

# BELONGING OF BANAT SWABIANS IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY FORMATION IN *DER  
KLEINE SCHWAB* BETWEEN VOLK, NATION AND STATE



MA THESIS APPLIED HISTORY

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# 1. Borderland, Belonging, and a Crisis of Identity

During Roman times, the land between the Mureş River in the north, the Tisza in the west, the Danube in the south, and the Carpathians in the east formed part of the province of Dacia.<sup>1</sup> Rich in fertile soil and natural resources and shaped by a mild Mediterranean climate, it lay at the intersection of Central and Southeastern Europe, where the cultural spheres of West and East overlapped.<sup>2</sup> Its geopolitical position along shifting imperial frontiers made it a ‘borderland.’<sup>3</sup> After the division of the Roman Empire in 395 CE, it marked the linguistic boundary between the Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East.<sup>4</sup> Following the collapse of Roman rule, the territory was gradually incorporated into the medieval Hungarian Crown from the tenth century onward, while by the fourteenth century it had become a bulwark against the expanding Ottoman Empire. At this frontier between the Christian and Islamic worlds, the leading noble of the Hungarian border counties bore the title of *Ban* – a designation that eventually gave the entire region its name, the Banat.<sup>5</sup>

To the Habsburg Empire, which conquered the Banat after 164 years of Ottoman rule in the eighteenth century, the region’s role remained both cultural and military frontier.<sup>6</sup> Imperial conquest was followed by colonization and administrative integration, accompanied by the deliberate settlement of diverse groups from across Central and Southeastern Europe. The Banat thus became a ‘transcultural archipelago’ of Romanians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Croats, Saxons, Swabians, Szeklers, Jews, Armenians, and Roma.<sup>7</sup> Travelling through its towns and villages, one would have encountered a mosaic of languages, customs, and traditions alongside Roman Catholic cathedrals, Orthodox basilicas, Protestant churches, Jewish synagogues, and Ottoman mosques.<sup>8</sup> Through the imperial lens, the Banat remained a bulwark and buffer zone, defined by conquest and colonization, migration and border shifts, and serving as a stage where imperial powers sought to impose order upon diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> William O’Reilly, “Divide et Impera: Race, Ethnicity and Administration in Early 18th-Century Habsburg Hungary,” *Nations and Nationalities in Historical Perspective. Pisa: Plus* (Galway), 2001, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Neumann, *Die Interkulturalität Des Banat* (Frank&Timme, 2015), 16.

<sup>3</sup> James Koranyi, *Migrating Memories. Romanian Germans in Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 61.

<sup>4</sup> Bruno Rochette, “Language Policies in the Roman Republic and Empire,” in *A Companion to the Latin Language*, ed. James Clackson (Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 553.

<sup>5</sup> O’Reilly, “Divide et Impera: Race, Ethnicity and Administration in Early 18th-Century Habsburg Hungary,” 78.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-81.

<sup>7</sup> Andreas Herzog, “‘Transkulturalität’ Als Perspektive Der Geschichtsschreibung Deutschsprachiger Literatur,” in *Wer mag wohl Die Junge, Schwarzäugige Dame Seyn? Zuordnungsfragen, Darstellungsprinzipien, Bewertungskriterien Der Deutsch(sprachigen) Literatur in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa?*, ed. Werner Biechele and András Bálogh (Budapest, 2003), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Koranyi, *Migrating Memories. Romanian Germans in Modern Europe*, 24.

In this plural environment, belonging was historically mediated by the religious and dynastic orders of the empire.<sup>9</sup> For a Protestant farmer under Habsburg rule, belonging did not appear contingent or historical but eternal, embedded in what seemed an unbroken chain of divine order and dynastic legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> Allegiance to the Catholic emperor, shared sacral languages, and dynastic ritual produced a sense of timeless stability across cultural and linguistic divisions. Yet from the late eighteenth century, the ideals of the Enlightenment and the seismic shock of the French Revolution began to destabilize this order. What had once seemed timeless now appeared ‘old.’ Vernacular languages displaced Latin as carriers of truth, and national belonging began to challenge dynastic loyalty as the primary framework of identity.<sup>11</sup> The Habsburg Empire’s multiethnic provinces were deeply unsettled by these changes. As enlightened rulers turned their administrative focus to schools and language policies, questions of linguistic and cultural belonging became increasingly politicized.<sup>12</sup> Latin, once the universal medium of authority, was replaced by German, Hungarian, and other vernaculars, provoking resistance from communities whose languages and traditions had been marginalized. For the Banat Swabians, whose settlement in the region dated only to the eighteenth century, the rise of nationalism raised the questions of belonging and what it meant to be ‘Swabian’ in Hungary.

