.1944); AMV/KB 1080, “Namensverzeichnis und Wohnort der Volksverräter von der OG-Gutacker,” from VDU Paripas (31.4.1944); AMV/KB 1080, “Polit. Gegner.,” from VDU Paripas (31.3.1944). Unless otherwise noted, most of these lists are unfortunately undated; their approximate date can be reconstructed based on the street names (which were Germanized after March 1944).

¹⁸² AMV/KB 283, “Liste der gefährlichsten Volksverräter” from Szilberek.

“dangerous traitor to the *Volk*” both under Hungarian and German occupation.¹⁸³ In some cases, blacklisting by the National Socialist authorities did not remain a rhetorical exercise. On May 22nd, 1944, the Gestapo arrested Adam Berenz and imprisoned him in a cell in Sombor. Upon the intervention of the Archbishop of Kalocsa, József Grósz—who asked the Hungarian interior minister for Berenz’s release— Berenz was discharged the next day. The Archbishop personally drove Berenz to Kalocsa, where he remained until his death in 1968.¹⁸⁴

Between 1941 and 1944, conflicts between the Catholic Church and the *Volksbund*— which already had been brewing and bubbling to the surface during the 1930s— reached a boiling point. In the press, the *Volksbund* and the Catholic Church engaged in heated mutual denunciations, staking out definitions of “Germandom” that— despite increasing similarities— were framed as antagonistic and exclusive to either party’s sphere of influence. Such conflicts, however, were not merely an intellectual exercise; rather, they were carried out in the *Donauschwaben* villages, as youth and “*Erneuerer*” activists engaged in vandalism and violence against each other. Yet, despite such rich archival accounts on the Church’s youth and anti-Nazi activities, certain gaps remain. While the Catholic youth press has preserved some illustrations of the activities and ideology of groups like the *Marienbund* and *Christusjugend*, there is no information as to the composition of these groups after 1941. Occasionally, the press reported attendance numbers for specific events; however, there are no available statistics on the number of youth enrolled in Catholic youth organizations as a whole. Furthermore, while papers like the *Jugendruf* made claims to maintaining a “German” purity, evidence suggests that the Batschka’s German Catholic youth organizations between 1941 and 1944 were much more inclusive. Indeed, in the Batschka’s German Catholic youth libraries (preserved today at the *Deutscher Bürgerverein “Adam Berenz”*), the books’ library loan cards frequently contain Hungarian borrowers’ names. Scraps of paper nestled between these books’ pages— which were used as bookmarks during the early 1940s and never touched again— were drawn from Hungarian-language journals and newspapers, suggesting (at the very least) a quotidian contact with the non-German

¹⁸³ AMV/KB 282, “Verzeichnis der gefährlichen Gegner mit Angabe ihrer Wohnung”; AMV/KB 1081, “Nahmensliste der gegen das Deutsche Volk ...”; AMV/KB 1080, “Volksverräter,” letter (31.4.1944).

¹⁸⁴ Merkl, *Weitblick eines Donauschwaben*, 9-11.

press.¹⁸⁵ Despite the youth press' claims to a "German" Catholicism, it therefore seems that in practice, the Batschka's German Catholic youth groups were also open to individuals less easily classified as purely "German."

Another major gap relating to the Batschka's churches after 1941 exists in relation to the Protestant denominations. While much has been preserved in the press and the archives regarding the Catholic Church, almost no sources are available in relation to the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches' activities among the *Donauschwabern* youth. In part, this archival lacuna may have arisen from a historic absence: by the late 1930s, as we have seen, most public Protestant (especially Lutheran) youth projects had floundered and failed. In part, however, such absences might be explained through a lack of preservation efforts: the *Deutscher Bürgerverein "Adam Berenz"*, which hosts most of the Catholic sources used in this dissertation, only began to receive Protestant collections in 2014, as the Archive of Sombor gave up those sources from its basement storage.¹⁸⁶ It is here that oral history once again becomes valuable. For individual memories carried into the present more detailed recollections of Protestant youth activities, the continued multiethnic nature of the "German" Catholic Church, and the local impact of Church-*Volksbund* conflict.

3. Oral History Perspectives

a. Protestants

The Batschka's Protestant churches— whether Lutheran, Calvinist, or Methodist— had all initiated their own youth programs and publications during the interwar period. However, and largely due to the simultaneous rise of pro-Nazi youth programs, most of the larger, public attempts at organizing the *Donauschwabern* youth under a Protestant church's umbrella had failed. After 1941, however, religious devotion and activities did not flounder completely; even in the memories of former Protestant *Donauschwabern* children and youth, the Church thus plays a prominent role.

In the narratives of *Donauschwabern* interviewees, their former communities are always painted as having been highly religious. This was as true for Protestant

¹⁸⁵ Library of the ABV.

¹⁸⁶ Author's own experience while on a research mission in Apatin and Sombor in September 2014, over the week of this delivery. All other libraries and archives consulted over the course of this research also barely contained any Protestant sources for the period 1941-1944.

communities as it was for Catholic ones. As Johann Weber recalled, his native Torschau was composed of Calvinists and Lutherans. Both denominations not only had their own church, but their own streets within the town. In his grandparents' generation, explained Johann, Calvinist and Lutheran families had still been reluctant to intermingle; marriages between the Protestant denominations were extremely rare. However, by his parents' generation, these restrictions had been lifted. His own mother was a Lutheran and his father a Calvinist— Johann and his sister therefore were baptized in their father's faith. However, explained Johann, this caused no problems when they attended church on Sunday mornings. As both churches were built across the street from each other, families like theirs could simply congregate in the middle and then walk to their own denomination's service.¹⁸⁷

Even during the early 1940s, Johann's family attended church regularly. Religion, explained Johann, had always been important to them. Especially his mother's (Lutheran) parents were "very pious" ("*sehr fromm*") and "diligent churchgoers" ("*fleissige Kirchgänger*"). They firmly believed that one must "live the Gospel," and not just appear to Sunday services in elegant attire and then begin fighting as soon as church ended. Following in her father's footsteps, Johann's mother sang in a Lutheran choir. "She was an excellent soprano," elaborated Johann, and when she was younger "she traveled around the entire Batschka" with the choir. Though his father was slightly less devout, it is no surprise that Johann, too, was introduced to his town's church programs from a young age.

As Johann recalled, Torschau had a religious "*Jungschar*." At his young age (he was born in 1937), this group's main activities consisted of "youth church" ("*Jugendkirche*") services, which were held every Sunday directly before the main service. There, the kids were introduced to "the holy scripture [...] and the commandments and all that ... as far as one understands that as a child." Following the children's service, the entire congregation entered the church— Johann thereafter was free to either remain seated with the children's group, or to join his father and sister in a pew further towards the back of the church. Occasionally, this children's group "met during the afternoon"; however, not much else was organized for children Johann's age. However, the "bigger ones," who had already entered third or fourth grade, held additional "meetings" ("*Zusammenkünfte*"). Johann did not know what these older cohorts did— after all, in

¹⁸⁷ Weber, interview.

light of his expulsion at age seven, he ultimately never had a chance to join in on their activities.¹⁸⁸

Older Calvinist youth who would have qualified in age for formations like the “*Jungschar*” did not join them, for a variety of reasons. As Johanna Koch recalled, her hometown of Sivac had a Lutheran, a Calvinist, and a Catholic church. During her childhood, “people were very religious [*gläubig*],” especially within her grandparents’ and parents’ generation. Kindergarteners like the young Johanna attended Sunday school, which was held immediately after the main Sunday service; a religious choir sang in her town; and generally, the Church and its council (“*Rat*”) were very prominent during her childhood. Once she moved to Werbass to attend the *Bürgerschule*, however, religion seems to have moved to the background of Johanna’s life. Pocket money, pastries, and the cinema thus dominate Johanna’s accounts of her Sundays in Werbass; the “BDM,” and not the religious youth programs, engaged Johanna. Indeed, after 1941, one of Johanna’s most prominent memories of the Church was related to her family’s acquisition of an “*Ahnenpass*” (“ancestral certificate”). “My father wanted to go out to Germany,” Johanna explained, “and [for that] we needed an *Ahnenpass*, to [certify that we are] *rein arisch* [‘purely Aryan’].” Johanna and her mother therefore went to the church office, which had kept records of their family from the seventeenth century onwards, to receive certification of their German heritage. “Dreadful!” (“*scheusslich!*”), “all the things that are in there,” Johanna laughed. In any case, she kept the *Ahnenpass* for the rest of her life, as it reminded her of her family’s history in a region that now, to them, is lost.¹⁸⁹

Other girls who attended school in *Werbass* similarly experienced changes related to their daily interactions with the Church. Anne Wirth, born to a Calvinist mother and a Lutheran father (and thereby Lutheran herself), recalled how her hometown of Tschervenka had a Catholic, a Lutheran, and a Calvinist church. Most of her town’s Catholics were Hungarians, explained Anne, while the town’s Germans belonged to one of the Protestant denominations. Already during her parents’ generation, it had become common for the different Protestant denominations to marry among each other. Religion, emphasized Anne, was very important— “we had a big faith,” she explained. Indeed, when she fled the Batschka in October 1944, one of the few items she packed was the large family Bible. As a child, Anne had sung in a church choir; while she was still in

¹⁸⁸ Weber, interview.

¹⁸⁹ Koch, interview.

Kindergarten, she further went to Sunday school every week. However, upon enrolling in Werbass' *Bürgerschule*, the teenager's daily schedule became dominated by sports events and school. Religious youth groups, it seems, did not exist at all.¹⁹⁰

Relocation to one of the Batschka's (pro-Nazi) school centers seems to have exacerbated young people's more general, age-related movement away from religious activities. However, a migration away from the ecclesiastical seems to have affected broader swathes of *Donauschwaben* society, too. Anna Kirschner— another former Werbass student— thus presented an elaborate narrative of the general decline of religiosity within the *Donauschwaben* communities. A Calvinist, she agreed that prior to her parents' generation, "it was not seen positively" ("*nicht gern gesehen*") when a Lutheran and a Calvinist married. However, by the time she was a child, the Batschka's Protestants generally did not care about such divisions anymore. Anna attended church every Sunday while she was still in Schowe's primary school, as this was required of all pupils. However, upon completing primary school and moving to Werbass (where she stayed with a Methodist family), Anna no longer attended church services regularly, choosing instead to watch sports events on Sundays. Anna, however, was not alone in her absence from church. As she claimed, even in Schowe, "few people went to church" during the early 1940s. The Calvinist priest himself, she explained, had "connections" to the Pfalz, the region in Germany whence the village's settlers and dialect had originated. Already in 1936, with Schowe's 150-year settlement anniversary, the priest had helped bring "*reichsdeutsche*" guests to Schowe. Apparently "Dr. Janko" even married a girl from Schowe at the event, which Anne had attended.¹⁹¹ Already in continuous contact with "*Reichsdeutsche*," and faced by increasingly empty churches— Anna claimed— even the priests purportedly joked that they only continued going to church because it was their job. By the early 1940s, individuals were no longer concerned so much by religious matters or about who belonged to which particular confession. "In the final years, things became blurred," Anna explained; "one became more generous ... especially the youth came together socially and ... one no longer saw any [religious] differences."¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Wirth, interview.

¹⁹¹ For more on the wedding and marriage between Janko and Magdalena Petri from Schowe, see: "Dr. Sepp Janko 90 Jahre alt," *Das Donautal-Magazin*, no. 82 (1.11.1995), 27.

¹⁹² "*Aber es hat sich so verwischt in die letzten Jahre [...] Da war man grosszügiger ... die Jugend ist mehr zusammengekommen gesellschaftlich und da ... hat man dann keinen Unterschied gesehen.*" Kirschner, interview.

In the narratives of both Lutherans and Calvinists, a general secularization— and a concomitant decline in conflicts between the various *Donauschwaben* confessions— is thus prominent.¹⁹³ As in the Western Banat, youth seem to have been most affected. Especially individuals who travelled to Werbass and who thus— in the midst of their youth— suddenly found themselves outside of their traditionally church-driven environments, no longer remained active within the Protestant churches’ activities. Despite such changes, none of the Protestant interviewees recalled any major conflicts between the churches and organizations like the *Volksbund*. With the exception of Johann, youth groups like the *Jungchar* further seem to have dropped entirely from these individuals’ radars after 1941. As we shall see, this is the main way in which the narratives of Protestant and Catholic *Donauschwaben* differ.

b. Catholics

As Jakob Winzer stated, he had “the blessing of a late birth.”¹⁹⁴ Born in 1939, Jakob had been too young to truly experience and understand the conflicts that wrought his native Filipowa during the early 1940s. He was too young, furthermore, to remember in great detail his brother’s enlistment (and eventual death) in the German military forces, or the early details of his internment in a Partisan camp after October 1944. Nevertheless, Jakob spoke at great length— in stories he both experienced as a child and reconstructed as an adult— on the history of his town, the interwar and World War II years, and the role of the Church.

The Catholic Church, explained Jakob, traditionally had been a bedrock of Filipowa’s society. It was common, he elaborated, for Filipowa’s families to have up to fifteen children; he and his three older siblings were an exceptionally small group in their community. Indeed, under the “thousand-year *Reich*, some (in quotation marks) very good Germans wanted to re-name the town into ‘*Kindlingen*’” (from the word “*Kind*,” or “child”). The town had a convent school, which allowed even large families to educate their children, as well as a Kindergarten, which he had attended. The priest, Jakob

¹⁹³ National Socialism, in this sense, can be seen as occurring within a broader trend of twentieth-century secularization.

¹⁹⁴ “*Die Gnade einer späten Geburt.*” Winzer, interview. Jakob here echoes the statement made by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and others of his generation on the (exculpatory) “blessing of a late birth.” For a discussion of this, see: Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 193.

claimed, was “the main person in the village; he counted more than the mayor ... or a teacher or doctor.”¹⁹⁵ Since Filipowa’s foundation in 1763, only three marriages had been dissolved by divorce (by the Vatican council). While it was rare for Germans to marry anyone but a German, what truly counted— according to Jakob— was a person’s faith: Catholicism joined Catholicism, and family wealth joined family wealth.¹⁹⁶ Filipowa’s society, generally, “was very pious, barely critical,” and largely embedded within an “arch-conservative, blindly obedient, local Catholicism.”¹⁹⁷

According to Jakob, even the war years and the *Kulturbund*’s agitation could do little to change Filipowa’s largely religious dynamics. Certainly, *Kulturbund* activists—who had studied in places like Stuttgart, Vienna, Graz, or Marburg— had brought pro-National Socialist, racist, and anti-clerical ideas into the region. However, the “*Kulturbund* could not change everything [or] convert an established community [‘*Ortsgemeinschaft*’] in a just a few years.” People, after all, “were no wavering reeds! They were embedded in their faith.” As a result, the “*Kulturbündler*” did not “come like prophets from the Old Testament, and simply turn around people!”; they also did not arrive like the missionary Bonifatius, who converted the Germanic tribes near Fulda by chopping down their sacred Wotan oak.¹⁹⁸ As Jakob warned, “one should not overestimate the [*Kulturbund*’s] influence!”

Nevertheless, certain changes and conflicts did occur during the late 1930s and early 1940s. As Jakob recalled, it used to be common for people to greet the priest with “*gelobt sei Jesus Christus!*” (“praised be Jesus Christ!”), whereupon the priest would respond with “*in Ewigkeit, amen*” (“in eternity, amen”). However, during the “*Hitlerzeit*” (“Hitler time”), some young “zealots” (“*Eiferer*”) began to greet the priest with “*Heil Hitler!*” Chuckling, Jakob remembered that the priest would then respond: “*in Ewigkeit, amen.*” This priest, recalled Jakob, was Peter Müller, a man who “was not very interested

¹⁹⁵ “*Der Pfarrer war die Hauptperson im Dorf. Der hat mehr gegolten als der Bürgermeister ... oder ein Lehrer oder Arzt oder so was.*” Winzer, interview.

¹⁹⁶ “*Entscheidender wäre gewesen, ob sie katholisch ist!*”; “*Da sollte Besitz zu Besitz zusammen kommen.*” Winzer, interview.

¹⁹⁷ “*Die Leute waren sehr fromm in der Regel, sehr gläubig, wenig kritisch*”; “*Diesem erkonservativen, kadavergehorsamen örtlichen Katholizismus.*” Winzer, interview.

¹⁹⁸ “*Die Leute waren ja keine ... keine wackelnden Schilfrohre! Die waren ja gefestigt im Glauben ihrer Überzeugungen ... Das war nicht so, dass da die ... die Kulturbündler wie alttestamentliche Propheten gekommen sind! Und die Leute einfach umdrehen konnten! ... Oder wie der Missionar Bonifatius, der die Wotan-Eiche bei Fulda gefällt hat, und dann wurden die ... die Wotan-Gläubigen äh ... Germanen, ham’ dann gestaunt, dass der Wotan nicht eingreift!*” Wotan (Odin) is a god in Germanic mythology, and a main character of the *Nibelungenlied*, as featured in Wagner’s operas.

in the national maintenance of the Batschka” and who spoke better Hungarian than German.¹⁹⁹ Apparently, Peter Müller had even Magyarized his name by placing diacritics on his name’s “e”s (signing his name “Pétér,” not “Peter”).²⁰⁰ Plenty of people like Müller existed in Filipowa, explained Jakob. These so-called “*Magyaroner*” were generally individuals who had come into contact with the Hungarian nationality (“*Ungarntum*”) and who had Magyarized their names to qualify for state positions. As a child, he had heard the term and was under the impression that a “*Magyaroner*” was something bad. Sometimes, recalled Jakob, the word was used as a curse word. While the “personality that stood behind [the term]” was often highly educated and respected, Filipowa’s inhabitants nonetheless made critical remarks, stating: “Well, he and his children are lost to Germandom!”²⁰¹

Particularly after the *Kulturbund* had been “turned around a bit in the National Socialist sense,” Peter Müller initiated certain measures to save the town’s youth. The *Kulturbund*, explained Jakob, had replaced the previously popular football with handball in his town. The priest, “who did not like to see the influence of the *Kulturbund* and the *Reich*,” therefore offered a football and a parcel of parochial land (for use as a pitch) to the town’s youth. Furthermore, a Catholic youth organization existed in *Filipowa*, the “*Marienmädchen-Jugend*” (“Mary’s girls’ youth”). The organization participated in a range of events, engaged in religious exercises, and helped organize the town’s *Kirchweihfest*, held on August 16th (Saint Roch’s feast day).