By the nineteenth century, regions like the Banat had turned into *Vielvölkerregionen* – regions of many people. However, the trans- and intercultural diversity that had historically developed in those regions became a structural problem for the advancing political ideals of homogeneous nation-states. The harmonization of *le peuple*, *la nation*, and *l’état* in the French model, based on territorial sovereignty (*ius soli*), contrasted with the German case, where the absence of a unified state encouraged an ethnocentric emphasis on descent and blood ties (*ius sanguinis*).<sup>13</sup> This transformation of political ideals was profoundly destabilizing for the Habsburg monarchy, which was increasingly faced with the reality of competing nationalities seeking greater autonomy.<sup>14</sup> By 1900, belonging was no longer anchored in the eternal rhythms of religious and dynastic order but had been caught by the seismic shift from a Europe of dynasties to one of nation-states. Despite its disruptive character, the transformation was neither

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>12</sup> Joachim von Puttkamer, “Schule zwischen Staat und Nation,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918: Staat, Konfession, Identität*, ed. Andreas Gottsmann, vol. 10/1 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2021), 290.

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Seewann, *Geschichte Der Deutschen in Ungarn. Band 2: 1860 Bis 2006* (2012), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Csilla Dömök, “Die Geschichte der Völker und Nationalitäten des Habsburgerreiches,” *West Bohemian Historical Review* 11, no. 1 (2021): 125.

linear nor complete. Localizing belonging remained a continual negotiation marked by ambivalence, now situated at the threshold between the ‘old world’ of imperial plurality and the ‘new world’ of national exclusivity.<sup>15</sup> It is within this context that the case of the Banat Swabians becomes particularly revealing, as their narration of belonging as colonial settlers was anchored in, and legitimized by, the fading imperial order. Thereby, Swabian literature becomes a crucial site of (re)negotiation: a space where identity is not only reflected but actively constructed, where competing narratives of belonging, exclusion, and cultural memory converge. Though literary expression identities are continuously reimagined, and “the unspeakable stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history.”<sup>16</sup> The way communities began to formulate origin stories as independent historical narratives – transforming their previously timeless existence into historical experience – reveals how older notions of belonging were reframed through a new vocabulary.

This thesis investigates how Banat Swabian identity was constructed at the turn of the twentieth century, focusing on Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn’s novella *Der Kleine Schwab*. The biographic processing of his life serves as an artefact that narrates what it meant, or was supposed to mean, to be a Banat Swabian at the twilight of the Habsburg world. Thereby, the narration and the used political concepts reflect the broader changes or disruptions of the socio-political structure. Either gradual or, in a Foucauldian sense, abrupt discontinuities of consciousness are enshrined within the storytelling of its time.<sup>17</sup> This hermeneutic characteristic, storing the socio-political meaning structures of their historical context, enables qualitative research to reconstruct how identity was formed. Historical concepts thus serve not only as the vocabulary of analysis but also as objects of semantic inquiry. With the rise of nation-states, *the concepts of nation and state* emerged as decisive forces shaping notions of belonging. In the German case, however, the nation became closely intertwined with the meaning of *Volk* and must therefore be considered alongside it. The focus on *Volk*, nation, and state in *Der kleine Schwab* serves not only to reconstruct how belonging was narratively constructed, but their conceptual transmission also reveals Müller-Guttenbrunn’s ideological positioning.

Hence, the research question is not only how Banat Swabian identity was narratively constructed in *Der Kleine Schwab*, and how the concepts of *Volk*, nation, and state were mobilized to articulate a sense of belonging, but also why these concepts were used in that way

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves,” in *The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, edited by Lisa Appignanesi (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987), 44.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 28.

within the specific socio-political and cultural context of late nineteenth-century Southeastern Europe.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

The question of how we make sense of the world often begins with language. With the emergence of linguistic tools, humans “(...) began to look at the world not just to behave in it but also ‘in order to tell about it.’”<sup>18</sup> In the wake of the linguistic turn, language was no longer perceived as a mere tool to describe reality, but constitutive of *how* reality is constructed in a meaningful way.<sup>19</sup> Thereby, the understanding of knowledge and reality underwent a fundamental epistemological shift: both came to be viewed as socially constructed. Based on this constructivist view and the recognition of humans as genuine storytellers, the focus shifted from the told to the telling. With this narrative turn, the way we narrate was recognized as *how* “we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world.”<sup>20</sup> Narratives are not merely static structures but performances; they must be understood not merely as meaning structures, but in their enactment as narrative practices.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the broader narrative term, stories are particular narratives that involve a deviation from the expected, requiring individual (re)action. By telling stories, events are “selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience.”<sup>22</sup> Thereby, the fundamental meaning-making element of narrativity is emplotment. Through the plot of a story, otherwise unrelated events or fragments are turned into coherent episodes – they only become meaningful through their plot.<sup>23</sup> This causal emplotment is inherently temporal and spatial: it orders events in a ‘genuine temporal sequence’, while locating them within a contextual landscape.<sup>24</sup>

The implications of narrativity and emplotment created a deep interdisciplinary resonance between the humanities and psychology, as meaning-making came to be understood

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<sup>18</sup> Brian Boyd, “The Evolution of Stories: From Mimesis to Language, from Fact to Fiction.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Achim Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse* (Campus Verlag, 2008), 48.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994): 606.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Bamberg, “Narrative Analysis,” in *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, vol. 2, ed. H. Cooper (Washington, DC: APA Press, 2012) 10.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine K. Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 3

<sup>23</sup> Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” 616.

<sup>24</sup> Achim Saupe and Felix Wiedermann, *Narration und Narratologie. Erzähltheorien in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 2015, 3.

in terms of identity formation, and vice versa. In Erikson's (1968) understanding, identity is the 'self-structure' that individuals construct in response to the fundamental question, 'Who am I?', arguing that this development emerges during adolescence and young adulthood, when individuals first seek to develop a coherent sense of self and purpose in life.<sup>25</sup> By understanding this identity formation process in terms of storytelling, narrative identity emerged as "a person's internalized and evolving story of how he or she has become the person he or she is becoming"<sup>26</sup> In the field of psychology, the understanding of narrativity extended beyond its epistemic dimension, positioning it as constitutive of cognition, emotion, and even genetic expression.<sup>27</sup> Within the humanities, a range of theoretical positions emerged that differently conceptualized the relationship between lived experience and narrative form, thereby offering different answers to the question of whether reality is understood through stories, or is storied itself. With his distinction between the paradigmatic and narrative modes of cognition, Jerome Bruner positioned narrativity as a retrospective structuring process, suggesting a clear distinction between lived experience and the way it is represented.<sup>28</sup> Structurally reminiscent of a discursive position, Paul Ricœur positions the independent and creative act of narrative processing as a mediator between lived experience and interpreted meaning.<sup>29</sup>

This thesis, however, primarily builds on the work of Margaret R. Somers (1994), who conceptualizes narrativity as the "ontological condition of social life."<sup>30</sup> Based on this premise, Somers distinguishes four interrelated dimensions of narrativity: (1) ontological narratives, which reflect the individual stories through which people make sense of their lives in time and space; (2) public narratives, which embed individuals into a network of intersubjectively shared stories of cultural and institutional formations; (3) metanarratives, provide the conceptual scaffolding for both lived experience and scholarly interpretation; and finally (4) conceptual narrativity, which reflects to the used vocabulary for tracing how these layers interact historically.<sup>31</sup> Further theoretical implications complement and enrich these dimensions, most notably Hall's notion of cultural identity as a continuous process of production, rather than a fixed essence, shaped within cultural and historical discourses. Identity, in his view, emerges simultaneously as 'being' and as 'becoming': it is not derived from an essentialized past but

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<sup>25</sup> Dan P. McAdams, "'First We Invented Stories, Then They Changed Us': The Evolution of Narrative Identity," *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>27</sup> Brian Boyd, "The Evolution of Stories: From Mimesis to Language, from Fact to Fiction," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 9, no. 1 (2018): 12.

<sup>28</sup> Saupe and Wiedermann, *Narration und Narratologie. Erzähltheorien in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994): 614.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 617-626.

constituted through the dominant narratives of the present.<sup>32</sup> This perspective resonates with Anssi Paasi's localization of regional identity and consciousness through the recognition of space not merely as geographic–physical but as a sociocultural construct, central to identity formation.<sup>33</sup> As a place becomes not only the story setting but an integral part of its plot, it intersects with broader metanarratives, most notably Anderson's account of the rise of nationalism. This shift profoundly reconfigured the spatial imagination by moving nationhood into the physical as well as sociocultural foreground of identity formation. Detached from their historical complexities, these spaces were imagined as 'pure' – ethnically, culturally, and religiously homogeneous.<sup>34</sup> Anderson's notion of nations as 'imagined communities' thus highlights how metanarratives reshape collective identity: the transition from the 'old world' of dynastic and religious orders to the 'new world' of national belonging transformed 'large cultural systems' and thus provided new frameworks of identity.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, this arrives at the conceptual narrativity, the vocabulary through which historical actors construct, and scholars reconstruct identities. While Somers situates this dimension within sociology, historical inquiry relies on the tools of *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history), developed by Conze, Brunner, and Koselleck. Somers herself draws on Koselleck's notion of *Sattelzeit* as a transitional epoch marked by accelerated semantic and structural change. Especially in times of rapid change and rupture, the inability to integrate historical events into a narrative structure creates confusion and leads to a crisis of identity.<sup>36</sup> Further, it provokes a 'lag effect,' in which remnants of an older order persist alongside emergent structures.<sup>37</sup> With the rise of homogeneous nation–states, the most prevalent concepts during the nineteenth century were *Nation* and, in the German intellectual tradition, *Volk*. The two terms increasingly became interchangeable in German–language discourse. Given that this research also concerns the imperial–dynastic realm, Somers' emphasis on the hybrid coexistence of new and old forms resonates with the emergence of 'official nationalism' and thereby "stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire" (Anderson, 86). In this sense, the concept of the *state* must also be considered a crucial category of analysis. By tracing the conceptual localization of *Volk*, nation, and state, the semantic transformations these terms underwent across this transitional period ground the analysis in the

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<sup>32</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London: Routledge, 2015), 225.