However, it seems like Filipowa’s young were not particularly attracted to the Church. At least partially, this was probably due to the Church’s highly conservative nature, mixed with Peter Müller’s own domineering personality. As Jakob explained, the priest kept close records of the town’s birth rate. If the birth rate declined, he confronted his congregation, asking “where are the others?” Sexual education was seen as taboo. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, elaborated Jakob, some of the town’s men began returning from temporary employment in German factories, bringing a copy of Theodoor Hendrik van de Velde’s *The Perfect Marriage* with them.²⁰² The book “traveled from hand to hand” quite quickly, so that the priest heard about it. He then “thundered from

¹⁹⁹ “... an der nationalen Erhaltung in der Batschka wenig interessiert.” Winzer, interview.

²⁰⁰ At least in Peter Müller’s handwritten parochial history, this is not the case.

²⁰¹ “*Na ja, der und seine Kinder sind für’s Deuschtum verloren!*” Winzer, interview.

²⁰² Van de Velde’s sexual education book was first published in 1926 and placed on the Catholic Church’s list of forbidden books.

the pulpit that an un-Christian, shameless book is making the rounds.” As Jakob explained, such conservatism caused consternation among people who were not “one hundred fifty percent faithful to the Church” (“*kirchgläubig*”). Occasionally, this even led to violent incidents, like one Sunday morning, when *Kulturbund* enthusiasts disturbed Mass by firing bullets outside the church. Yet, as Jakob emphasized, the *Kulturbund* could not change everything during those years. Things might have looked differently, however, had the Third Reich not collapsed.²⁰³

A very different narrative was presented by Katharina Schiffer. Born in the Batschka’s German Catholic center, Apatin, Katharina had been raised religiously. Her father was Adam Berenz’s childhood friend— as young boys, they would board the Danube’s ships, which anchored in Apatin, and steal sugar from the food merchants. It was therefore also Adam Berenz who married Katharina and her husband when she was seventeen, and gave her a crucifix that still adorns her living room today. When Katharina’s daughter was born a few years later, it was also Berenz who baptized her first child. Adam Berenz, said Katharina, was a kind and intelligent man, and very funny, capable of entertaining entire crowds with his sense of humor. As she recalled, he was also “a very good priest” who spoke out against the “Nazis” in his publication, *Die Donau*.

Chaplain of Apatin’s Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Berenz was one of two main priests in the town, the other being Jakob Egerth, Abbot of Apatin’s older church in the town center. As Katharina explained, only Hungarians and “those Germans who were *not* for Hitler, meaning not for National Socialism” went to Berenz’s church.²⁰⁴ He was a very good preacher, she recalled, and he spoke out against the *Kulturbund* in a way that did not offend or judge anyone, but rather encouraged individuals to be more humane and good to one another.²⁰⁵ Despite his moderate demeanor, he provoked the *Kulturbund*’s anger: sometimes, when she went to church, pro-Nazi “girls” and “boys” would march outside the church in uniform, singing “the Hitlerite songs” (“*hitlerschen Lieder*”). Laughing, Katharina remarked that she liked one of them in particular: “*Es ist so schön, Soldat zu sein ... Rosemarie.*”²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Winzer, interview.

²⁰⁴ “*Die Deutschen, die was ... nid! Für de Hitler waren, also nid fü’ der Nationalsozial-, sozialismus [...] und die Ungaren!*” Schiffer, interview.

²⁰⁵ “*Er hat ned ... jemand beschimpft oder jemand verurteilt! Oder so, sondern mehr ... von mehr, mer soll ... menschlich sein! Gut sein! Einem anderen helfen!*” Schiffer, interview.

²⁰⁶ “*It’s so nice to be a soldier, Rosemarie.*” The song was a popular German soldiers’ marching song.

Apatin's "*Donauschwaben*" society, explained Katharina, was bifurcated between pro-Nazi "*Braune*" ("browns") and anti-Nazi, Church-loyal "*Schwarze*" ("blacks"). The gulf that opened between these factions ran right through families. When Katharina got married, for instance, her relatives (her father's sister's family) who were "big Nazis" ("*grosse Nazis*") initially refused to attend her wedding as Berenz would be there. Eventually, they agreed to attend the wedding meal; however, they declined to sit near Berenz, instead confining themselves to the fringes of the wedding party. Families "on Hitler's side" ("*für Hitlers Seit*") painted signs on their houses to declare their loyalty—"V! Victoria!, right?" Katharina's home did not have such a sign; however, most of Apatin's German houses did. Over the course of the war, explained Katharina, the "pro-Hitler" side became stronger and stronger. Finally, Berenz barely spoke about the *Kulturbund* in his sermons anymore. Eventually, he was even "interned" ("*interniert*"), before escaping to Kalocsa. "He never returned to Apatin again," Katharina stated ruefully.²⁰⁷

Considering such illustrations of conflict within Apatin's *Donauschwaben* community, it is astonishing how seldom such divisions appear in other individuals' memories. Resi Gerber's narrative presents one case in point. A former DJ *Kameradschaftsführerin* who considered herself a "big German" ("*grosse Deutsche*"), Resi was adamant that conflicts did not exist within Apatin's *Donauschwaben* society. Originally, she had come from quite a religious family. When she was very young and her family still lived in Bački-Monoštor, she fell so ill she almost died. Terrified, her father swore that he would make a pilgrimage to Apatin's black Madonna if his daughter recovered. Resi recuperated, and on a pilgrimage he went. Years later, Resi was still in the *Marienbund*, but "then the *Kulturbund* came," so "of course"—being a "big German"—she stopped participating in the religious youth group. Resi had no idea whether the *Marienbund* even existed after 1941—"one did not really care about them anymore, because one was largely in the *Kulturbund*."²⁰⁸ However, she did recall that the *Marienbund*'s leader, Katica Kuntics, apparently had an affair with a priest from a

²⁰⁷ Schiffer, interview.

²⁰⁸ "Dann sind, hat mer sich so nümme um die gekümmert, weil mir ja, des war ja dann überwiegend war ja s'Kulturbund dann." Gerber, interview.

neighboring village, a romantic entanglement that purportedly lasted well into the postwar period.²⁰⁹

As Resi recalled, “everything was peaceful” (“*war alles Friede!*”) until October 1944. Neighbors lived in solidarity with their neighbors, and within the German community, “there were no fights [...] or debates.” Everyone who was “German” simply joined the *Kulturbund*. Certainly, there were some exceptions. Adam Berenz, for instance, “did not like the Germans, or the *Hitler-Jugend*, very much.” However, Berenz was just a “*Schwowe*” (“Swabian”). Resi herself attended Mass in Apatin’s older church in the upper part of town, the church that was not Berenz’s— “that church was of course more beautiful, the one in the upper part of town.”²¹⁰ Resi had never even been to the lower church, primarily because her church was closer to the town center— the place where she lived, and where “everything,” including the *Kulturbund* home, was located.²¹¹

Despite such narratives of largely peaceful intra-German coexistence, memories of bifurcation within the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* communities are more common. Georg Schneider, for instance, recalled how there were two cultural centers (“*Vereinshaus*”) for youth in his hometown, Kernei. One belonged to the *Kulturbund*, the other to the Catholic church. Youth, explained Georg, only went to one of those, “so that there were hardly any contacts anymore” between those two groups. According to Georg, the majority of youth were *Deutsche Jugend* members— indeed, even in adult Church groups like the women’s *Rosenkranzverein*, members left *en masse* during the early 1940s, as they felt like they could no longer “combine” their memberships in the *Kulturbund* and Catholic associations. However, the Church had actually been very active from the start in the promotion of “German folk culture and German folk songs” (“*deutsches Volksgut und deutsche Volkslieder*”), and had organized events like Banja Luka’s German language courses. “German” was therefore not necessarily something political, and youth organizations not the invention of the *Kulturbund*. However, especially after the *Kulturbund* had been “infiltrated” (“*unterwandert*”) by Germany’s “propaganda,” Kernei’s inhabitants split into the “*Braune*” (“brown”) and “*Schwarze*” (“black”) factions. The former, pro-Nazi group was not only composed of individuals

²⁰⁹ Katica Kuntics had been Apatin’s *Marienbund* youth leader from its inception in 1937. Consider: “*Historiae domus’ parochiae Apatinensis inserendi anno 1937,*” p. 2, ABV- ABF.

²¹⁰ Indeed, Berenz’s church (built during the 1930s) was never quite completed before the expulsion of Apatin’s ethnic Germans, and it lacked the interior decorations of the older church.

²¹¹ Gerber, interview.

hostile to the Church and the Hungarian state, but— crucially— of Kernei’s lower classes. With its social benefits programs (such as health insurance for workers in German factories), the *Kulturbund* and its promises seemed “socially redemptive” (“*sozial erlösend*”) to those *Donauschwabern* who had not succeeded in becoming landowners, and who instead were forced to work for “the wealthy.” Owners of vast estates, on the other hand, were generally much more wary of National Socialism and the *Kulturbund*— a pattern which is also reflected in the narratives of individuals from the Western Banat.²¹²

Friedrich Fischer’s depiction of the early 1940s Batschka— though told from the perspective of a former DJ leader— is largely congruent with Georg Schneider’s in its emphasis on social class. As Friedrich explained, perhaps seventy percent of Bukin’s German population (youth included) belonged to the “*Braune*” faction. These individuals, he emphasized, generally had less property and were therefore “looking for a better life or [were] more adventurous.” The “*Schwarze*,” on the other hand, were frequently more “prosperous” and more cautious as “they had more to lose.” Nevertheless, in Bukin, too, the “*Schwarze*” were largely tied to the Church and loyal to the Hungarian state, while the “*Braune*” were “with Germany.” As he recalled, “mistrust” and “animosity” existed between the two groups. Youth then found themselves in the middle of such conflicts. The “*Hitler-Jugend*,” for instance, planned its most important meetings on Sunday mornings. Youth then “had to decide, well, are you going to church or are you going to the Hitler Youth meeting?” “As soon as you did not come to the meetings on Sunday mornings,” Friedrich explained, “more or less you became a ‘black.’”²¹³ As Hans Brenner, also from Bukin, elaborated, the consequences of choosing church over the Hitler Youth were clear: “you were ostracized.” Such divisions, explained Hans, only subsided after the *Vertreibung*, when “everything fell apart” anyways, and war, internment, and forced migration reshuffled *Donauschwabern* society and redirected individual concerns.²¹⁴

The battle between the *Volksbund* and the Catholic Church, fought intensively in the press and the local bureaucracy, was indeed perceived and remembered by children and youth in the Batschka of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Almost all interviewees thus

²¹² Schneider, interview. For an example from the Western Banat, consider Elmar Müller’s narrative in Part II.

²¹³ Fischer, interview.

²¹⁴ Brenner, interview.

recalled the bifurcation that arose as pro-Nazi “*Braune*” clashed against pro-Church, pro-Hungarian “*Schwarze*.” However, while it is apparent that these factions arose, became active in the sphere of youth education and mobilization, and thereby truly affected even individual youth, one should be careful not to oversimplify the *Volksbund*-Church divide, ascribing it only to matters of clearly defined national or confessional loyalties. Indeed, doing so would reproduce not only narratives of the postwar *Donauschwaben* historiographies; it would also replicate the argumentation used under Marshal Tito’s newly established administration.²¹⁵ For as the region’s ethnic Germans faced expropriation, imprisonment, and expulsion under the AVNOJ provisions of late 1944 and 1945,²¹⁶ *Donauschwaben* confronted with collective retribution showed their *Marienbund* membership cards to the local Yugoslav authorities to prove that they had not been *Kulturbund* members, but individuals who had “led a fierce struggle against Fascism and the *Kulturbund*.”²¹⁷

Certainly, the Catholic Church and the *Volksbund*, by the early 1940s, had been pitted firmly against one another. However, religiosity among Catholic *Kulturbund*/*Volksbund* supporters generally did not flounder entirely, as even former DJ leaders like Resi Gerber or Friedrich Fischer recalled having religion classes in school and going to Church occasionally during the early 1940s.²¹⁸ Furthermore, there does not seem to have been a major difference between the *Donauschwaben*’s Catholic and Protestant youth. Despite the Catholic Church’s public struggle against the *Kulturbund* and its maintenance of youth publications and programs, Catholic youth also joined the *Deutsche Jugend*; Protestant youth, similarly, either enrolled in the *Deutsche Jugend*, participated in the Church’s programs, or remained apathetic in the face of these options. As many interviewees suggested, divides within *Donauschwaben* society were not only demarcated according to religion, which had declined as a divisive factor with the younger generations anyways. Rather, they were also influenced by social class, by inter-

²¹⁵ For a prominent example of *Donauschwaben* historiography on the Catholic “battle” against National Socialism, see: Merkl, *Weitblick eines Donauschwaben*.

²¹⁶ Starting on November 21st, 1944, Tito’s parliament (the AVNOJ) began issuing a series of laws and decrees that deprived Yugoslavia’s ethnic Germans of their civil rights and property. Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 119-146, 191-229, 244-247, 329-330; Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 292-303.

²¹⁷ Consider: October 1945 form with copied *Marienbund* membership cards from 1938 and 1943, ABV-ABF. “*Potvrda: Potpisani ovim potvrđuje da je Viderker Mariana kći Antuna rođena 29.IV.1875 god. članica ‘Marienbunda’ koji vodi oštru borbu protiv Fašizma i Kulturbunda, nije bila član Kulturbunda.*” The authenticity or origins of these cards are difficult to verify based on the copies in this file.

²¹⁸ Gerber and Fischer, interviews.

and intra-familial conflicts, and— most significantly— by conceptions of “Germanness” and the loyalties that these would entail. Indeed, by the early 1940s, questions of national affiliation no longer merely influenced educational and political matters; they helped determine under which circumstances, and under which flag, thousands of young *Donauschwaben* would serve and die on World War II’s bloody fronts.

D. Military Recruitment, Ethnic Cleansing, and War

One crisp morning in September 1944, forty-year-old Jakob Weber* from Torschau decided to heed his “fatherland’s” call. Digging out the green, wooden, brass-clad suitcase that his father had been issued by the Habsburg Army decades ago, Jakob packed his bags and headed to the nearest military barracks. For years, almost all of Torschau’s young men had departed on this journey. Now that almost none were left, it would also be Jakob’s duty— despite his advancing age and responsibilities with farm and home— to defend the “homeland.” After being poked, prodded, and measured by young German doctors at the recruitment center, Jakob was found to be physically unfit due to a heart condition. Allowed to return to his astonished wife and children the next day, it became clear that Jakob had only very narrowly escaped the fate of most of his town’s German-speaking men: service in Nazi Germany’s armed forces, especially the *Waffen-SS*.²¹⁹

Although the Batschka had followed a very different path than the Western Banat after Yugoslavia’s occupation in April 1941, that region, too, experienced not only the mass mobilization of civilians (including youth), but also of soldiers. Between 1941 and 1944, perhaps 37,000 ethnic German men from the Batschka alone enlisted in the *Reich*’s military forces, accounting for nineteen percent of the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben* population.²²⁰ This mobilization— as in the Western Banat— affected young and old, placing Hitler’s weapons into the hands of school boys and Habsburg war veterans alike, and planting the Batschka’s ethnic Germans onto some of Europe’s most horrific fronts and sites of genocide. In the Batschka, however, this mobilization did not occur exclusively under a German occupational regime. Rather, over the course of the early

²¹⁹ As told in an interview with his son, Johann Weber* (25.3.2014). During the interview, Johann guessed that this scene occurred in 1943. However, based on the rest of his narrative, as well as further archival and historiographical evidence, it seems more likely that his father was recruited in the fall of 1944, probably in September.

²²⁰ Josip Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers from the Bačka Region in the Waffen SS,” *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia 1933-1945* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1977), 650.

1940s, Hungarian, *Reich*, and *Volksdeutsche* officials worked in (an often contentious) tandem to enlist— through a mixture of propaganda and coercion, economic incentives, and the evocation of diverse national and state loyalties— tens of thousands of *Donauschwaben* into German military units. The following section will explore the manner in which this mobilization occurred, paying particular attention to the role of youth and the ways in which (imagined) national affiliations spurred not merely active volunteerism, but also deep and violent contestations within *Donauschwaben* communities over their national self-identifications, loyalties, and future.

1. Mass Military Mobilization in the Batschka: A Brief Introduction

As we have seen in the chapters on the Western Banat, the military mobilization of the Batschka's ethnic Germans started not with the entry of Axis troops into Yugoslavia in 1941, but earlier. As early as December 1940, the Batschka's "German *Volksgruppe*" had begun to mobilize "self-defense units ... according to the model of the SA."²²¹ Initially, VoMi chief Werner Lorenz protested against these ostensibly illegal mobilizations, led by youth and sports leaders like Gustav Halwax and Jakob Lichtenberger, for fear of losing control over the region's ethnic German military efforts.²²² Nonetheless, by January 1941, the *Reich*, too, had drafted plans for an initial mobilization of ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Romania into the *Waffen-SS*, in secret enlistment drives camouflaged as sports recruitments.²²³

When Hungarian troops entered the Batschka in April 1941, several hundred Yugoslav ethnic Germans had already been recruited into forces like the *Waffen-SS*.²²⁴ Approximately two thousand young Batschka men then joined the *Wehrmacht* as soon as the first *Reich* units entered Yugoslavia in April 1941.²²⁵ Further fearing a potential recruitment into the Hungarian forces, up to three thousand young Batschka *Donauschwaben* followed German military recruiters to the Western Banat or Croatia over the following months, where their enlistment into the *Wehrmacht* and the *Waffen-SS*

²²¹ Telegram, signed Heeren (15.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934; telegram, signed Heeren (20.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934.

²²² Letter from VoMi head to German Foreign Office (16.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934.

²²³ Letter from VoMi to German Foreign Office, "Untersuchung in Jugoslawien—Freiwillige in Rumänien" (24.1.1941), PA AA, R 100934; "Aufzeichnung" from Triska to *Reichsaussenminister* (3.2.1941), PA AA, R 100934.

²²⁴ Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944*, 219-222.

²²⁵ Mirnić, "The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers," 627.

faced fewer legal obstacles.²²⁶ Largely through such “voluntary recruitments,” the German Foreign Office officially counted at least two thousand Batschka Germans in the SS, one thousand in the *Wehrmacht*, and two thousand in anti-partisan “*Werkschutz*” units by December 1941.²²⁷ According to other *Reich* statistics, furthermore, the Batschka had actually supplied soldiers more “enthusiastically” than any other Hungarian region by October 1941: while only 125 *Volksdeutsche* from “Trianon Hungary” served in the *Wehrmacht* at that point, approximately 1,500 individuals from the Batschka had enlisted into the *Wehrmacht*. Another 2,000 ethnic Germans from the Batschka served in the *Waffen-SS*.²²⁸

As (new) Hungarian citizens, however, the Batschka’s ethnic Germans were formally required to serve in the Hungarian military forces. Their enlistment into the *Wehrmacht*, the SS, or the SA was therefore considered illegal and treated as an act of desertion (“*Fahnenflucht*”) by the Hungarian authorities. Occasionally, this led to difficult diplomatic situations between Hungary and Germany, as over the 1941 Christmas holidays. According to *Wehrmacht* reports filed at Berlin’s Foreign Office, dozens of ethnic German soldiers from the Batschka, who were mobilized in German military units, had been released for the holidays, against the *Wehrmacht*’s explicit instructions. As soon as these men crossed a Hungarian border, they were arrested and imprisoned for military desertion of the Hungarian forces. The *Wehrmacht*’s highest offices intervened, so that the Hungarian military authorities agreed to release the men to the Third Reich.²²⁹

Faced with mounting political tensions and increasing illegal ethnic German military recruitments, Hungary and Germany entered negotiations over these military affairs. On February 12th, 1942, the German and Hungarian governments struck a first diplomatic deal, according to which twenty thousand ethnic Germans from Hungary could be legally recruited into the German armed forces. All recruits would initially have

²²⁶ Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 284-286. Statistic from: Filipowa— *Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 274.

²²⁷ Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 629; letter from German Legation in Budapest to German Foreign Office, “Volksdeutsche in der Batschka” (5.12.1941), p. 3, PA AA, R 100939-2424.

²²⁸ Paikert, *The Danube Swabians*, 147; Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944*, 284. A discrepancy between statistics exists across the historic and historiographic record, partially due to inaccurate record-keeping, differences in medium and audience (diplomatic letters, Nazi press, etc.), the large-scale destruction of documents after World War II, and the contentious nature of the topic.

²²⁹ Transcription of letter from *Oberkommando des Heeres* (29.12.1941), PA AA, R 100939-2424; letter by *Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, “Batschkadeutsche in der deutschen Wehrmacht” (2.1.1942), PA AA, R 100939-2424.

to be given the choice of whether to join the Hungarian *Honvédség* or the German military (primarily the *Waffen-SS*).²³⁰ During the ensuing “first wave of recruitment,” some 12,868 Batschka Germans volunteered for German military service. Of these, 3,452 were deemed unfit for service, 5,243 were inducted directly into the *Wehrmacht*, and 4,173 into the SS.²³¹ The majority of Hungary’s quota for ethnic German soldiers was thereby fulfilled by men from newly incorporated borderland territories, like the Batschka.²³² The men recruited henceforth immediately lost their Hungarian citizenship, and qualified, at least in theory, for German citizenship and full *Reich* military pensions and benefits from the *SS Fürsorge und Versorgungsamt* (“SS Welfare and Supply Office”).²³³ Following their transportation to Vienna and distribution to training camps across the *Reich* and its occupied territories, the Batschka’s Germans served on a variety of fronts: in the largely anti-partisan and Southeastern Europe-based 7th SS *Division “Prinz Eugen,”* in the 8th SS *Kavalleriedivision “Florian Geyer,”* in the 2nd SS *Panzerdivision “Das Reich,”* and in the 6th SS *Gebirgsdivision—Nord;* in various *Wehrmacht* formations stationed in Kharkhov, the Demyansk District, Voronezh, the Caucasus, and Stalingrad; and in concentration camps like Dachau, Mauthausen, and Auschwitz.²³⁴

Unsatisfied by the number of recruits supplied, the *Reich* entered into renewed negotiations with the Hungarian government in early 1943. Following Himmler’s intention of mobilizing thirty to fifty thousand additional soldiers from Hungary, Germany and Hungary signed a diplomatic agreement on May 22nd. According to its stipulations, all “German” males born between 1908 and 1925 would need to “volunteer” for service in the German forces, regardless of prior *Volksbund* (non-) membership. The numbers recruited into the SS could be limitless. Recruitment committees were to consist of two German officers, two non-commissioned officers, two representatives of the SS Welfare Office, a Hungarian Home Guard officer, and a Hungarian police official. Ethnic Germans currently serving in the *Honvédség*, furthermore, could choose to transfer into

²³⁰ Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 224; Paikert, *The Danube Swabians*, 146.

²³¹ Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 66; Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 632.

²³² The reasons for this were multiple. As Mirnić explains, Batschka Germans were more reluctant than their “mainland” Hungarian German peers to serve in the Hungarian forces, as they had not developed the same loyalty to the Hungarian state over the preceding decades. Furthermore, the Hungarian authorities had fewer qualms about recruiting—violently and forcefully if necessary—“volunteers” from newly incorporated territories like the Batschka. Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 633-634.

²³³ Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 224; Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 636.

²³⁴ Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 637; *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7088 (31.10/1.11.1942), 5; interviews with Gerber and Schneider.

the German armed forces. All soldiers thereby recruited would lose their Hungarian citizenship and receive German-level military benefits. Conducted between June and August 1943, these enlistment drives brought some 7,500 Batschka “volunteers” in front of recruitment commissions.²³⁵ Approximately 6,500 additional Batschka Germans were thereby inducted into the *Waffen-SS*, bringing some ninety percent of all males born between 1908 and 1925 under the banner of the *Reich*’s military formations by September 1943. Casualties among those mobilized were high: by November 1943, the Batschka’s *Volksbund* leader, Sepp Spreitzer, announced that some 7,000 Batschka SS soldiers had already died in service.²³⁶

Following Hungary’s occupation by *Reich* troops on March 19th, 1944, German military forces entered the Batschka. One of the divisions which occupied the Batschka was the 8th SS Cavalry Division “Florian Geyer,” a division partially already composed of Batschka Germans.²³⁷ In agreement with Sepp Spreitzer, the Division launched a brief and illegal SS mobilization drive, in which it smoked out any remaining men capable of combat (“*wehrfähige Männer*”) across the Western Batschka, pressing them into the German military formations.²³⁸ On April 14th, 1944, a third and final agreement was reached related to the mobilization of Hungary’s ethnic Germans. According to its stipulations, “German” soldiers were no longer given a choice between the German forces and the *Honvédség*, but were directly, and often forcefully, recruited into the SS and various “home guard” formations.²³⁹ All men born between 1882 and 1927 (or between seventeen and sixty-two years of age) became liable for military mustering, and were found by German military commissions with the help of *Volksbund*-authored lists. “German” was now officially defined: a “German” was anyone who “through their way of life and their *Volkstum*’s characteristics reveals themselves as such, or who voluntarily avows themselves to Germandom.”²⁴⁰ Through their military service, soldiers would be

²³⁵ Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 640-643; Paikert, *The Danube Swabians*, 146; Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 224-225. According to Lumans, especially from this second “wave” onwards, recruitments, led by German officers, became increasingly brutal and exerted great psychological pressure on individuals to join the German and not the Hungarian armed forces. Furthermore, according to Janjetović, some 8 out of 18 transports of German soldiers during this recruitment “wave” came from the Batschka (Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 66).

²³⁶ Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 641-644.

²³⁷ Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 645-646.

²³⁸ Filipowa— *Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 289-290.

²³⁹ Paikert, *The Danube Swabians*, 146; Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 225.

²⁴⁰ “*Wer sich durch seine Lebensweise und seine Volkstumsmerkmale als solcher zeigt oder sich freiwillig zum Deutschtum bekennt.*” Filipowa— *Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 277; AMV/KB

granted German citizenship. However, to allay previous fears of future forced migration to the Third Reich or a loss of property within Hungary, ethnic German soldiers would now also be allowed to retain their Hungarian citizenship.²⁴¹ Most of the Batschka's remaining ethnic German men— or another seventeen thousand individuals— were thus mobilized into *Reich* and German “home guard” forces by September 1944.²⁴²

The immense number of Batschka Germans drafted into formations like the *Waffen-SS* of course raises questions about the mechanisms behind this recruitment. In *Reich*-occupied regions like the Western Banat, such mobilization numbers— though shocking— are perhaps less surprising. However, in the Batschka, the majority of ethnic German recruits were mobilized before service in German units even became legally mandatory for them (after Hungary's occupation in March 1944). Though it is not possible to uncover all of the reasons behind this phenomenon here, it is apparent that two main (non-mutually exclusive) factors brought tens of thousands into Himmler's ranks: enthusiasm and coercion. In both cases, mechanisms of political propaganda and social cohesion and exclusion— already pre-packaged in “national” terms over the preceding decades— became central.

2. *Enthusiasm*

Like the Western Banat, the Batschka saw a proliferation of war-related propaganda during the early 1940s. The German-language press, rife with heroic portrayals of ethnic German war “volunteers,” Axis victories on the front, and odes to the German *Volk* and “fatherland,” disseminated images of the ideal Batschka German man. Loyal to his homeland, to the German *Reich*, and to the greater German “*Volksgemeinschaft*,” a true German man from the Batschka was one who took up arms— like his Habsburg German forefathers— to defend both his frontier homeland and the greater German cause. Through service in forces like the *Waffen-SS*, the Batschka's Germans would ascend to become “a heroic *Volk*” once again, a *Volk* that for centuries had already withstood invasion, border changes, and imperial shifts.²⁴³

272, “Kampf gegen Verwirrung der Geister: Aufklärungsschrift des Gebietspropagandaamtes No. 1,” edited by Martin Braun, p. 9.

²⁴¹ Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 647-648; *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 277.

²⁴² Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 650.

²⁴³ “Wir sind wieder ein heldisches Volk,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6875 (12.2.1942), 1.



Figs. 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8 Bidding *Waffen-SS* Troops Farewell in Novi Sad, April 1942.
 Source: *Deutsches Volksblatt*. Vol. 24, No. 6921-6923 (10.-12.4.1942).
 Above: Crowds in Front of Vojvodina Parliament; “Guests of Honor”; Marching SS
 “Volunteers”; Goodbyes at the Train Station. Next page top: Schowe’s SS “Volunteers”
 Marching on Novi Sad’s Main Square (in front of the Catholic Church).
 Next page bottom: Youth Assembled on the “Horthy-Miklós” Street.



Especially in 1942 and 1943— when service in German units was still, at least officially, a matter of choice— newspapers like the *Deutsches Volksblatt* launched issues dedicated almost entirely to the Batschka Germans’ involvement in the War. In late March and early April 1942, when the first official SS “volunteers” (“*Freiwilligen*”) departed, the *Volksblatt* regularly distributed images and reports of the major celebrations that were organized to bid these men farewell. After 1,042 SS recruits left the district (“*Kreis*”) of Palanka, for instance, the *Volksblatt* described how ten thousand individuals had gathered to pronounce their loyalty to and pride in these men who had been “called by the *Volk*, the highest duty” to fight “the war of all Germans.” These soldiers’ service represented nothing less than the unification, in blood and in *Weltanschauung*, of the “*Reichsdeutsche*” and the “*Volksdeutsche*.” To honor this, explained the article, thousands had now gathered for a celebration held in “the most beautiful Hitler-weather,” accompanied by National Socialist chants and songs, and capped by the Hungarian national anthem.²⁴⁴

Following the “second wave” of recruitments in 1943, similar reports dominated the German-language press. As the *Deutsches Volksblatt* announced triumphantly on September 19th, twenty thousand “Batschka Germans” had by then followed their “ethical” duty and joined the *Waffen-SS*. This mobilization, the article emphasized, had occurred voluntarily. Indeed, “twenty thousand soldiers recruited by force would simply suffice for the establishment of a division of twenty thousand young people.” However, twenty thousand “young people” who “gather under the *Führer*’s flags ... without legal obligation [and] only following their hot hearts and their German conscience” were worth more than entire “battalions, regiments, and divisions.”²⁴⁵ Certainly, these men’s service would also contribute to “the Hungarian homeland.”²⁴⁶ However, and most importantly,

²⁴⁴ “*Das Volk, die höchste Verpflichtung, ruft auch die Männer unserer Volksgruppe an die Front, an der in einer einzigen Gemeinschaft des Blutes Reichsdeutsche und Volksdeutsche weltanschaulich einheitlich ausgerichtet stehen im Kampfe ... Es herrschte schönsten Hitler-Wetter.*” “Unsere Soldaten werden tapfer für uns kämpfen,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6919 (5.4.1942). For similar articles about the departure of recruits from Apatin and Novi Sad, see: “Großkundgebung in Apatin: Achttausend Volksgenossen angetreten,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6915 (1.4.1942), 4; “Der letzte Sonderzug mit volksdeutschen SS-Freiwilligen aus der Batschka abgerollt,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6921 (10.4.1942), 1-3.

²⁴⁵ “*20.000 junge Menschen aber, die ohne gesetzlichen Zwang, bloß aus ihrem heißen Herzen und ihrem deutschen Gewissen folgend unter die Fahnen des Führers eilen ...*” “Zur Armee der 20.000 Batschkadeutschen,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7348 (19.9.1943), 1.

²⁴⁶ “*Größte Opfer nicht nur für das deutsche Volk, sondern auch für die ungarische Heimat!*” “Zur Armee der 20.000 Batschkadeutschen,” 1. It is interesting to note that certain sections of this article—

their “heroic” sacrifices to “mother *Germania*” would forever cement the Batschka’s Germans to the greater “German *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*” (“community of fate”). In their service, moreover, these soldiers would not be alone. Indeed, the home front, too, would contribute through supplies, moral support, and an unwavering loyalty.²⁴⁷

The degree to which thousands of “Batschka Germans” entered the *Waffen-SS* on a purely voluntary basis and out of a matter of inner conviction, as we shall see, is highly questionable. However, in historiographic, archival, and oral history sources alike, at least some cases of voluntary enthusiasm do appear— especially among the young. As Johann Weber from Torschau recalled, most of his hometown’s young men were drawn into the German military. Initially, he explained, Torschau’s men had a choice between the Hungarian army and the SS. Many of them, he recalled, “voluntarily” (“*freiwillig*”) joined the SS for two reasons. First, as “we were of German descent” (“*deutscher Abstammung*”) and “they advertised among the German people to defend the *Reich*,” young men joined out of a sense of obligation to their German heritage. Second, many feared that if they did not join the German forces, the Hungarians would “collect them” instead and mobilize them in divisions where they would be treated “dirtyly”— even worse than previously in the Habsburg Hungarian and Serbian formations.²⁴⁸ For some people, however, such considerations were secondary. Indeed, a distant relative of his joined the SS at an early stage of the war. He was “very athletic and spent every Sunday on the sports field,” winning football matches against neighboring towns. It was therefore obvious that he would join the SS. “Of course he reported himself to the SS,” Johann stated; “he thought he would be at the right place there, because they also looked for such people!”²⁴⁹ Men who were older, less athletic, and less enthusiastic about “defending Adolf” waited until they were forcibly mobilized later in the war.

From the war’s outset, service in the *Waffen-SS* was portrayed in propaganda as a declaration of loyalty to and self-identification with Germany. As Martin Braun, head of

including a quotation immediately preceding the quoted section— seem to have been censored, presumably by damage done to the original printing plate.

²⁴⁷ “Zur Armee der 20.000 Batschkadeutschen,” 2. For reports on the home front’s activities, consider: “Kriegsfront und Heimatfront müssen zusammenstehen!,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6950 (14.5.1942), 3; “Die Heimat grüßt die Front,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7315 (10.8.1943), 5; photos with captions, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7405 (27.11.1943), 3.

²⁴⁸ Weber, interview.

²⁴⁹ “*Der hat sich natürlich dann auch, weil er so sportlich war ... und sich jeden Sonntag am Sportplatz ... aufgehalten, n’dann hat er sich natürlich auch zur SS gemeldet, weil er ... gedacht hat, da isser richtig aufgehoben, weil der ... und so Leute haben die ja gesucht!*” Weber, interview.