<sup>33</sup> Anssi Paasi, "Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 476.

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Hall, "Culture, Community, Nation," *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3 (1993): 355.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Saupe and Wiedermann, *Narration Und Narratologie. Erzähltheorien in Der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," 626.



dimension of conceptual narrativity. Moreover, by situating their meanings as they appear in the sources under examination, it becomes possible not only to reveal the ideological positioning of the authors but also to re-establish their connection to the broader historical context. Thus, in the following, the historical context is preceded by the contextual developments themselves, together with the evolving semantics of the concepts.

## 2.2 Volk, Nation, State – a very brief conceptual history

Reinhart Koselleck's concept of the *Sattelzeit* ('saddle period,' c. 1750–1850) marks the threshold at which Europe's political and social vocabulary underwent accelerated semantic change. Concepts that had long signified relatively stable, estate-based orders began to absorb expectations of a radically open and future-oriented world.<sup>38</sup> Koselleck highlights four interlinked processes: temporalization (words acquire a future-directed, dynamic meaning), politicization (they become central to political debates), ideologisability (they can be mobilized programmatically), and democratization (they increasingly invoke 'the people' as subject).<sup>39</sup> During this period, terms such as *Volk*, nation, and state were transformed from descriptive labels of order into categories of historical action and political mobilization.<sup>40</sup> The adjective *deutsch/deutsch* (German) had originally denoted the vernacular in distinction to Latin, only later acquiring territorial and political connotations. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, phrases like *deutsche Nation* (German nation) or 'Germany' circulated in imperial, confessional, and legal contexts. Yet the modern political subject 'the German people' did not crystallize until the nineteenth century, when cultural, linguistic, and political meanings converged and gained renewed urgency in the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>41</sup>

In early modern usage, *Volk* meant little more than 'the common people,' carrying a social rather than a national connotation. Over the course of the *Sattelzeit*, its meaning broadened. With Herder and his contemporaries, language and descent became the 'most natural' bonds of a people; *Volk* was increasingly reimagined as a historical-cultural community and as a potential subject of politics, even when this 'people' was not yet realized in empirical

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<sup>38</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–1997), 1: xiii–xxviii.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.; see also Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, on temporalization, politicization, ideologisability, democratization.

<sup>40</sup> Fritz Gschntzer, Reinhart Koselleck, Eberhard Schmitt, and Bernd Schönemann, "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 7: 373–386.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 149–51.

form.<sup>42</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the concept operated along a spectrum: in moderate discourse, it could still signify the citizenry or the cultural public; in *völkisch* circles, it hardened into an ethnic–biological category of ancestry and blood. In both registers, *Volk* became a robust moral vocabulary of belonging, through which institutions like schools, associations, and churches were invested with cultural authority.<sup>43</sup>

The nation followed a partly different trajectory. Before 1800, it oscillated between a scholarly-juridical category, as in references to the ‘German nation’ within the Empire, and a cultural-linguistic one.<sup>44</sup> The French Revolution decisively altered its semantics, transforming the nation into a sovereign collective that authorized the state. In nineteenth-century Germany, two models intertwined and competed: the *Kulturnation* (cultural nation), grounded in shared language, history, and culture, and the *Staatsnation* (nation-state), imagined as a people united by common political institutions.<sup>45</sup> The tension between these models intensified across the century. Liberals envisioned constitutional national unity, while conservatives retained dynastic frameworks and adopted a national language. Democrats radicalized popular sovereignty, and socialists reinterpreted nations as formations of capitalist development. The mid-century revolutions and the rise of a national press and associational life made the nation a mobilizing concept of public life.<sup>46</sup> The decisive inflection came with the Wars of Unification (1864–71). The victory of a Prussian-led solution stabilized a powerful *Staatsnation* within the German *Reich*, yet left many German-speaking populations outside its borders while incorporating diverse minorities within. This disjuncture gave new force to cultural nationalisms that emphasized language, schooling, and memory, while also sharpening ethnonational currents that naturalized the nation as descent and ‘character,’ increasingly expressed in anti-Slavic, antisemitic, and expansionist terms. By the early twentieth century, the nation had become the default grammar of legitimacy: in both the German Reich and Austria–Hungary, political claims were framed as national rights to language, schools, and representation, fusing civic–legal and ethno-cultural meanings.<sup>47</sup>

The modern concept of the state consolidated comparatively late in the German-speaking world. Whereas the Netherlands and England had already developed sovereign state models in the early modern period, the composite structure of the Holy Roman Empire delayed such a unification. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the state

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 316–18.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 147–49, 374–76.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 343–44.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 343–50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 343–57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 372–76.

gradually detached from the person of the ruler and gained autonomy as an acting subject. Cameralism and natural-law thought reframed it as an order grounded in public welfare and rational administration.<sup>48</sup> The French Revolution further elevated the concept, enabling the state to be contrasted with ideal future states, whether liberal constitutional visions or Hegel's 'state in thought.' In the nineteenth century, three key developments defined its semantics: the establishment of the classical triad of territory, people, authority (*Staatsgebiet, Staatsvolk, Staatsgewalt*); the idea of the *Kulturstaat* (cultural state), where the state became guardian of national schooling, language, and culture; and the growth of bureaucratic and infrastructural regimes that bound populations into state routines.<sup>49</sup>

In the German Empire after 1871, the state was firmly fused with national identity: loyalty to state institutions – the army, civil service, schools – was equated with Germanness. In Austria–Hungary, by contrast, the state remained multiethnic and often opposed to national aspirations. The nationality conflicts of the late century, with competing language laws and school ordinances, made the state an arena of interethnic struggle.<sup>50</sup> For minorities like the Banat Swabians, the state was deeply ambivalent: it provided order and infrastructure but threatened cultural reproduction through Magyarization and bureaucratic assimilation. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Volk*, nation, and state functioned as mutually entangled yet distinct categories. *Volk* anchored cultural-ancestral belonging; nation articulated political sovereignty and collective destiny; and state provided (or withheld) the institutions that materialized these claims.<sup>51</sup> Where the nation and the state coincided, as in the German *Reich*, *Volk* was folded into a statist pedagogy of national identity. Where they diverged, as in Austria–Hungary, *Volk* and nation were mobilized against the state or deployed to nationalize it from within.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Werner Conze, "Staat," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 6 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 25–33.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–63.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–58; Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 369–73.

<sup>51</sup> Bernd Schönemann, "Lexikalischer Rückblick," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 381–89.

<sup>52</sup> Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," 143 ("Kraft des Lateinischen"); cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

## 2.3 Historical context of the Banat

### 2.3.1 'Behind his army followed the colonists'

The encounter of languages, cultures, and religions along the Danube appears ambivalent: an often-romanticized narrative suggests a pre-modern utopia of transcultural exchange, while others characterize this togetherness as the result of imperial conquests and colonial intervention.<sup>53</sup> To competing empires, the region did not constitute a coherent entity with defined borders, a native population, or distinct cultural and political institutions, but was perceived in their relation to their imperial centers. To the Ottomans that following the Hungarian defeat at the Battle of Mohács in 1526 and the fall of Buda in 1541 had gained full control of the Banat region, the Banat served as replenishment to their westward expansion. The Habsburg empire which had become the succeeding imperial adversary in the west, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century gradually reconquered Ottoman territories, and by 1718 with the Treaty of Passarowitz gained full control of the Banat after 164 years of Ottoman rule.<sup>54</sup>

The Banat remained a 'borderland' in the Habsburg empire and was formally integrated into its *Militärgrenze* (military frontier), which was established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and consisted of retired soldiers and colonists drawn from all over the Empire and the conquered territories.<sup>55</sup> Through the imperial lens, the Banat was perceived as a *terra deserta*, an essentially empty and impoverished marshland that needed to be colonized to serve the interests of their imperial realm.<sup>56</sup> Count Claudius Florimund Mercy, the first Habsburg administrator in 1718/19, reported to Vienna that 'the land needed a new population.'<sup>57</sup> In the following decades, both state-directed colonial initiatives and private ventures actively sought—and often competed for—the targeted settlement of predominantly German populations from across the empire. Within the imperial framework, these settlers were ascribed five strategic functions: "be a bulwark of Christianity, be loyal subjects, serve as a buffer for Hungary from the rest of the Balkans, transform the Banat into the grain basket of the monarchy, and Germanize the region."<sup>58</sup> This colonization unfolded in three waves, later immortalized by Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn as

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<sup>53</sup> Méri Frotcher, "A Lost Homeland, a Reinvented Homeland: Diaspora and the 'culture of Memory' in the Colony of Danube Swabians of Entre Rios," *German History* 33, no. 3 (2015): 33.

<sup>54</sup> Hans Weresch, *Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn. Sein Leben, Denken Und Schaffen* (Freiburg, 1975), 1: 37.

<sup>55</sup> O'Reilly, "Divide et Impera: Race, Ethnicity and Administration in Early 18th-Century Habsburg Hungary," 80.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>57</sup> Renate Florstedt, *Wortreiche Landschaft. Deutsche Literatur aus Rumänien – Siebenbürgen, Banat, Bukowina. Ein Überblick Vom 12. Jahrhundert Bis Zur Gegenwart* (BlickPunktBuch e.V., 1998), 62.

<sup>58</sup> Anca-Elena Luca Holden, "Cultural Identity in Contemporary German-Romanian Literature" (The University of Georgia, 2010), 21.