Fig. 6.9 Exercises on a Sports Field. Source: Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection.

the Batschka's VDU propaganda office, claimed in an informational circular, service in the SS was the means through which Hungary's "German *Volksgenossen*" ("national comrades") would be able to prove "their relationship to *Führer* and *Volk* and profess themselves to Germanism." Nobody with "German blood in their veins, except the true *Volksverräter*, eg. Berencz" would be able to withdraw from thereby claiming their loyalty to Germany.²⁵⁰ This argument, at least in part, indeed seems to have encouraged some of the Batschka's ethnic Germans to join. As Resi Gerber explained, Apatin's men "went voluntarily [...] to the SS, nobody was forced into it." While the Hungarian military would have been an option for them, service in the *Honvédség* crossed almost nobody's mind "as we were big Germans." Even her father, who had already worked at an industrial mill in Munich for several years, eventually joined the *Waffen-SS* in September 1944 because "we were big Germans." She and her family had "no idea" ("*ka' Ahnung*") what

²⁵⁰ "Jeder hat nun noch einmal, aber auch zum letzten [sic] Male, Gelegenheit sein Verhältnis zu *Führer* und *Volk* zu klären und sich somit zum *Deutschtum* zu bekennen." "Aufklärungsschrift des Gebietspropagandaamtes No. 1," 6. It is unclear whether the editor Martin Braun was related to Filipowa's teacher, who was also named Martin Braun.

stood behind such activities, Resi emphasized. Nevertheless, following her father's mobilization, she never saw him again, hearing only years later from a purported fellow war veteran that her father had served in the Dachau concentration camp, where he had used his "rough voice" to herd women and children to the gas chambers.²⁵¹

Service in the *Waffen-SS*, at least according to VDU propaganda, was designed for "humanity's elite."²⁵² Especially youth already mobilized into the *Volksbund's* schools and extra-curricular youth groups seem to have agreed with such portrayals, developing an earnest fascination with Hitler's troops. Friedrich Fischer, for instance, recalled how both the *Deutsche Jugend* and his LBA classes in Werbass were designed as preparation for war—nonetheless, he truly enjoyed their activities. At least half of the Batschka's men, explained Friedrich, "joined the German army," especially the "special division," the "Prinz Eugen Division." In retrospect, it became clear that the "SS division [was] hated almost all over the world"; however, "they didn't know anything about that."²⁵³ During the War, people perceived that the SS were the "elite," even comparable, perhaps, to the U.S. Marines.²⁵⁴

As both the early 1940s press and postwar *Donauschwaben* histories suggest, youth enrolled at institutions such as Werbass' German secondary schools volunteered for SS service quite readily. In September 1942, for example, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* reported how Werbass' upper grades were comparatively small, as so many older students had "followed the *Führer's* call to the weapon."²⁵⁵ Decades later, the authors of Werbass' *Heimatbuch* similarly recalled how the 1942/1943 academic year was tumultuous, as "students reported to military service out of youthful enthusiasm, although they often had not yet reached the age of eighteen." Some students reportedly even ran away from home

²⁵¹ "Ba' uns sind ja die, die Leut' freiwillig die Soldate ... die jetz' zu dr SS gange, da ist niemand gezwunge worde dazu [...] hätt' aber au wähle kenne zu de Deutschen ... und well mer ja grosse Deutsche ware ... und da hat er sich zu der Deutschen, zu der SS ..." "Und mei Vater hat so e rauhe Stimme g'habt, so ... so ... biss'l laut die Stimme hat er g'habt ... und der hat dann ... hend, hend sie ... Mädal, also Kinder und Frauen gebracht zum vergaase." Gerber, interview.

²⁵² "Elite der Menschheit." "In der Heimat—für die Heimat!" *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 25, no. 7288 (10.7.1943), 3.

²⁵³ Though questioned further about the meaning of "that," Friedrich did not elaborate on this statement during the interview. Fischer, interview (2011).

²⁵⁴ "The *Schutzstaffel*, that, that was an elite, uh, German, uh ... oh, how should I say? ... Oh! I cannot compare it to the Marines here!" Fischer, interview (2011).

²⁵⁵ "... dem Rufe des Führers folgend unter die Waffen geilt sind." "Die Batschka stellt über 2,700 volksdeutsche Mittelschüler," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7046 (11.9.1942), 3.

to enlist.²⁵⁶ Other *Donauschwaben* memoirists described how especially in German secondary schools in Werbass and Novi Sad, an “indescribable storm of enthusiasm” erupted as the *Waffen-SS* began its recruitments. Many students enlisted; those who were rejected from military service, apparently, were “hugely disappointed.”²⁵⁷ Although the precise emotional environment surrounding these recruitments is difficult to reconstruct, it is apparent that German secondary school students enlisted during those months. The enrollment books of Werbass’ secondary schools confirm this trend. In Werbass’ *Lehrerbildungsanstalt*, for instance, one male student after another suddenly disappeared from the record during the 1942/1943 academic year, a simple “*Ausgeschrieben*” (“disenrolled”) written where their grades for the second semester should have been.²⁵⁸

As reflected in the Batschka’s German press, young people’s *Waffen-SS* service brought not only purported glory and victory on Germany’s military fronts, but death. Starting in around January 1942, almost every *Deutsches Volksblatt* issue distributed the death announcements and obituaries of Batschka men who had died in the German military. A majority of casualties listed prior to 1944 were no older than twenty-three; many were as young as seventeen when they died a “hero’s death” (“*Heldentod*”) in the *Waffen-SS*.²⁵⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of those casualties listed had been youth group leaders.²⁶⁰ Some, moreover, had volunteered for SS service directly out of secondary school. In July 1944, for example, Stephan Graf’s family from Temerin published an obituary for their son, who had “chosen the life of a soldier” in 1943 at the age of sixteen, right upon his completion of Werbass’ *Gymnasium*’s fourth grade. After a few months of service with an SS tank division, he was shot in the head on the Eastern front and died in a field hospital in Kharkhov. “In deep sorrow” but with gratitude, wrote

²⁵⁶ “*Aus jugendlicher Begeisterung meldeten sich Schüler zum Waffendienst, obwohl sie oft das 18. Jahr nicht erreicht hatten.*” Werbass 1785-1975, 141. For similar descriptions related to Apatin’s German secondary school, see: Selgrad, *Das Apatiner Deutsche Gymnasium*, 23.

²⁵⁷ “*Es war ein unbeschreiblicher Sturm der Begeisterung und für diejenigen, die nicht als tauglich befunden wurden, war es eine große enttäuschung. So war das damals, auch wenn wir es uns heute kaum mehr vorstellen können.*” Weltzer, *Wege, Irrwege, Heimwege*, 101.

²⁵⁸ ANS F. 181 v. 13 (1943). This disenrollment appears in six out of forty-seven student records for that academic year.

²⁵⁹ For such seventeen-year-old casualties, consider: Matthias Baumstark’s obituary, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7130 (22.12.1942), 4; Ignaz Engelmann’s obituary, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7108 (25.11.1942), 5.

²⁶⁰ Sepp Eichinger’s obituary, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6859 (20.1.1942), 5; Hans Legler’s obituary, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7093 (7.11.1942), 4.



Fig. 6.10 “Greetings from Auschwitz.” Source: *Deutsches Volksblatt*. Vol. 24, No. 7088 (31.10./1.11.1942). p. 5. Caption: “Drei unzertrennliche Kameraden: Benzinger - Apatin, Bischoff - Kornau und Hans - Kindlingen grüßen aus *A u s c h w i t z*” (“Three inseparable comrades: Benzinger - Apatin, Bischoff - Kornau [Kernei] and Hans - Kindlingen [Filipowa] send greetings from *A u s c h w i t z*.” Emphasis in original.)

the family, they would remember their son who “had sacrificed his young life for our *Führer*, *Volk*, and fatherland.”²⁶¹

3. Coercion

Not all recruits, however, joined forces like the *Waffen-SS* with enthusiasm. As postwar memoirs and oral histories alike indicate, many men saw service in the German military as the lesser of two evils. Faced with the choice between the *Honvédség* or the *Wehrmacht* and the *Waffen-SS*, most of the Batschka’s ethnic Germans chose to serve in *Reich* formations, where they would understand the language of command, receive much higher monetary compensation, and avoid being sent immediately to the bloodiest fronts

²⁶¹ Stephan Graf’s obituary, signed 4.7.1944, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 26, no. 7560 (9.7.1944), 12.

due to rumored anti-German sentiments in the Hungarian army.²⁶² As Johanna Koch explained, any “Germans” who did not join the “*Honvéd*” as they did not want to fight for Hungary and “Horthy Miklós” “automatically” became SS soldiers instead. Their enlistment in the SS, therefore, was at most “indirectly voluntary” (“*indirekt Freiwillig*”).²⁶³

It was not merely personal incentives that drove many to choose the SS. Rather, social pressures surrounding these recruitments were intense. Hans Brenner recalled the unsurmountable “pressure” that existed in his native Bukin to “volunteer” for the German military. “They almost forced you,” Hans explained, and “everybody from our town went.” Indeed, his own father was mobilized into the SS in September 1944, in a unit that “maneuvered” on the town’s messy dirt roads— an event which the young Hans found “fascinating.”²⁶⁴ Jakob Winzer— whose own teenage brother fell on the front in 1945— similarly explained how men’s enlistment in the German military was a matter of “*freiwilliger Zwang*” (“voluntary compulsion”). The Batschka’s ethnic Germans ultimately did not have a choice about whether or not to join these forces, as even the last men were mobilized in drives where “voluntariness did not exist.”²⁶⁵

As the war progressed, and the first young SS soldiers began falling on the front, enormous conflicts erupted within the *Donauschwaben* communities over the issue of military service. As Georg Schneider recalled, a “true hatred” developed between those families with (deceased) SS volunteers, and those whose sons were either still at home or in the Hungarian army. Windows were smashed and façades defaced.²⁶⁶ Even children became involved in such altercations. As Anna Kirschner recounted, “some were really malicious to those [...] families, who did not want to go [to the German army].”²⁶⁷ The children of those men who did not “volunteer” were beaten up and berated by the children

²⁶² Filipowa— *Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 277; Weber, interview. This is also described in: Mirnić, “The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers,” 635.

²⁶³ Johanna Koch, interview.

²⁶⁴ Brenner, interview.

²⁶⁵ “*Die Freiwilligkeit bestand nicht!*” Winzer, interview. In relation to the final “wave” of SS recruitment in 1944, even VDU documentation supports this statement. As described in an August 1944 report from Filipowa’s VDU branch: “The third W[affen] SS recruitment is already over, it was devastating, not one ‘black’ came voluntarily, everything had to be brought about through violence” (“*Die 3. W SS Aktion ist bereits vorüber, es war verheerend kein einziger schwarzer kam freiwillig, alles musste mit gewalt herbeigeholt werden*”). AMV/KB 1144, “Wochenbericht” from VDU Kindlingen-Szentfülöp (5.8.1944).

²⁶⁶ Schneider, interview.

²⁶⁷ “*Manche [...] waren wirklich böse dann zu denen, zu der Familie, die nicht gehen wollten.*” Kirschner, interview.

of SS soldiers. Many men— including her own uncle— then finally went “out of love for their families” (“*der Familie zuliebe*”).²⁶⁸ Others, like Katharina Schiffer’s husband, went into hiding in neighboring Croatia. As a result, her family was derided as being aligned with the “*Drückeberger*” (“shirkers”) and “*Feiglinge*” (“cowards”). Her own two-year-old daughter was teased by other children and called a “*Badoglio*,” after the Italian general who betrayed Mussolini in 1943.²⁶⁹

The archival record, too, is rife with descriptions of mounting violence within the *Donauschwaben* communities over the issue of military service. Filipowa’s priest, Peter Müller, for instance, kept records on the violence that erupted as the various SS recruitment drives swept through the town. Already in March 1942, during the first “voluntary” recruitment drive, some 260 men from Filipowa were recruited, “sometimes voluntarily and not voluntarily.” One man, he wrote, was ambushed and stabbed; window smashings and the distribution of anti-Catholic flyers became a daily occurrence.²⁷⁰ The 1943 recruitments were similarly violent and “filled with brawls” (“*Raufereien*”). Some “boys” who did not appear for military mustering instead were arrested and sent into “work service” (“*Arbeitsdienst*”). The windows of families without “volunteers,” similarly, were smashed; however, as Filipowa’s (Hungarian) *Gendarmerie* was purportedly firmly “within the hands” of the *Kulturbund*, nothing was done to prosecute the vandals.²⁷¹ Such conflicts, however, were still mild compared to what occurred in March 1944, when Germany took over the region. Immediately, local “sportsmen” (“*Sportmänner*”) went from home to home, searching for remaining “volunteers.” Although they lacked any authorization (the final German-Hungarian recruitment treaty was signed in April), the “sports men” then ordered the men to join the “*SS Waffen*.” Some of those who did not join were beaten and locked up in the inn (“*Gasthof*”) that had previously hosted the *Kulturbund*’s celebrations. Others ran away and hid at their “*szálás*” (country estates) or in a neighboring village. In April, the Catholic “*Heim*” (“home”) was confiscated by German troops. From there, the SS then launched its final hunts for manpower, taking as hostages the wives and elderly relatives of those “*Schwarze*” who had run away.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Kirschner, interview.

²⁶⁹ Schiffer, interview.

²⁷⁰ *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 48-49.

²⁷¹ *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 50-51.

²⁷² *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 51-52. This is also reported in: *Filipowa— Bild einer donauschwäbischen Gemeinde*, 291-292. According to the latter source, some of the SS troops who rounded

The *Volksbund*'s records, too, attest to the conflicts that erupted over the Batschka's SS recruitments. In March 1942, Szilberek's propaganda office reported how violent the departure of the town's first official SS "volunteers" was: newly mobilized men "rapped on the windows of *Volksverräter*," the "*Volksverräter*" and the mobilized beat each other up, and the Hungarian *Gendarmerie*— who was now apparently on the side of the "*Volksverräter*"— arrested and beat up the German soldiers involved in these incidents. The *Gendarmerie* then marched around Szilberek demanding that all swastika flags be removed from people's façades. One woman, whose children were all soldiers or nurses on the Eastern front, refused to remove the flag. The *Gendarmerie* thus cursed at her, shouting: "*az anya ur Istenit te 'marha'!*"²⁷³

Even prior to the legal enforcement of SS service, the *Volksbund* had powerful means at their disposal to pressure men into joining the German military forces. From 1942 onwards, the *Volksbund* kept detailed lists— which they then handed to the SS recruiters— on the name, age, and address of all mobilizeable men. Following each precisely planned recruitment drive, lists and reports were again drawn up of those men who had not reported for duty or shown up to their army physical examination ("*Musterung*").²⁷⁴ These men and their fiancées and families were expelled from the *Volksbund*. Their children— and sometimes even their siblings— thereafter lost the right

up Filipowa's last men were members of the Bosnian Muslim-based "*Handschar*" *Waffen-SS Division*. Such eyewitness accounts, however, are largely discredited by historians. According to Mirnić, some of the troops involved in these final manhunts were members of the 31st Grenadier Division, a unit established as part of a (failed) attempt at erecting a "Batschka Division." Members of the "Batschka Division" partially had been trained with Muslims who were recruited into the German forces; that division therefore became popularly known as the "Kama" (curved knife) division. Mirnić, "The Enlistment of Volksdeutschers," 649-650.

²⁷³ "Your mother's God, you [stupid] cattle." In Hungarian, the spelling would actually be: "*az anyád úristenit te marha.*" AMV/KB 475, secret report by Szilberek's propaganda office (28.3.1942).

²⁷⁴ For such recruitment schedules, see: AMV/KB 949, "Musterungsplan vom 17.7. bis 1.8.1943"; AMV/KB 936, "Musterungsplan für die Batschka" (28.6.1943); "Musterungsplan für die III. Waffen-SS-Aktion," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 26, no. 7589 (14.7.1944), 2. For an example of a list drawn up of those who did not appear for their army physical exam, consider: AMV/KB 945, "Verzeichnis derer, die sich bei der II. SS-Aktion nicht gemeldet bezw. Gemeldet aber zur Musterung nicht erschienen sind" (10.8.1943); AMV/KB 1106, "Verzeichnis der Feiglinge, die sich bei der I. Waffen-SS Aktion nicht freiwillig zur Waffen-SS meldeten" (15.5.1944).

to attend a private German-language school.²⁷⁵ Many of the “*Drückeberger*” further made it onto the *Volksbund*’s “*Volksverräter*” lists.²⁷⁶

Those who did sign up for service in 1942 and 1943 were forced to sign German- and Hungarian language forms stating that they understood that their Hungarian citizenship would be withdrawn upon their entry into the *Waffen-SS*.²⁷⁷ Recruits below the age of legal consent had their parents complete and sign an additional section stating that they permitted their child to enter the *Waffen-SS* and thereby relinquish their Hungarian citizenship.²⁷⁸ It is unclear whether such permission forms were always used in the mobilization of teenagers. Nevertheless, it is apparent that parents’ refusal to sign them occasionally caused frustration among *Volksbund* recruiters. In August 1943, Szilberek’s VDU reported that three mustered youth (all born in 1925) had not been given the necessary permission slips. In one case, the boy’s father was in a common law marriage (“*wilde Ehe*”) with a Hungarian lady and had already withdrawn from the *Volksbund*. In another case, both of the boy’s parents were “big opponents” (“*grosse Gegner*”) of the VDU, though the boy himself had been a *Deutsche Jugend* member. In the final case, the boy’s father had reportedly refused to sign the form as one of his sons had already died in the SS, and another one was mobilized within its ranks.²⁷⁹ Similar incidents appear on other VDU indices of those men who had not “volunteered” for the SS; however, parents’ reasons for not sending their children to the SS are not always elaborated.²⁸⁰

The social pressures and violent incidents surrounding *Waffen-SS* recruitment were exacerbated in 1944, as the German army took direct charge of mobilizing the Batschka’s

²⁷⁵ AMV/KB 565, letter from VDU Sombor to VDU Szilberek (6.7.1942). The exclusion of the children and siblings of “cowards” from German-language schools seems to have caused at least some conflict. One letter from October 1943 thus urged all VDU branches in Hodschag to send lists of all of those middle school students who wanted to continue attending their school, despite having brothers and/or fathers who shirked their SS service. According to the note, “urgent” negotiations would have to take place about their status. AMV/KB 997, “Rundschreiben Folge 52/43- Mittelschüler von Feiglingen” (24.10.1943).

²⁷⁶ See previous section on the Church.

²⁷⁷ AMV/KB 936, letter signed Feldinger, “Musterungsplan für die Batschka!” (28.6.1943).