*Schwabenzüge*.<sup>59</sup> The first 1722–1726, under Charles VI, brought an estimated 40,000 settlers; the second 1763–1772, during the reign of Maria Theresa, saw similar numbers; and the third 1781–1787, under Joseph II, followed the promulgation of the Edict of Tolerance in 1781, which granted settlers religious freedom for a period of 150 years.<sup>60</sup> While migration declined thereafter, official Habsburg colonization policy remained in place until the *Ausgleich* of 1867.

### 2.3.2 Education in the Age of Enlightened Absolutism

One of the most consequential administrative influences of the Habsburgs in the Banat was their educational policies, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Initiated in the 1720s alongside settlement policies, schools served as incentives to attract settlers.<sup>61</sup> Enlightened-absolutist reforms soon reshaped the educational landscape, most notably through Johann Ignaz von Felbiger's reform, which sought to cultivate morally upright and capable subjects across broad social strata.<sup>62</sup> The *Inpopulation-Haupt-Instruktion* of 1772 formalized educational obligations, though school fees initially limited attendance to roughly one-third of children. The *ratio educationes* 1777 introducing elementary and *Trivialschulen* for basic instruction, *Hauptschulen* with an expanded curriculum, and *Normalschulen* for the education of teachers.<sup>63</sup> In non-German-speaking areas, bilingual instruction was mandated, though German was promoted as a 'unifying' language. By 1778, the Banat counted 60 German schools with 71 teachers, and reforms moved the region toward a structured *Volksschule* system with regulated teacher qualifications, appointments, and attendance.<sup>64</sup> In the early eighteenth century, the Banat's school system was still under church control, with major denominations as well as the Jesuits and Piarists playing a central role until the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773. Piarist gymnasiums, found throughout the Habsburg Empire, enjoyed high prestige and attracted children from wealthy families of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. Instruction was primarily in German, with some Serbian-language teaching.<sup>65</sup> While the state oversaw administration, churches managed supervision, and municipalities bore the financial burden.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Holden, "Cultural Identity in Contemporary German-Romanian Literature," 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>61</sup> Otfried Kotzian, *Das Schulwesen der Deutschen in Rumänien im Spannungsfeld zwischen Volksgruppe und Staat*, 1983, 169.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-72.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-73.

<sup>65</sup> Grozdanka Gojkov, "Das Banater Bildungssystem in der Zeit von Habsburger Verwaltung und Doppelmonarchie," in *Das Temeswarer Banat* (De Gruyter, 2022), 276.

<sup>66</sup> Kotzian, *Das Schulwesen Der Deutschen in Rumänien Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Volksgruppe und Staat*, 173.

The nineteenth century saw a gradual shift from confessional bound schools toward a more secular system, intensifying nationality conflicts. Maria Theresia reforms had given rise to a highly politicized educational system, which even intensified further under Joseph II's with the replacement of Latin with German as the primary *Amtssprache* in 1784 and thus the language of instruction.<sup>67</sup> Particularly in Hungary, this was met with popular resistance, prompting the declaration of Hungarian as the mandatory language in Transylvania.<sup>68</sup> The late eighteenth-century drive to develop a centralized and unified monarchy ultimately fueled the emergence of a Hungarian national movement. Furthermore, it positioned vernacular languages as the primary target of an increasingly polarized ethnonationalist debate, in which language instruction was stylized as a question of national survival.<sup>69</sup> While language became increasingly reflective of national belonging, the number of schools rose sharply and by 1801/02 the number of German schools had tripled, and Romanian schools had doubled in the Banat.<sup>70</sup> Although a German *Normalschule* was established in Timișoara as a key teacher-training institution, it was closed in 1844 as centralist policies curtailed cultural autonomy under the rising Hungarian nationalism.<sup>71</sup>

Following the Revolution of 1848, in which Hungarian demands for greater independence were provisionally unsuccessful, the Banat entered a period of political turmoil. During an interim phase, it became part of the Austrian crown land 'Voivodeship of Serbia and Temes Banat,' and until its reintegration in 1860, underwent a phase of absolutist reconstruction.<sup>72</sup> Contrary to the neo-absolutist constitution of 1849, which first declared the inalienable rights of all the *Volksstämme* (tribes) to preserve and cultivate their nationality and language, in 1850, German was introduced as the mandatory language.<sup>73</sup> Although this measure had to be revoked in 1859, it illustrates that the conflict about the role of nationality, language, and education in the Habsburg realm remained unresolved.<sup>74</sup>

### 2.3.3 *A process of alienation after the Ausgleich of 1867*

The Magyarization policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries placed significant pressure on the Bant Swabians. While the *Nationalitätengesetz* (nationality law) of 1868 formally granted equality to all citizens of the Hungarian state, its implementation was

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<sup>67</sup> Puttkamer, "Schule zwischen Staat und Nation," 287.

<sup>68</sup> Dömök, "Die Geschichte Der Völker Und Nationalitäten Des Habsburgerreiches," 123.

<sup>69</sup> Puttkamer, "Schule zwischen Staat und Nation," 290.

<sup>70</sup> Kotzian, *Das Schulwesen Der Deutschen in Rumänien Im Spannungsfeld Zwischen Volksgruppe Und Staat*, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 167-68.

<sup>72</sup> Weresch, *Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn. Sein Leben, Denken Und Schaffen*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Joachim von Puttkamer, "Schule zwischen Staat und Nation," 293.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 294-96.

undermined by subsequent laws on primary (1879) and secondary (1883) education, the changing of place-name changes in 1898, and ultimately the 1907 *Lex Apponyi* which all sought to strengthen the role of Hungarian in public life, particularly in education.<sup>75</sup> The *Volksschulgesetz* (educational law) of 1867 had initially placed confessional churches at the center of educational organization, with the state only providing the legal framework, to avoid tensions among the nationalities.<sup>76</sup> However, this arrangement proved viable only to communities where churches had established institutions, such as the Saxons in Transylvania.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the deep-rooted Habsburgian emphasis on emotional education and fostering attachment to the *Heimat* and *Vaterland* (fatherland) before cognitive development persisted, now serving only the Hungarian nation.<sup>78</sup> The Magyarization pressure became particularly pronounced in the Banat's schools, where the ideological focus on creating a homogeneous Magyar nation-state turned educational institutions into both targets and instruments of national assimilation policy.<sup>79</sup> The formal introduction of the Hungarian compulsory school subject in 1879 proved particularly effective among the German population: by ages twelve to fourteen, two-thirds spoke Hungarian, the highest rate among non-Magyar groups.<sup>80</sup> As more schools became bilingual, the number of German *Volksschulen* nearly halved between 1880 and 1913, while the share of confessionally bound schools dropped from about 90 percent to roughly half over the same period.<sup>81</sup>

This changing linguistic affiliations, however, reflected a disproportionate development between the rural Bantian Germans and their urban counterparts. In urban areas, German often gave way to Hungarian, and traditional customs weakened, while rural communities remained more conservative and attached to their cultural heritage. Marriage patterns, social mobility, and the potential material advantages of identifying with the dominant culture further shaped identity negotiations. In industrial centers such as Timișoara, German-led trade unions initially shielded workers from assimilationist pressure, though by the early twentieth century, Hungarian socialist parties began exerting influence. This contributed to a widening urban-rural divide: the countryside clung to communal identity, while city elites often embraced bilingualism without fully abandoning their cultural values. By 1910, the Banat's population had grown to over 1.5 million, with Germans and Romanians each making up roughly a third,

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<sup>75</sup> Patrick Lavrits and Simona Olaru-Posiar, "Die Sozialen Und Wirtschaftlichen Veränderungen Den Banater Schwaben in Der Zweiten Hälfte 19. Jahrhunderts," *Germanistische Beiträge* 32 (2013): 183.

<sup>76</sup> Puttkamer, "Schule zwischen Staat und Nation," 296.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>79</sup> Kotzian, *Das Schulwesen Der Deutschen in Rumänien Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Volksgruppe und Staat*, 173.

<sup>80</sup> Puttkamer, "Schule zwischen Staat Und Nation," 320.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 303.

followed by Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, and others. Despite the pressures of assimilation, the issue was less about the outright loss of German identity than about its adaptation within a shared Banat cultural canon rooted in the Habsburg reforms of the eighteenth century. In the multiethnic, transcultural environment of the Banat, many urban elites adopted a cosmopolitan outlook, learning Hungarian while retaining their language and traditions.

## 2.4 Scholarship on Belonging and Identity among Banat Swabians

Since the 1960s, scholarship on German minorities in Southeastern Europe has shifted away from ethnonationalist perspectives towards cultural and regional approaches. Early works framed Banat Swabians primarily through national categories and structuralist paradigms. Notably, in the scholarship from within the diaspora reflected a romanticized and uncritical portrayal of Swabian identity that echoed through Weresch's (1975) biography of Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, as well as in Ortfried's (1983) examination of the educational system in the Banat.<sup>82</sup> On the contrary, Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann's (1964) study of folk songs rejected the notion of 'linguistic islands of folklore' and instead emphasized intercultural exchange as constitutive of identity formation.<sup>83</sup> This cultural turn opened the way for later research to foreground hybridity, exchange, and negotiation rather than fixed categories of belonging. Regarding the intercultural and transcultural realities that informed Banat Swabian identity construction, Neumann's works (1997, 2015, 2023) are foundational. He conceptualizes the Banat first as a multicultural region, later as an intercultural contact zone, and ultimately as a European region defined by cultural crossings. By linking plural identities to their regional contexts, Neumann shows how regional history questions the nation-state's claim to 'totality' while offering a linguistically and culturally sensitive perspective on everyday life.<sup>84</sup> Other scholars extend this approach: Anderl (2006) explores the cultural ambiguity of ethnicity in modern-day Romania, Wilhelm (2016) reframes regional identity through global migration patterns, and Koranyi (2022) connects regional identity to European memory politics.<sup>85</sup> Nubert