²⁷⁸ AMV/KB 440, 917-918, 921-923, “Erklärung” forms (2.1942); AMV/KB 988, “Erklärung” forms (10.1943). For more on these permission forms, see: John C. Swanson, “Being German: German-Speaking Villagers in Hungary Discover Germany,” *Nationalsozialismus und Regionalbewusstsein im östlichen Europa*, edited by Burkhard Olschowsky and Ingo Loose (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 40. According to Swanson, the 1942 German-Hungarian treaty related to military recruitment stipulated that all SS recruits under the age of twenty-four would require parental consent.

²⁷⁹ AMV/KB 945, “Verzeichnis” (10.8.1943).

²⁸⁰ Consider: AMV/KB 1106, “Verzeichnis der Feiglinge, die sich bei der I. Waffen-SS Aktion nicht freiwillig zur Waffen-SS meldeten” (15.5.1944).

ethnic Germans. Groups of *Waffen-SS* soldiers marched from house to house, with lists in hand provided by the local *Volksbund* chapters. Men up to the age of sixty-six, fathers and sons, and men who had never been *Volksbund* members were sought out, their consent and signature now superfluous to whether or not they were mobilized into the SS.²⁸¹ *Volksbund* members mobilized in *Deutsche Mannschaft* (DM) units further monitored their villages, reporting the presence and activities of any remaining “*Drückeberger*” and “*Feiglingle*” to the VDU authorities. Paripás’ VDU, for instance, received reports from various “DM men” in July and August 1944 of “*Drückeberger*” who had gone into hiding, had occasionally been arrested by the Hungarian authorities, and who were now spotted nonchalantly eating lunch, harvesting their crops, and otherwise going about their daily lives. Sometimes, these “*Schwarze*” were even in the company of the Hungarian *Gendarmerie* men who were technically in charge of arresting them. However, according to the reports, the *Gendarmerie* were clearly unreliable, and most of them were usually drunk anyways.²⁸² Other reports contained downright calls to violence. In one 1944 report from an unnamed village, a VDU official reported that the latest SS “volunteer action” (“*Freiwilligen Aktion*”) had been met with great joy and enthusiasm. Only fifteen people— here precisely named and described with their offenses— had not shown up for their recruitment. All of them, claimed the report, were members of the “black front” (“*Schwarzfront*”), and had exhibited cowardice, stupidity, laziness, histories of Magyarization, ties to the Catholic Church and— occasionally— business relationships with Jews. In any case, the town’s “masses” were “extremely indignant” about those “*Volksgenossen*” who had still not reported for military service, and threatened to murder them.²⁸³

In the memories and narratives of the Batschka’s former children and youth, such episodes of violence and coercion are prominent. As Jakob Winzer recounted, his mother’s cousin was Filipowa’s doctor. One day, he was called to treat a man who had been beaten and locked up in a pigsty for not “volunteering” for the SS. Certain “enthusiasts” (“*Eiferer*”) attempted to persuade him not to help the man; however, due to his Hippocratic oath, the doctor saw the man anyways.²⁸⁴ Johanna Bauer, too, described

²⁸¹ See: AMV/KB 1160, lists entitled “Freiwillige der III. Waffen-SS-Aktion 1944.”

²⁸² AMV/KB 1148, “Bericht” from VDU Paripás (10.8.1944); AMV/KB 1136, letter from VDU Paripás (31.7.1944).

²⁸³ “*Ueber jene Volksgenossen die sich der Aktion durch Nichtmeldung entzogen, ist die Masse ungeheuer empört und droht ihnen mit Totschlagen.*” AMV/KB 236, “Bericht” labeled “B.3 15.”

²⁸⁴ Winzer, interview.

how men went into hiding in 1944 to avoid military service. Her father and most of his brothers had already been drawn into the SS; however, her youngest uncle refused to report for SS service and hid. As a result, her grandfather was “taken out of his bed” one night by “German soldiers” and locked into Kernei’s school building, which had been turned into a “jail.” After protesting to the guards, one of her aunts was able to bring Johanna’s grandfather some clothes, as he had been arrested in his pyjamas.²⁸⁵

In order to find the last mobilizeable men— or take their relatives hostage— these “German soldiers” also relied on neighbors. As Georg Schneider explained, his father was a veteran of the Habsburg and the Yugoslav forces. Already quite elderly, pitted against the *Volksbund*, and wary of the destructions of war, his father was determined not to voluntarily enlist. In his hometown (Kernei), the wives of fugitive men had already been taken hostage. Those men who caved into the pressure and finally enlisted were then subjected to lectures about how they should “go voluntarily, that way their families will be taken care of, and so on.” Others, including his father, nevertheless refused to serve. However, as Georg described, his father, too, was finally mobilized one night in September 1944. In the midst of the “strong conflicts between *Kulturbund* supporters and adversaries,” his father was betrayed by his neighbors, who divulged his father’s location to “four or five” soldiers who came looking for him. He and 180 other men were mobilized that night and brought to Sombor, where they were locked in a synagogue for two weeks. They were then “forcibly put in uniform” (“*zwangsweise eingekleidet*”) and stationed with German troops who were overseeing groups of ethnic German refugees from further East. Afterwards, his father was “tasked with the surveillance of Jews” and sent to work as a guard in the Mauthausen concentration camp— an event under which he “suffered his entire life.”²⁸⁶

4. Holocaust

The mobilization of fathers, uncles, and brothers into the *Waffen-SS* has been mired in taboos for decades, appearing only occasionally in *Donauschwaben* histories in texts and contexts primarily designed to exculpate, relativize, and— in some cases— even

²⁸⁵ Johanna Bauer, interview.

²⁸⁶ “... *eingesetzt bei der Judenüberwachung ... Darunter hat mein Vater also das ganze Leben lang gelitten, nicht? Und ist dann auch in Mauthausen ...*” Schneider, interview.

present SS service as yet another source of German wartime victimhood.²⁸⁷ Even the silences and distortions fabricated around the subject of *Waffen-SS* service, however, are small when compared to the Holocaust— a topic which, despite decades of historical research and public outcry, has rarely entered the chronicles of Europe’s German expellee histories.²⁸⁸ This brief section cannot pretend to fill such gaps entirely. However, it will present at least a cursory overview of how the Holocaust was carried out in the Batschka, focusing, once again, on the memories of those former *Donauschwabern* children and youth who spoke of witnessing its horrors.

Jews had lived in the Batschka since at least the early eighteenth century, as they settled in the region as merchants, active especially in the grain trade. After World War I, perhaps eight thousand Jews lived in that portion of the Batschka which was ceded to Yugoslavia. Despite establishing cultural associations (based primarily in Novi Sad and Belgrade) that were explicitly loyal to the new Yugoslav state, Yugoslavia’s Jews increasingly faced restrictions over the course of the interwar period.²⁸⁹ In line with Yugoslavia’s larger nationalization policies, all Jewish primary schools were appropriated by the state during the 1920s. By the late 1930s, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia further introduced explicitly anti-Semitic policies. Laws passed in 1939 excluded Jews from military service. On October 5th, 1940, additional legislation blocked Jews from wholesale food trade and restricted their access to secondary and higher education through a “*numerus clausus*.”²⁹⁰

However, it was only with the entry of Hungarian troops into the Batschka in 1941 that anti-Semitic brutalities unfolded on a massive scale. After April 1941, Hungarian military-supervised “screening committees,” consisting of five to ten “reliable” local citizens, were set up in each Batschka town. These committees investigated the identity papers of their towns’ non-Hungarian and non-German minorities, especially Serbs and Jews. Those who had settled in the Batschka after October 31st, 1918, were either

²⁸⁷ Consider: Helmlinger, *Bukiner Heimatbuch*, 215-217; Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 180-186.

²⁸⁸ For an interesting analysis on (lacking) depictions of National Socialism and the Holocaust in *Heimatbücher*, see: Wilfried Setzler, “Die NS-Zeit im Heimatbuch— ein weißer Fleck?,” *Das Heimatbuch: Geschichte, Methodik, Wirkung*, edited by Mathias Beer (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2010), 203-220.

²⁸⁹ Braham (ed.), *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 21. As Braham indicates, it was primarily the younger generations who displayed loyalty to Yugoslavia; the older Jewish generations generally remained loyal to, and identified with, the Hungarian (Habsburg) state.

²⁹⁰ *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 21. Jaša Romano and Lavoslav Kadelburg, “The Third Reich: Initiator, Organizer and Executant of Anti-Jewish Measures and Genocide in Yugoslavia,” *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia 1933-1945* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1977), 670-671.

deported to Serbia or the Banat, or locked into internment and labor camps in Apatin, Begecs, Hódság, Magyararkanizsa, Óbecse, Óverbász (Werbass), Palanka, Szabadka, Titel, Topolya, Novi Sad, and Zombor.²⁹¹ Jews were excluded from civil service, their properties were plundered, and thousands were sent into forced labor, including perhaps 1,500 who became slave laborers clearing mine fields in Ukraine, and hundreds more who became forced laborers in the copper mines of Bor (Serbia).²⁹² Acts of anti-Semitic violence swept across the region: most infamously, in January 1942, up to 1,500 Jews (some 550 in Novi Sad alone) were killed in the “*racija*.”²⁹³

These measures were conducted according to Hungary’s official “Jewish policies,” publicized for all the Batschka’s inhabitants to see.²⁹⁴ In January 1942, for instance, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* announced that Hungary’s “Jewish laws” (“*Judengesetz*”) would now also be extended to its (freshly reacquired) southern territories (“*Südgebiet*”). As a first step, the Batschka’s local business owners would be required to register all Jewish employees with Novi Sad’s “*Kaufmännische Verein*” (trade association), using pre-printed governmental forms. Jewish employees, explained the article, were not to fill more than twelve percent of the “intellectual occupations” in every registered business.²⁹⁵ In May 1942, the *Volksblatt* similarly reported that Budapest’s government had drafted a law regarding the expropriation of Jewish properties. On the “basis of race” (“*Rassegrundlagen*”) and the “law for racial protection” (“*Rasseschutzgesetz*”), all Jews would be deprived of their (landed) property, and—to avoid corruption and theft—the value of their properties would be placed into a locked account in the form of bonds (“*Obligationen*”). All non-Jewish landlords, furthermore, would receive the right to cancel their leases with Jewish tenants sixty days after the law went into effect.²⁹⁶ In October 1942, these laws were extended: according to a decree by Prime Minister Miklós Kállay, reported the *Deutsches Volksblatt*, Hungary’s Jews would now pay their “contribution to the war” through a special “income tax.” Furthermore, all Jewish men of

²⁹¹ *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 21-22.

²⁹² Romano and Kadelburg, “The Third Reich,” 686-687.

²⁹³ Romano and Kadelburg, “The Third Reich,” 687. For more on the “*racija*,” see: Randolph Braham, ed., *A magyarországi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* (Budapest: Park Könyvkiadó, 2007), 21-23. Also see the dissertation’s first Batschka chapter for a description of this event.

²⁹⁴ For more on Hungary’s anti-Semitic policies and Holocaust history, see: Braham (ed.), *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, xv-xcv.

²⁹⁵ “Zur Durchführung des Judengesetzes im Südgebiet: Mitteilung des Kaufmännischen Vereines in Neusatz,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6860 (21.1.1942), 6.

²⁹⁶ “Der endgültige Wortlaut des Gesetzentwurfs über die Beschleunigung der Enteignung des jüdischen Grundbesitzes,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6958 (24.5.1942), 6.

the age of military service (“*kriegsdienstpflichtigen Alter*”), without regards to their actual able-bodiedness (“*Diensttauglichkeit*”), would be brought to labor camps (“*Arbeitslager*”).²⁹⁷

It seems like the Batschka’s *Volksbund* was more than happy to oblige in implementing Budapest’s anti-Semitic policies. Already in April 1942, the VDU began assembling lists of all the “blind, dumb, imbeciles, and Jews” living in towns also inhabited by ethnic Germans.²⁹⁸ Additional lists were drawn of the region’s Jewish inhabitants, which enumerated the Jews living in each town by name and address.²⁹⁹ Jews, in the VDU’s correspondence, were labeled as “traitors,” and as the source of malicious rumors of Germany’s imminent capitulation, hearsay otherwise only spread by “*Feiglinge*” and “Serbs.”³⁰⁰ The *Volksbund*’s press, too, began reporting with satisfaction on the internment of Croatia’s Jews, the forced labor conscription of Rome’s Jewish men, and the expropriation of Jewish properties in Serbia.³⁰¹ The local German press, for its part, began distributing anti-Semitic caricatures and slogans, such as “*Die Juden sind unser Unglück!*” (“the Jews are our misfortune!”).³⁰² In December 1942, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* even published an article explaining “why the Jews must go.” Jews, explained the article, were of “weak character,” fixated on money, and largely unable to maintain “order within their community.” Only by refusing to “tolerate” Jews could the German “*Volksgenossen*” (members of the *Volk*) avoid being “poisoned” by them. Jews, after all, were like “bugs”—even if they are innocent, nobody wants them “in their own home.”³⁰³

The deportation and murder of the Batschka’s Jewish population, though already started prior to 1944, was carried out to completion with Germany’s occupation of Hungary. At the end of March 1944, the Batschka’s remaining Jews were forced to wear a yellow star, ordered to stay in their homes, excluded from their professions, and

²⁹⁷ “Der ‘Kriegskostenbeitrag der Juden’ wird in Form einer Vermögenssteuer eingehoben,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7082 (24.10.1942), 3.

²⁹⁸ AMV/KB 500, “Blinden, Taubstummen, Schwachsinnige und Juden,” letter from VDU *Kreisleitung* Zombor to VDU *Kreisleitung* Hodschag (22.4.1942).

²⁹⁹ AMV/KB 282, “Verzeichnis der Juden mit Angabe ihrer Wohnung”; AMV/KB 1008, “Liste der Juden” in Szilberek and Sztapár.

³⁰⁰ AMV/KB 952, “Bericht” by VDU Paripasch (18.8.1943).

³⁰¹ “Kroatiens Juden in Lagern zusammengefaßt,” *Deutsches Volksblatt* (24.3.1942), 6; “Die Juden in Rom müssen arbeiten,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6956 (22.5.1942), 2; “Einziehung jüdischen Vermögens in Serbien,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7039 (2.9.1942), 6.

³⁰² “‘Made’ in USA” caricature, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 6986 (28.6.1942), 2; “Die Juden sind unser Unglück!,” *Batschkaer Zeitung* (26.6.1941), 2.

³⁰³ “*Auch Wanzen sind nicht schuldig, aber man mag sie trotzdem nicht in der eigenen Wohnung.*” “Warum die Juden gehen müssen,” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, vol. 24, no. 7127 (18.12.1942), 6.

compelled to register and relinquish all of their property.³⁰⁴ Local *Deutsche Mannschaft* forces updated their lists of the Jews and “*Volksverräter*” who were still living in the Batschka’s *Donauschwaben*-inhabited towns.³⁰⁵ On April 6th, 1944, the new Hungarian Prime Minister Döme Sztójay then issued decree 6163/44 for the “clearing up of the country of the Jews.”³⁰⁶ By April 19th, the military, gendarmerie, and police commanders in charge of “Gendarmerie District V (Szeged)” — to which the Batschka belonged — had met in Budapest and planned the “evacuation” of the region’s Jews. On April 26th, at five o’clock in the morning, the round-up and deportation of the Batschka’s Jews began. The Hungarian Gendarmerie, aided by SS and *Volksbund* members, arrested some ten thousand Jews from Hungary’s Bács-Bodrog County.³⁰⁷ The Batschka’s Jews thereafter were interned in provisional camps in Bačka Topola and Subotica, where they stayed until the beginning of May 1944. Thereafter, they were sent to Hungarian transit camps in Baya, Szegedin, and Bácsalmás, before finally being deported to Auschwitz.³⁰⁸ Of the 16,624 Jewish individuals (identified as such on the basis of anti-Semitic legislation) in Bács-Bodrog County, including 14,700 from the Batschka (according to Yugoslav Jewish sources), up to 13,000 ultimately died in the Holocaust. Only a handful of those deported to Auschwitz survived.³⁰⁹

The final deportation of the Batschka’s Jews hardly appears in the *Volksbund*’s surviving records, with the exception of two documents. The first, a “*Stimmungsbericht*” (“mood report”) from May 4th, 1944 by Szilberek’s VDU leadership, merely ominously remarks that the town’s Serbs were “anxious, as they fear that after the Jews, they too will be taken away.”³¹⁰ The second, a May 2nd, 1944 report from Paripás’ VDU, is more

³⁰⁴ Romano and Kadelburg, “The Third Reich,” 687.

³⁰⁵ AMV/KB 1080, “Bericht über folgende Persohnen was von uns beider Besprechung am 30.III.44. Gefordert worden ist” (31.3.1944); AMV/KB 1080, “Juden in Paripasch,” letter from VDU Paripás (31.3.1944). Spelling errors in original.

³⁰⁶ Under pressure from Berlin, Horthy replaced Miklós Kállay with Döme Sztójay on March 23rd, 1944. It was under Sztójay that the fascist Arrow Cross Party (under Ferenc Szálasi) was legalized. Sztójay was ousted again in August 1944; in October 1944, Szálasi became Hungary’s Prime Minister and “Leader of the Nation.”

³⁰⁷ *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 23-24.

³⁰⁸ Romano and Kadelburg, “The Third Reich,” 686-687. For a discussion of Vojvodina’s interwar Jewish population statistics (including the Jewish population’s mother tongue and national affiliation according to official censuses), see: Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 128-130.

³⁰⁹ *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 23-24.

³¹⁰ “Das Verhalten der Serben ist ängstlich, da sie glauben, nach den den [sic] Juden werden sie eingezogen.” AMV/KB 1101, “Stimmungsbericht” from VDU Szilberek (4.5.1944).

elaborate. According to the report, two members of the Hungarian secret police arrived in Paripás as soon as “the command from the government to deport all the Jews was announced here.” Together with representatives of the local notary and the military, these two men made an inventory of all of the town’s Jewish properties, and on April 27th and 28th, they “carried out the whole thing.”³¹¹ On April 28th, the VDU leader, Heinrich Eichinger, was then approached by the Hungarian secret police, who purportedly asked Eichinger to appoint *Volksbund* members to keep an eye on and protect the abandoned properties, which were now “state property.” The next day, German troops finally marched into the town. The “German occupation army” (“*deutsche Besatzungstruppe*”) thereafter was quartered in private homes and the local school building, and their tanks were parked in the church’s garden. Some of the remaining recruits were stationed in the freshly vacated Jewish apartments, apartments whose inventories were locked into the town’s synagogue (“*Judentempel*”).³¹²

The mass exclusion, deportation, and murder of the Batschka’s Jews is hardly mentioned in the postwar *Donauschwaben* literature. On the contrary, former ethnic German leaders and writers, like Sepp Janko and Josef Beer, spent the following decades denying the presence of anti-Semitism in their towns; according to their accounts, the deportations were an event conducted largely by external forces, much to the naïve surprise of the *Donauschwaben* population.³¹³ It is true that anti-Semitism was not a prominent feature of the *Kulturbund*’s 1930s press, despite other obvious declarations of

³¹¹ “Als die Anordnung von der Regierung für die Juden abtransportieren hier herauskam, kamen zu uns zwei ung. Geheimpolizisten und führten mit dem Notär Stellvertreter Johann Habebusch sowie mit dem Militärreferenten Franz Gauder die Inventaraufnahmen bei den Juden durch und führten auch am 27. u. 28.4.44 die Sache durch.” AMV/KB 1099, “Bericht!,” letter from VDU Paripás (2.5.1944). It is unclear from this statement whether merely the inventory, or also the deportation, were carried out on those days.

³¹² AMV/KB 1099, “Bericht!” (2.5.1944).

³¹³ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 164-166; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 443-444. Indeed, even decades later, Sepp Janko and his circle in Argentina published accounts that not only entirely ignored topics like the Holocaust, but also claimed that Janko was “a successful pioneer of general human rights law” in his attempts at turning the Banat into a “model” of interethnic cooperation (“... *im Interesse der gemeinsamen Heimat, in ein Miteinander autonomer Volksgruppen umgewandelt werden müsse. Das Banat sollte dafür zu einem Modell werden ... Damit gebührt Dr. Sepp Janko die besondere Ehre, als erfolgreicher Vorkämpfer für ein allgemeines Volksgruppenrecht in die Geschichte einzugehen.*”). “Dr. Sepp Janko 90 Jahre alt,” 28. See also: “Ein Gespräch des ‘Donautal-Magazins’ mit Dr. Sepp Janko,” *Das Donautal-Magazin*, no. 91 (1.5.1997), 12-17. In cases where the Holocaust is mentioned in the works of *Donauschwaben* authors, any direct involvement by Batschka Germans in the murder of Jews is largely denied, as in Georg Wildmann’s volume (in which he claims that the only proven case of Batschka Germans being “involved” in a “crime against Jews” was the 1944 shooting of four Jews in Paraputsch): Wildmann, *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, 748.

loyalty to the National Socialist cause.³¹⁴ Nonetheless, as historians like Thomas Casagrande have shown, anti-Semitism had already become common and “virulent” in Yugoslavia, including in the *Donauschwaben* communities, prior to 1941.³¹⁵ Furthermore, while almost no oral history interviewees described the spread of anti-Semitic ideology within their communities, some of them were able to recount episodes of anti-Semitic violence that they had witnessed in the period after April 1941.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Holocaust is only mentioned briefly and vaguely in most of the interviews. Anna Kirschner, for instance, recalled that three or four Jewish families, as well as several other Jewish individuals, lived in her hometown of Schowe. She knew most of them only through “hearsay” (“*Hörensagen*”); however, she was acquainted with one Jewish woman, a seamstress who gave the town’s girls lessons so that they could sew their dowries. The relationship between the town’s *Donauschwaben* and Jews had always been “all right,” Anna claimed. However, “around ‘41”— when Anna was twelve years old— Schowe’s Jews were “suddenly not there anymore.” “Nobody knew where they went,” she said, but “all of a sudden, they were just gone.”³¹⁶

Anne Wirth similarly described how relationships between Tschervenka’s Jews and Germans initially were peaceful. One of the town’s Jews, a produce merchant named Feldmann, apparently visited her family occasionally. He and the town’s wood merchant, also a Jewish man, “even came into our home” to advise Anne’s father about the sale and price of his agricultural products. However, the merchants and their families were “later abducted [...] as they caught the Jews.”³¹⁷ Anne was reluctant to say more. However, later in the interview, she described how her father was hesitant towards the *Volksbund* primarily because he deemed their actions “too crazy” (“*zu verrückt*”). They “caught and took away” the town’s Jews and, generally, “chased [...] certain peoples.”³¹⁸ After

³¹⁴ Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918-1941*, 442-443. I also noticed this over the course of my research.

³¹⁵ Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen“*, 104-105, 165-166.

³¹⁶ “*Die waren nicht mehr da ... aber kein Mensch weiss, wo die hingekommen sind ... die waren plötzlich nicht mehr da [...] Um '41 rum, muss das gewesen sein ... mhm ... Niemand gewusst [inhales], auf einmal waren 'se' weg.*” Kirschner, interview. For a discussion on such postwar statements in the German public and private spheres, consider: Peter Longerich, “*Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!*” *Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006).

³¹⁷ “*Die sin' ja ... verschleppt worden nacher ... gell? Wie sie die Jude z'sammefang' han.*” Wirth, interview.

³¹⁸ “*Weil sie manche g'fangen ha'n un' fortgeführt ha'n [...] die Jude [...] Des hat meim Vater ned g'fall ... Das es so verfolgt hab'n. Die Völker. Manche Völker.*” Wirth, interview. Jews had lived in Tschervenka since 1775; in 1941, twelve Jews and three Christians of Jewish origins lived in the town. One Jewish man, director of the local sugar factory, was hanged by an angry mob in April 1941; the

Anne's father was mobilized into the SS in 1944, he was eventually sent to a "*Judenlager*" ("Jewish camp") near Berlin, presumably the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. However, her father requested a transfer to the Russian front; he thereafter fought near Minsk, became a prisoner of war, and was finally released to Germany in 1948.³¹⁹

Some testimonies by former youth witnesses of the Holocaust are surprisingly elaborate. Katharina Schiffer, for instance, spoke in great detail about Apatin's Jewish population and their deportation. Katharina and her family had lived in close contact with Apatin's Jewish population. Indeed, her father for some time had attended Apatin's Jewish school, as it offered the town's best education. In Katharina's neighborhood, there were several Jewish families, including the family of Dr. Blum, one of Apatin's finest doctors, the Schwalb family, and the Szende family. However, after the Hungarians entered Apatin in 1941, the "terrible" Hungarian police— uniformed in a "helmet with feathers" (a "*kakas*")— "deported" Apatin's Jews. Katharina watched as the neighboring Blum family was torn out of their home. Only one of their small daughters escaped, as another neighboring woman absconded with the girl, hid her, and raised her as her own. The Schwalb family— which had three boys and three girls, including one of Katharina's former classmates— was similarly deported. Only two siblings, including Katharina's childhood friend, survived, and returned to Apatin briefly after the war. Her friend then emigrated to Palestine and assumed a new name.³²⁰

As Katharina recounted, all of Apatin's Jewish families ended up in "*Vernichtungslager*" ("extermination camps"). Most of Apatin's Serbs, too, were interned in "*Arbeitslager*" ("labor camps") during the early 1940s; however, unlike the Jews, most of the Serbs returned after 1944. Occasionally, former neighbors met again in the concentration camps. Dr. Szende and his family, for example, had lived across the street from a family, named Blank, which was "very in favor of Hitler" ("*sehr eingenomme für de Hitler*"). After the Szende family had been sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp, they suddenly saw Mr. Blank there, now uniformed as an SS guard. Apparently, Blank requested his supervisors to "liquidate" his former "arch enemy" from

remaining Jews were deported on April 26th, 1944. Only four survived. *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 36.

³¹⁹ Wirth, interview.

³²⁰ Apatin's Jews had lived in the town since 1749. In 1941, there were 57 practicing Jews and 12 Christians of Jewish origins in Apatin. A number of Jews were arrested and interned after April 1941; the remaining Jewish population was deported on April 26th, 1944. Ultimately, 40 of Apatin's Jews died in the Holocaust. *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 25.

Apatin. Granted the request, Blank took the Szende family to the camp's outskirts and ordered them to dig their own graves. He then shot near them, threw lime into the grave, and told them to run away. The Szende family survived and returned to Apatin after the war to look for the Blank family. Mr. Blank, however, had fallen on the Eastern front; his wife and daughter had fled the Partisans and emigrated to Germany.³²¹

Not all such episodes had their purported saviors and survivors, however. Johanna Koch, for example, described at great length the vandalism and violence that she had witnessed against Jews. Twice during her interview, she described one particular scene that she had witnessed as a student in Werbass. Apparently, Werbass' synagogue was in the same neighborhood as the town's ethnic German schools and gymnastics building. One winter night—probably in 1943—the synagogue was burned down, its “books and scriptures” scattered on the ground.³²² The children passed the scene on their way to school the next day, and the boys ran over and played football in the debris. “They were children,” explained Johanna, “and they didn't know what they were doing, right?” In any case, Johanna could not recall any kind of “slogan, or anything malicious.”³²³ As a child, she explained, “you don't think about these things”; however, especially in retrospect, Johanna was horrified by “what they did” to the Jews.³²⁴

It was only during her own *Vertreibung* that Johanna witnessed the Holocaust's full brutality. As she, her sister, and her mother fled Sivac on October 8th, 1944 and trekked towards Sombor, she suddenly noticed “papers! Letters and bags, shoulder bags” strewn across the country road. Confused, Johanna turned to her mother and asked “mommy ... why?” Her mother replied: “Probably the Jews were also chased through here, child. I don't know what this is.” And indeed, explained Johanna, as they trekked northwestwards, they soon encountered a large group of Jews, all of them at the end of their strength after weeks on the road, as they were evacuated from concentration and

³²¹ Schiffer, interview.

³²² Koch, interview. Johanna guessed that this occurred during the winter of 1943; however, she clearly remembered that it was before the 1944 summer holidays and during a cold season, perhaps even on a cold spring or fall day. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any other references to this event. Braham's *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary* simply mentions that reports by Werbass' Neolog congregation in the spring of 1944 mentioned that “they had not been allowed to use the synagogue for the previous year,” so that the congregation held religious services in the rabbi's private home (p. 47). It is also interesting to note that not one of the other interviewees who had spent that academic year in Werbass mentioned anything about this.

³²³ “*Da war keine Parole, irgendwie was Bösertiges [...] ich wüsste nicht, wirklich ned ...*” Koch, interview.

³²⁴ “*Was heisst, als Kind dusch du gar nix denke dabei ... Aber im Nachhinein sag' ich, des war furchtbar, was die gemacht habe!*” Koch, interview.

forced labor camps further Southeast.³²⁵ Then something happened that still haunted Johanna “seventy years later.” A young Jewish man turned to one of the guards present and pleaded: “Comrade, I cannot anymore!” (“*Kamerad, ich kann nicht mehr!*”). The guard immediately shot the man in the neck, and his head collapsed. All of the women and children in the expellee group began to cry, including Johanna. When they finally reached the outskirts of Sombor, some of the Jewish prisoners were forced to kneel in an empty potato or turnip field. There were “thirty, or forty of them, if not more!,” Johanna exclaimed. Although she does not know exactly what happened to them, she is quite certain that they were all shot.³²⁶ Even today, Johanna explained in tears, she cannot believe “how one country [Germany] could bring some much strife [*Unfriede*] into this world.” However, it “was probably not him [Hitler] alone, but also all the little Adolfs who surrounded him.”³²⁷

E. Conclusion

By October 1944, the Batschka had been transformed according to similar patterns as the Western Banat: most of the territory’s ethnic Germans were in the pro-*Reich Volksbund*, children and youth participated in Nazi activities, most mobilizeable *Donauschwaben* men had joined the *Waffen-SS*, and the regions’ Jews, Serbs, and other “unwanted” minorities had been deported into forced labor and concentration camps. However, these territories’ paths to this murderous state were highly divergent. Faced

³²⁵ It is highly likely that this was the same group of Jewish prisoners described by Mariana Hausleitner (*Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 289) and other historians. Since 1941, Europe’s largest copper mine in Bor (Serbia) had been operated for the *Reich* by forced laborers, including hundreds of Jews who had been deported from the Batschka (consider: Romano and Kadelburg, “The Third Reich,” 678, 686-687). Due to the approaching Soviet army, a first group of prisoners was evacuated from the mine to Baja (in the Hungarian Batschka), approximately 400 kilometers away, on September 17th, 1944. Those who collapsed from exhaustion were shot by guards along the way. On October 8th, they reached Tschervenka/Cservenka/Crvenka (next to Sivac), where between 700 and 1,000 of them were shot by a *Waffen-SS* unit, including by local *volksdeutsche* soldiers. Another group was then shot in a field near Sombor. Those who survived continued on to Baja (on the same road that connected Crvenka to Sivac and Sombor). The final survivors of this trek were then sent to camps in the Third Reich, where they were liberated in April 1945. For more on the evacuation of the Batschka’s ethnic Germans (including from Sivac) and the concurrent massacre of Jews in Crvenka, see: Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 138-141; Braham, *A magyarországi holokauszt*, 30-31; *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 36, 45-46.

³²⁶ For a short description and photograph of the aftermath of this shooting near Sombor, see: Braham, *A magyarországi holokauszt*, 31.

³²⁷ “*Ich kann das gar ned versteh’n, dass ein Land so viel Unfriede auf die Welt bringe hat könne, aber dann denk ich also, s’ischt nicht er allein gewese. Die viele kleine Adolfe was um ihn rum ware ...*” Koch, interview.

once again by a Hungarian administration, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* navigated much more nationally diverse conditions after April 1941, as the Hungarian state and the Catholic Church fought to maintain influence over the local ethnic German minority. Contestations over the *Donauschwaben*'s future generations were fought intensely, and were conducted not only by administrators, national activist leaders, and the press, but by *Donauschwaben* youth themselves.

To a degree not found within the Western Banat, ethnic German youth in the Batschka remained active in non-*Volksbund* youth groups, and continued to receive non-German education, between 1941 and 1944. Forced to contend with alternate definitions and official visions of their "Germanness" even after Yugoslavia's collapse, the Batschka's *Donauschwaben* youth carried a more diversified understanding of their national identification into the postwar period. Certainly, all interviewees insisted that they were, are, and always will be "German." Nevertheless, especially in the narratives of the Batschka's former children and youth, the contested and— to a degree— constructed nature of this category becomes apparent. "Germanness," in these narratives, was a fractured concept, and employed by different parties in service of (occasionally) contradictory aims. Instead of providing a common ground within this now largely nationally-defined minority, "Germanness" became a point of contention, used to ostracize, forcibly mobilize, and entice to murder. Children and youth, placed in the midst of such conflicts, were compelled to take a stance even then, and to stake out their own position in the massive complex of meanings encompassed by the term "German." Self-identification with the "German," during the early 1940s, ultimately shattered at least as much as it bound. Indeed, it was only after October 1944, after the *Donauschwaben* were violently ripped from their homes and strewn across the globe, that common categories once again made sense to them: only after the *Vertreibung* could these communities, so riven by conflict, once again claim to belong to one family of "*Donauschwaben*" and of "Germans."³²⁸ Conflicts now rendered senseless, however, were not forgotten. Especially those individuals who had been ostracized and bullied by *Volksbund* and *Deutsche Jugend* members recalled the conflicts that arose between "Germans" in their hometowns, the violence directed against other minorities, and the ultimately very public deportation and murder of the region's Jews.

³²⁸ Kirschner, Schneider, Brenner, interviews.

Conclusion

In his 1944 propaganda booklet, penned to entice young Batschka *Donauschwaben* to join the *Waffen-SS*, *Volksbund* propaganda leader Martin Braun feverishly exclaimed: “Our generation does not only have the great fortune of experiencing the most significant German history, but also the duty of shaping this [history] through its own activities.” Now presented with the last opportunity to “voluntarily” enlist in Germany’s armed forces, it would be every single *Donauschwaben* man’s duty to openly profess his loyalty to “Germandom,” take up arms, and make his contribution to the unfolding of Germany’s most momentous historic event to date. These men, however, would not be alone: women and children, too, would serve on the home front and help ensure the victory of Germandom, the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.¹

As this dissertation has shown, the majority of the region’s *Donauschwaben*, by 1944, would indeed profess their allegiance to “Germandom.” Such confessions of loyalty, however, did not always take the form of voluntary enlistment in the *Waffen-SS*. They did not, moreover, automatically entail a devotion to National Socialism. Rather, even as Axis occupation, Nazi administration, and mass mobilization into organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend* came to dominate the region’s ethnic German wartime experience, alternate conceptualizations of “Germanness” endured, circulating, intermittently surfacing, and continuously reformulating themselves in both individual and collective subjectivities.

Previously perhaps defined more by their religious confessions, German dialects, customs, trades, and particular localities (their regions, towns, and neighborhoods), the Batschka and the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* were increasingly identified according to nationality after the Habsburg Empire’s demise. National categories— to a degree already the product of the preceding imperial administration— became key to the assertion of state and minority rights in the newly established nation-states of the interwar period. Now placed within a state with its own nationalizing agenda (Yugoslavia), the

¹ “Unsere Generation hat nicht nur das Glück grösste deutsche Geschichte zu erleben, sondern auch die Pflicht, selbe durch ihren Einsatz zu gestalten.” AMV/KB 272, “Aufklärungsschrift des Gebietspropagandaamtes,” p. 8.

Batschka and the Western Banat's *Donauschwabern* soon realized that German cultural and educational autonomy could only be realized if it was placed within a framework of national grievances, and negotiated not only with their "host state," but abroad. From the 1920s, secular and religious *Donauschwabern* leaders alike thus appealed to bodies from the League of Nations to the German state to Germany's Catholic and Protestant religious authorities to gain (or impose) educational, cultural, and legal rights. Such efforts, as we have seen, led not only to Germany's direct involvement in the *Donauschwabern*'s affairs; it also produced a first politicization of childhood and youth within the region's ethnic German communities.

Frustrations in the formal educational sphere— though largely alleviated by Germany's continuous interventions— encouraged extra-curricular solutions. Even minority educators employed within the state-controlled educational system thus founded, endorsed, and led extra-curricular youth groups. By the mid-1930s, a veritable panoply of German-specific youth organizations had been established: "traditionalist" *Kulturbund* and pro-*Reich Erneuerer* formations, sports teams, Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Methodist organizations, *reichsdeutsche* Hitler Youth troops, and Yugoslav Sokol groups all competed for the youngest *Donauschwabern*'s loyalty, even while they promoted very different notions of "Germanness." Largely due to *Reich* interventions, however, this diversity soon diminished. By 1940, the now *gleichgeschaltet Kulturbund* counted over ninety percent of Yugoslavia's ethnic German youth within the ranks of its *Deutsche Jugend*. "Germanness," within these groups, was no longer a matter of religious affiliation, mother tongue, or loyalty to the (variable) host state, but of blood, National Socialist ideology, and a "spiritual" connection to the "new Germany."

Following Yugoslavia's occupation and dissolution in April 1941, National Socialist organizations such as the *Deutsche Jugend* gained continuous ground. In the Western Banat, which became a semi-autonomous, German-administered territory, *Deutsche Jugend* service was declared mandatory for all ethnic German children and youth. Following their "cleansing" of all "non-German elements," furthermore, the territory's German-language schools ostensibly were converted into National Socialist academies, in which *Deutsche Jugend* and, ultimately, military and home front service became compulsory. In the Hungarian-occupied Batschka, the *Donauschwabern*'s status as new Hungarian citizens gave rise to additional complexities. Now forced to serve in *levente* formations, enrolled in a variety of state and (Nazi) German minority schools, and

actively targeted by Catholic organizations, the Batschka's ethnic German youth still overwhelmingly joined the *Deutsche Jugend*. Nevertheless, as they found themselves caught in the midst of battles among diverse national, religious, and state actors for the duration of the War— contestations by alternate organizations that had been largely dissolved in the Western Banat— the Batschka's youth found institutional backing for more diverse, non-National Socialist (self-) identifications and definitions of "Germanness." In the Western Banat, too, children and youth may have mirrored their families and peers in their reluctance to follow National Socialism, their desire to pursue religious devotion, or their general apathy towards mobilizational schemes of all sorts. However, and unlike in the Batschka, the Western Banat's *Donauschwaben* did not find the same variety of German schools, press, or youth organizations within a non-National Socialist spirit. Community pressures, legal tactics, and violence eventually drove even the most reluctant Batschka Germans to enroll in National Socialist formations, causing youth and military mobilization rates similar to those in the Western Banat. However, enduring wartime clashes between various national and ecclesiastical actors within the Batschka created space for a greater diversity of (intra-) national definitions and conflicts. This, in turn, encouraged more diverse reflections on questions of "Germanness" during the postwar period.

Regardless of the particular region in question, "Germanness," as we have seen, was to a considerable extent a matter of external ascription. Individual children and youth born into German-speaking communities, enrolled in German-language Kindergartens and schools, and identified by their families, peers, and (eventual) Nazi authorities as "German" ultimately also developed self-identifications as "German." However, as especially oral history interviews show, the conceptualization, experience, and— to a degree— performance of "Germanness" was largely in the hands of individuals. Children and youth undoubtedly also acted on impulses from, and within constraints set by, their families, schools, youth groups, and peers. Nonetheless, they, too, negotiated the meanings of their nationality, engaged diversely with rigid "national" frameworks (such as mandatory *Deutsche Jugend* service), and found their own ways of navigating a landscape in which National Socialism, in the name of "Germandom," had violently torn families, communities, and prior (interethnic) empathies asunder. Youth hence became not only the targets of nationalization and the recipients of national identities. They also became agents of nationalization, both on the individual and— as with their involvement in projects like the *Deutsche Jugend*— on the communal levels.

Assertions of agency in the name of diverse notions of “Germanness” notwithstanding, history would soon take a disastrous turn for all *Donauschwaben*. On August 23rd, 1944, previously Axis-aligned Romania joined the Allies, exposing the Third Reich’s Southeastern European front. On September 28th, 1944, the first Soviet troops entered the Western Banat; two weeks later, they took over the Batschka. Warned in advance of the approaching Red Army, *Reich* and ethnic German officials organized the evacuation of the region’s *Donauschwaben*, with varying degrees of success. Perhaps ten percent of the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* fled over the following weeks; in the Batschka, half of the ethnic Germans did.² Those ethnic Germans who stayed then experienced the vengeance they had feared. Soviet and Yugoslav Partisan forces poured into *Donauschwaben* villages, pillaged, raped, and killed. Starting on November 21st, 1944, Tito’s parliament (the AVNOJ) passed a series of laws that officially deprived the ethnic Germans of their civil rights and property. Tens of thousands faced deportation to the Soviet Union and imprisonment in Yugoslav Partisan camps, where up to fifty thousand died of starvation, disease, and acts of violence.³ Following interventions by Pope Pius XII and U.S. and French authorities, Vojvodina’s last Partisan camps for ethnic Germans closed in March 1948. Still legally bound to their state-allocated place of employment for another three years, any *Donauschwaben* who did not leave Yugoslavia through Red Cross family reunification and similar schemes thereafter were given the right, from 1949, to (re-) apply for Yugoslav citizenship.⁴ Very few, however, stayed. The Batschka and the Western Banat’s *Donauschwaben* hence formed yet another cluster in the approximately twelve million ethnic Germans who were expelled from Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II.⁵

Individual *Donauschwaben* children’s and young people’s postwar trajectories and experiences of expulsion varied immensely. Some, like Johanna and Michael Bauer, were

² A chilling account of this period is presented by Peter Müller’s parochial history of Filipowa. As he reports, in early October 1944 (shortly before these troops’ arrival in the Batschka), those *Donauschwaben* families who had painted a German victory sign onto their homes’ façades quickly scraped off the incriminatory symbols. People torn between leaving and staying often departed, walked a certain distance, and then returned to their hometowns in despair, to face the Partisans’ vengeance only a few days later. *Liber historiae parochiae Filipovo*, 52-53.

³ Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 119-146, 191-229, 244-247, 329-330; Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 292-303.

⁴ Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948*, 298-303.

⁵ Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States*, 197.

evacuated quite quickly and brought directly to Germany by train towards the end of World War II. Others, like Hans Brenner, Georg Schneider, Fritz Wetter, and Jakob Winzer, spent years in Partisan camps, where they watched their peers and relatives perish. Older boys, like Friedrich Fischer and Max Becker, were mobilized into Germany's military forces during the last months of the War and, upon their release, managed to track down their surviving family members and settle with them in Germany. Some, like Michael Bucherer, remained in Yugoslavia until the 1950s as forced laborers. Teenage girls like Resi Gerber, Anna Kirschner, and Anne Wirth, joined forces with other women and led their horse-drawn wagons on circuitous westward paths. Young mothers, like Käthe Radner and Katharina Schiffer, occasionally decided to stay. Käthe watched her youngest child starve to death in a Partisan camp, while Katharina— following her husband's murder, the birth of her second child in a Russian field hospital, several separations from her two daughters, and multiple camp internments— was finally released from Yugoslav imprisonment due to her Hungarian maiden name and fluent Serbian language skills. Once again, these individuals' "Germanness" had at least partially shaped their life story. Once again, measures taken and brutalities exacted in the name of the nation had confronted children and youth with questions of their "Germanness," questions which would reverberate well into the postwar period and to the current day.

For all interviewees, their national (self-) identification has been a lifelong project of negotiation, self-definition, and redefinition. Asked about their national self-identification, all interviewees insisted that they are, were, and always will be "German." This assertion, however, was in all cases shaded by further complexities. Depending on their greater life trajectories— their perspectives during the 1930s and 1940s, but especially where they eventually settled and integrated— these individuals further described themselves as a "German [. . .] from Yugoslavia" who felt that they were "American"; "one hundred percent German" but a "*Schwab*"; a "*Donauschwab*" fully integrated into Bavarian society; a "German" who always felt bitter about leaving Hungary as he "felt for Hungary, as belonging to Hungary"; or more appreciative of the German language, literature, and "everything" than any German from Germany now.⁶ Furthermore, battles fought during the 1930s and early 1940s were not forgotten. Decades later, Georg Schneider, already taunted as a "*Magyaroner*" during his childhood, was still

⁶ Fischer, Gerber, Bauer, Schneider, Brenner, interviews.

teased as such by his former neighbors. Resi Gerber, previously convinced that “big German” connoted National Socialist, barely recognized the Catholic leader Adam Berenz as “German.” Johanna Koch, traumatized after witnessing the mass murder of Jews in 1944, threatened to hack off her sons’ feet if they enlisted in Germany’s (mandatory) postwar military service, as she “had not raised [them] to kill.”⁷ Many *Donauschwabern* never visited their hometowns again. As Elmar Müller, who lived itinerantly for the majority of his postwar life, explained, “*Heimat*” is not something that he would find again in his former village. His “whole life” had been there, and “that was extinguished.”⁸

Few youth activists of the interwar period could have foreseen the many twists and turns that history would take with their charges, the numerous battles in which they would engage, and the fluctuating self-identifications they would carry with them throughout their lives. Negotiated within a web of interwar and wartime contestations, secular and religious youth organizations, and minority schools, the *Donauschwabern*’s national identities would find novel avenues of (re-) construction during the postwar period, as expellee organizations, first attempts at a historicization of the *Donauschwabern* communities, and growing public awareness of National Socialism’s heinous crimes demanded a continuous renegotiation, on the communal and personal levels, of questions like national (self-) identification and an individual’s relationship to history.⁹

Ultimately, this dissertation not only provides comparative and transnational insight into the mass National Socialist mobilization of an ethnic German minority in two Southeastern European regions, exploring in detail the many conflicts that erupted as state, national, religious, and political actors wrestled over the loyalty and national identity of a previously unexplored group of children and youth. It also opens a broader

⁷ Schneider, Gerber, Koch, interviews.

⁸ “*Es ist sicher sehr, sehr schwierig zu definieren, was ist Heimat ... Man hat’s oft versucht ... Sag’ ich, es ist ja nicht nur ein Name, ein Ort, es ist da ja ... sondern ... alles was da war! Da waren eben meine Spielkameraden [chokes up], von damals, und und alles, es es war ... Es war mein Leben! ... Und das ist ausgelöscht worden ...*” Müller, interview.

⁹ For more on the emergence of expellee organizations, histories, and memorial frameworks in postwar Germany, consider: Maren Röger, *Flucht, Vertreibung und Umsiedlung: Mediale Erinnerungen und Debatten in Deutschland und Polen seit 1989* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2011); Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010); Holm Sundhaussen, “Einführende Bemerkungen: Wider Vertreibung als nationalen Erinnerungsort,” *Definitionsmacht, Utopie, Vergeltung: “Ethnische Säuberungen” im östlichen Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Ulf Brunnbauer, Michael G. Esch, and Holm Sundhaussen (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 21-31; Moeller, *War Stories*.

discussion on questions of size and scale. For even the largest historical events—the rise and fall of National Socialism, the creation of “Hitler’s empire,” and the many mass murders of World War II— unfolded in the littlest entities.¹⁰ Children and youth negotiated structures erected by occupational regimes and ideologies conjured by world leaders. Individual hearts, minds, and hands created nationalities and spelled their demise. Personal life stories were molded by, and helped shape, the unfolding of epic events. Private, often fragmentary, memories and narratives carried experiences of National Socialism, military mobilization, and wartime flight to the present. The “micro” is inscribed in the “macro,” the “from above” and “from below” are mutually responsive, and the personal is entangled with the collective. Investigations into topics like National Socialism, occupation, and war profit not only from comparative and transnational approaches; they would do well to always also leave space for the little in the momentous.

¹⁰ For a fruitful consideration of the concept of “littleness,” especially in relation to childhood, human interiority, and the relationship between history and the life story, see: Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 9-20.

Appendix

A. Interviewees from the Western Banat

1. Overview

<i>Name (Pseudonym)</i>	<i>Year of Birth</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Religion</i>
Max Becker*	1925	Gross Kikinda / Nagykikinda / Velika Kikinda	Rom. Catholic
Michael Bucherer*	1929	Molidorf / Molin / Mollyfalva	Rom. Catholic
Elmar Müller*	1933	Modosch / Módos / Jaša Tomić	Rom. Catholic
Käthe Radner*	1921	Stefansfeld / Istvánfölde / Šupljaja	Rom. Catholic
Fritz Wetter*	1931	Karlsdorf / Nagykárolyfalva / Banatski Karlovac	Rom. Catholic

2. Short Biographies

a. Max Becker*

Born in Kikinda in 1925 to a family of land and factory owners, Max Becker received Serbian- and German-language Kindergarten, primary, and secondary education, before finally being accepted into the *Schulstiftung's* *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Werbass (in 1940) and then in Werschetz (1941). Following his childhood engagements as an altar boy and in Sokol-organized camping trips, Max joined the *Deutsche Jugend* during the late 1930s, becoming a provisional *Bannsportwart* for the district of Werschetz. Upon participating in a *Reich*-sponsored tour through Germany and receiving sniper training in Thuringia in 1943, Max worked as a DJ shooting instructor and German language teacher in his native Banat. During the autumn of 1944, he enlisted with the *Waffen-SS*. The following year, he was held in an American POW camp and “denazified.” His surviving family members settled in Germany during the postwar period.

*b. Michael Bucherer**

Born in the small, agricultural village of Molidorf in 1929, Michael Bucherer's father had been born in the Western Banat and his mother in Detroit, Michigan, as the daughter of Banat Swabian emigrants to the U.S.A. After attending a multilingual primary school in his hometown, Michael went to the German *Bürgerschule* in Werbass and the *Realgymnasium* in Betschkerek. Like all of his peers, he was forced to join the “*Jungvolk*” and the DJ through his school and dormitory. In September 1944, his older sister was sent as a forced laborer to Russia, where she died. After three years in a Partisan internment camp, and four more years as a forced mine laborer, Michael served for some time as a “soldier of Tito.” In 1954, he and his surviving nuclear family emigrated to Germany. Molidorf— which had been turned into a Partisan internment camp for ethnic Germans during the mid-1940s— was abandoned and destroyed by the Yugoslav authorities during the late 1950s. The town no longer exists. Michael still speaks fluent Serbo-Croatian and Hungarian, in addition to his native German.

*c. Elmar Müller**

The youngest son of a brick factory owner and a housewife, Elmar Müller was born in the small, multiethnic village of Modosch in 1933. Born in a year which allowed him to enroll in the *Volksgruppe*'s newly established German-language schools, he received a continuous German-language education in Modosch's *Volksschule* and *Hauptschule*. Like his older brother, Elmar did not care for the mandatory *Deutsche Jugend* meetings enforced upon him and his peers, avoiding them as much as possible. Following years of flight, hiding, and internment after September 1944, his family was reunited in Germany in 1947. Elmar spent his entire life traveling around the world, living and working across Germany and South America. Like many of his peers, he never returned to Modosch again.

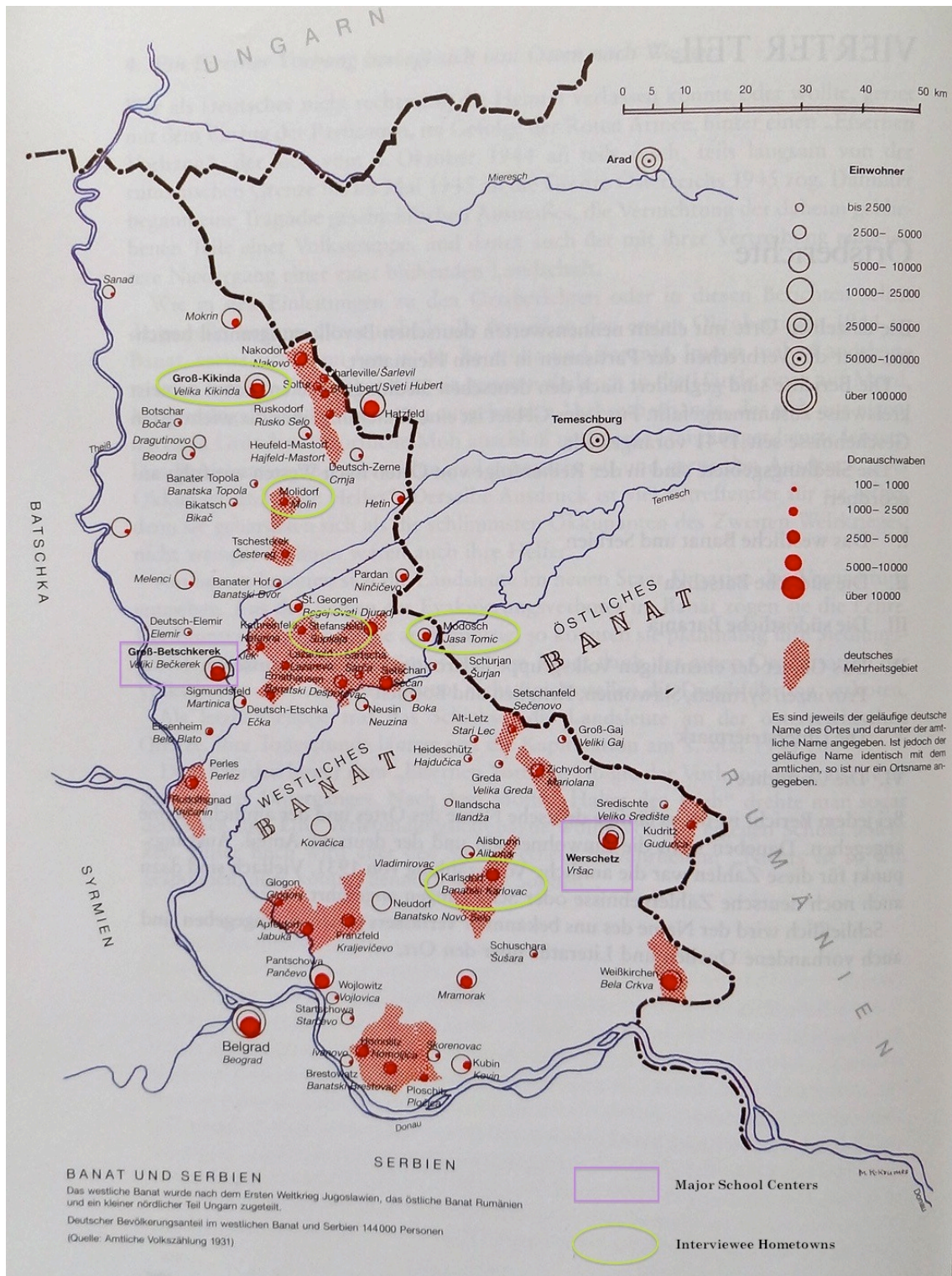
*d. Käthe Radner**

The only daughter of a small land-owning family, Käthe Radner was born in Stefansfeld in 1921. After attending six years of primary school, she attended a *Wiederholungsschule* for two years and helped her mother at home. Between November 1937 and April 1938, Käthe enrolled in a *Haushaltungsschule* (“home economics

school”) organized by the *Erneuerer* in Novi Sad. Married in 1939 to a German farmer from the same town, Käthe already had two children at the end of World War II. After observing the arrival of Russian troops in her hometown in September 1944 and the mass rape of the town’s women, she, her mother, and her children spent several years in Partisan internment camps in Stefansfeld, Molidorf, and Gakovo, where her daughter died. Käthe and her surviving family members were reunited in Germany in 1951.

*e. Fritz Wetter**

Born as the second child of a land-owning family in Karlsdorf in 1931, Fritz Wetter attended his town’s German-language *Volksschule* for four years, and his town’s *Hauptschule* for two. In 1940, his father helped organize Semlin’s relocation camps for Bessarabian Germans. In 1941, his grandfather became the ethnic German mayor of Karlsdorf. Developing a fascination with Hitler’s Germany, Fritz joined the *Deutsche Jugend* and helped maintain the barracks used by German soldiers in his hometown. In November 1944, his father was shot in the Partisans’ “*Akcija inteligencija*” operation; he himself was almost executed. Fritz, his sister, and his mother spent the next years in Partisan camps, including in Gakovo. In July 1947, they fled across the Hungarian border into Germany.



Source of basic map (additional annotations by author): *Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien, Band I*. Edited by Josef Beer et al. Munich/Sindelfingen: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1992. p. 96.

B. Interviewees from the Batschka

1. Overview

<i>Name (Pseudonym)</i>	<i>Year of Birth</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Religion</i>
Johanna Bauer*	1938	Kernei / Kerény / Krnjaja	Rom. Catholic
Michael Bauer*	1943	Kernei / Kerény / Krnjaja	Rom. Catholic
Hans Brenner*	1937	Bukin / Dunabökény / Mladenovo	Rom. Catholic
Friedrich Fisher*	1928	Bukin / Dunabökény / Mladenovo	Rom. Catholic
Resi Gerber*	1930	Apatin	Rom. Catholic
Anna Kirschner*	1929	Neu-Schowe / Újsóvé / Nova Sove	Calvinist
Johanna Koch*	1932	Alt-Siwatz / Ószivác / Stari Sivac	Calvinist
Katharina Schiffer*	1922	Apatin	Rom. Catholic
Georg Schneider*	1931	Kernei / Kerény / Krnjaja	Rom. Catholic
Johann Weber*	1937	Torschau / Torza / Torzsa	Calvinist
Jakob Winzer*	1939	Filipowa / Filipova / Szentfülöp	Rom. Catholic
Anne Wirth*	1927	Tscherwenka / Cservenka / Crvenka	Lutheran

2. Short Biographies

a. Johanna* and Michael Bauer*

Sister and brother, Johanna and Michael Bauer were born in 1938 and 1943, respectively. As their father was a teacher, they, their two other brothers, and their parents moved quite frequently, settling alternately in Batsch-Brestowatz/Bački Brestovac/Szilberek, Paraputsch/Parabuć/Paripás (today's Ratkovo), and Kernei. During the early 1940s, Johanna attended a VDU-sponsored ethnic German Kindergarten, helped

her mother host *reichsdeutsche* Hitler Youth groups through the KLV, and witnessed the mobilization of her male relatives into the SS. Unable to learn the Hungarian language quickly enough after April 1941 (now a requirement for the Batschka's teachers), Michael and Johanna's father found employment in the shipping industry with the *Wiener Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft* instead. The family therefore moved to Pécs, Hungary in 1944, from where they were evacuated to Germany only a few months later.

*b. Hans Brenner**

Hans Brenner was born in Bukin in 1937 to a carpenter and a seamstress, as the family's eldest surviving child. Enrolled in the local German Kindergarten, Hans participated occasionally in the town's "*Hitler-Jugend*" programs for the youngest. In March 1944, his father was drawn into *Waffen-SS* service; in October, Hans, his sister, mother, and grandmother fled Bukin on a horse-drawn wagon, making it all the way to Upper Austria. Reunited with their father and sent back to the Batschka by train in 1945, Hans' family was separated as soon as they reached Zagreb. His father disappeared, never to be seen again; the others survived several Partisan internment camps. In 1947, Hans, his sister, mother, and grandmother escaped via Hungary to Austria. Soon thereafter, Hans emigrated to the U.S.A. with a friend.

*c. Friedrich Fischer**

Born in Bukin in 1928, Friedrich Fischer was the eldest son of a merchant who traded agricultural products with the *Reich*. After completing primary school in Bukin and Palanka, Friedrich attended Novi Sad's German-language *Bürgerschule* for two years, and then enrolled in Werbass's *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in 1943. As an active member of his school's and dormitory's *Deutsche Jugend*, Friedrich spent August 1944 at a *Hitler-Jugend* summer camp in Weimar, Germany. In October 1944, Friedrich fled the Batschka with his sister and mother; *en route*, he was drafted in January 1945 into the German military. After a circuitous flight, which included a brief return to Yugoslavia and several internment camps, Friedrich and his surviving family members reunited in Austria and moved to Bavaria in 1946. In 1950, he and his family emigrated to the U.S.A.

*d. Resi Gerber**

Actually born in Bački-Monoštor/Monostorszeg (Batschka) in 1930, all of Resi Gerber's documentation lists her as coming from Apatin, the town to which she and her family moved in 1936, due to administrative confusions during her 1944 *Vertreibung*. After receiving six years of primary education at Apatin's *Volksschule*, Resi worked for several years at an undertaker's shop, as a newspaper vendor, and at a shoe factory. Originally a *Marienbund* member, Resi joined the *Deutsche Jugend* with great enthusiasm during the early 1940s, participating in summer camps and sports competitions, and becoming *Sportwartin* and *Kameradschaftsführerin* of her local girls' chapter. In late 1944, she, her sister, and her other female relatives and friends fled to the Sudetenland, where Resi supervised POWs working at an armaments factory. Arriving in Germany with her sister as an orphan in 1945, Resi eventually located her mother at a Partisan camp in Yugoslavia. They were reunited in Germany in 1950. Her father, a previous industrialist and SS member in Munich, disappeared in September 1944 and was never found again.

*e. Anna Kirschner**

Born in Neu-Schowe in 1929 to a Calvinist family, Anna Kirschner watched the slow economic decline of her major land-owning family after her father died in 1936. After completing five years of primary school in Schowe, Anna attended the *Bürgerschule* in Werbass, where she lived with a Methodist host family. Claiming not to have participated in organizations like the *Deutsche Jugend*, Anna nevertheless witnessed ethnic German sporting events, *Kulturbund* cultural activities, her family's hosting of *reichsdeutsche* children from Hamburg and Vienna through the *Kinderlandverschickung*, and the mass recruitment of SS troops in her hometown. Following her *Vertreibung* and reunion in Germany with her sister and mother in 1947, Anna married another *Donauschwab*, a man who became a major political figure with Germany's postwar ethnic German expellee organizations.

*f. Johanna Koch**

Born to a Calvinist family in Sivac in 1932, Johanna Koch moved to Bitola (Macedonia) in 1935, where she attended a French convent school and enjoyed her

summer holidays at the *Deutsches Haus* in Skopje. Driven away from Bitola by German bombs, her family moved back to Sivac in 1941. Upon finishing primary school at a Hungarian convent school in nearby Topola, Johanna enrolled in Werbass' *Bürgerschule* in 1942. Barely able to read and write German, Johanna spent most of her free time studying and catching up to her peers, who were all in the "BDM." After observing Holocaust atrocities and the mass mobilization of ethnic German men, Johanna and her female relatives fled to Germany in October 1944. Her father, who had been in the ethnic German *Heimatwacht*, spent two years in a Russian POW camp and one year in an American denazification camp, before being reunited with his family and taking up employment with Siemens in Germany.

*g. Katharina Schiffer**

Born in Apatin in 1922, Katharina Schiffer's parents spent most of their time working and living on a ship; she was therefore largely raised by her grandparents. Rejected from the German-language schools due to her Hungarian maiden name, she attended Apatin's Serbian-language *Volksschule* and *Bürgerschule* sections, as well as Sombor's *Gymnasium*. Having been a Sokol participant, enrolled for two more years in Sombor's convent school, and married by Adam Berenz personally in 1939, Katharina never had the opportunity to join the *Deutsche Jugend*. Nevertheless, she clearly remembered the deportation of Jews and Serbs in her hometown, the wartime bifurcation of the *Donauschwaben* community, and her husband's own escape of *Waffen-SS* service through his flight to neighboring Croatia. In October 1944, her husband was taken hostage by Partisans, tortured, and killed. Katharina gave birth to her second child in a Russian military hospital, and thereafter escaped imprisonment in Partisan camps several times using her Hungarian name and perfect Serbian language skills. She remained in Apatin for the rest of her life.

*h. Georg Schneider**

Born in 1931 as the younger of two sons to a modest farming family in Kernei, Georg Schneider attended his local German-language primary school for four years. In 1942, he enrolled in a Hungarian Piarist boarding school in Szeged, Hungary; his father, deeply opposed to National Socialism, had encouraged him to pursue an education

outside of the *Kulturbund*'s framework. Derided as "traitors," "*Magyaroner*," and "*Schwarze*," Georg and his family encountered discrimination by their town's *Kulturbund* followers during the early 1940s. His brother joined the *Honvédség*; his father was forcefully enlisted into the SS in September 1944. Following several years of internment in Partisan camps, Georg, his brother, and his mother fled to Hungary, where they lived in various borderland towns in hope of a quick return to their home. Georg eventually completed his secondary education at Kalocsa's Catholic *Gymnasium* in 1951. After half a year of service in the Hungarian military, Georg moved to Germany in 1952, where he was eventually joined by most of his surviving nuclear family.

*i. Johann Weber**

The youngest child of a mixed Calvinist-Lutheran family, Johann Weber was born in Torschau in 1937. He attended Torschau's Kindergarten and German-language primary school, where he learned some Hungarian. His father, a World War I veteran and modest land owner, forbade Johann from joining the *Deutsche Jugend*; Johann instead attended his Church's "*Jungchar*" meetings every Sunday before the regular service. Thanks to his more NS-enthusiastic uncle, Johann nevertheless participated in his school's silk worm production for the *Luftwaffe*, and attended *Kulturbund* film screenings. In October 1944, Johann fled to Germany with his parents, sister, and grandparents. His SS and *Wehrmacht*-mobilized uncle and cousins spent the next few years in Russian and American POW camps, and, upon their release, were more than happy to tell tales of their military service at family festivities.

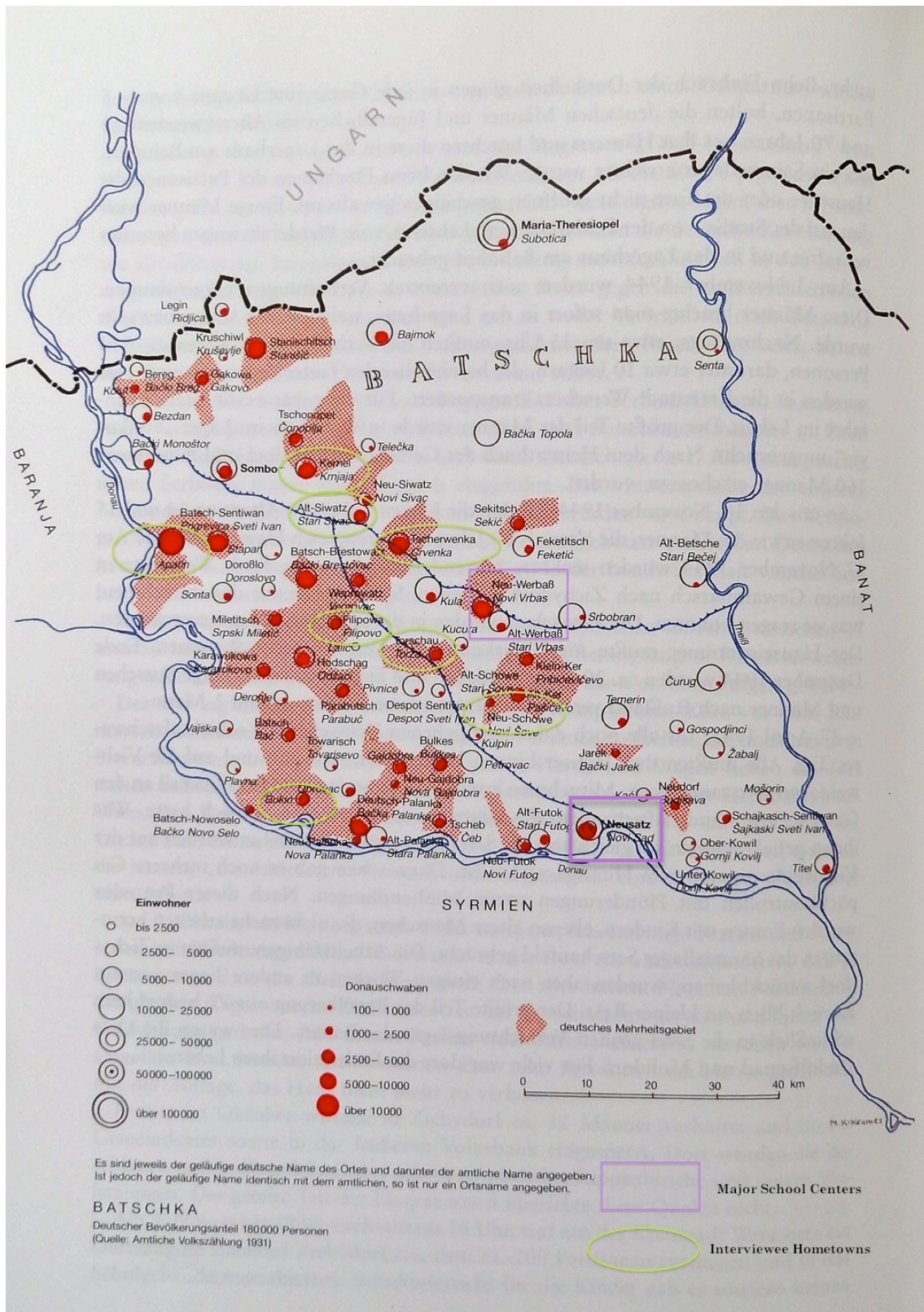
*j. Jakob Winzer**

Jakob Winzer was born in Filipowa in 1939. His father, a man who had made a fortune with trade connections all the way to Hamburg, had always valued education. Jakob's three siblings therefore received private, German-language tuition at the Jakob-Bleyer Gymnasium in Budapest, at Belgrade's German *Gymnasium*, and at a *Handelsschule* (trade school). Before he was old enough to enter school, Jakob and his family were interned in various Partisan camps. His brother, who had been sent to the front in September 1944, disappeared and eventually died, and his father and older female relatives were sent to forced labor in Donetsk. He and his surviving relatives reconvened

in Germany in 1948. Jakob became a lawyer so that he would never again feel helpless in difficult legal, administrative, and migration situations.

*k. Anne Wirth**

Born to a Calvinist mother and a Lutheran father in Tschervenka in 1927, Anne Wirth completed several years of Kindergarten and primary school in her hometown, where she sang in a regional prize-winning choir. Thereafter enrolling in Werbass' *Mittelschule*, Anne lived at home and commuted to school daily with a bus that her and some of her friends' families had bought for that purpose. Anne enjoyed sports, and participated in Werbass' sports groups, winning awards in disciplines like *Korbball*. In October 1944, she fled her hometown with her female relatives by horse-drawn wagon, steering the family's horse through Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia all the way to Bavaria. Anne's father— who had volunteered for the German army, warned his family of the expulsion of ethnic Germans he had witnessed in the Western Banat, and fought in Minsk— stayed in a Russian POW camp until 1948. Thereafter, he joined his family in Germany.



Source of basic map (additional annotations by author): *Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien, Band I*. Edited by Josef Beer et al. München/Sindelfingen: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1992. p. 366.

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- Regular Exhibition

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