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<sup>82</sup> Ortfried Kotzian, "Das Schulwesen der Deutschen in Rumänien im Spannungsfeld zwischen Volksgruppe und Staat" (1983); Hans Weresch, *Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn: Sein Leben, Denken und Schaffen*, vol. 1 (Freiburg, 1975); idem, *Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn: Sein Leben, Denken und Schaffen*, vol. 2 (Freiburg, 1975).e

<sup>83</sup> Weber-Kellermann, Ingeborg. "Probleme interethnischer Forschungen in Südosteuropa." *Ethnologia Europaea* 1, no. 1 (1967): 231.

<sup>84</sup> Victor Neumann, "Multicultural Identities in a Europe of Regions: The Case of Banat County," *European Journal of Intercultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (1997): 19–35; idem, *Die Interkulturalität des Banat* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015); idem, *Das Temeswarer Banat: Eine europäische Regionalgeschichte* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2023).

<sup>85</sup> James Koranyi, *Migrating Memories: Romanian Germans in Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Corina Anderl, "Siebenbürger Sachsen, Banater Schwaben und Landler als Deutsche in Rumänien. Zur Ambivalenz der kulturellen Funktion von Ethnizität in Multiethnischen," in *Ethnizität in der Transformation*, ed. Wilfried Heller, Peter Jordan, Thede Kahl, and Josef Sallanz (Wien/Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 39–59.



and Dascălu-Romițan (2023) situate early Banat German literature within wider regional currents.<sup>86</sup> Through those works, a perception of a transcultural regionality has emerged as a central category that challenges national frameworks and foregrounds the lived realities of plural societies.

Building on this cultural lens, scholars have increasingly emphasized literature as a crucial medium for expressing identity and negotiating belonging. Herzog (2003) conceptualizes transculturality as a historiographical perspective for German-language literature in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, highlighting hybridity and entanglement.<sup>87</sup> Cooper (2009) similarly situates Romanian-German literature within multinational frameworks, stressing cultural transfer across Romanian and Hungarian spheres. More recent studies by Nubert and Dascălu-Romițan (2023) trace the beginnings of Banat German literature in comparative perspective, while Nubert (2018) highlights intercultural elements in the Swabian *Heimatliteratur*, especially in Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn's works. Earlier, Müller (1998) had already demonstrated how Banat Swabian novels served as tools of identity construction, rooting the idea of a *Volksstamm* (tribe) in narratives of ancestry and continuity.<sup>88</sup> Glajar (2004) explores how German-language writing functions as memory work, linking personal subjectivity to collective trauma, while Holden (2010) extends this perspective to contemporary German-Romanian literature in transnational settings.<sup>89</sup> Together, these studies emphasize the dual role of literature as both a vehicle of cultural identity and a medium of memory work, bridging past and present identity discourses.

A recurring theme in the scholarship is the significance of storytelling in identity formation. Narratives of how German settlers came to be in Southeastern Europe – whether cast as migrants, colonizers, or settlers – implied different modes of legitimacy and belonging (Wendt 2021; Wilhelm 2016; Nagy-Szilveszter 2018). For the Banat Swabians, who settled mainly in the eighteenth century through Habsburg colonization, Germanness was initially articulated less through pan-German nationalism than through language, Catholic faith, and

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<sup>86</sup> Roxana Nubert, "Interkulturelle Aspekte der Banater Heimatliteratur. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn," *Germanistische Beiträge*, no. 42 (2018); Roxana Nubert and Ana-Maria Dascălu-Romițan, "Zu den Anfängen der deutschsprachigen Literatur im Banat – kulturvergleichende Überlegungen (1718–1850)," *Germanistische Beiträge* 49, no. 1 (2023): 30–49.

<sup>87</sup> Andreas Herzog, "'Transkulturalität' Als Perspektive Der Geschichtsschreibung Deutschsprachiger Literatur," in *Wer mag wohl Die Junge, Schwarzäugige Dame Seyn? Zuordnungsfragen, Darstellungsprinzipien, Bewertungskriterien Der Deutsch(sprachigen) Literatur in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa?*, ed. Werner Biechele and András Bálogh (Budapest, 2003), 22–35.

<sup>88</sup> Müller, Hans. "Auf den Spuren der Ahnen: Die Begründung der Identität eines Volksstammes in einer Romantrilogie." *Banatica. Beiträge zur deutschen Kultur* 2 (1998): 12–22.

<sup>89</sup> Anca-Elena Luca Holden, *Cultural Identity in Contemporary German-Romanian Literature* (Athens, GA, 2010); Valentina Glajar, *The German Legacy in East Central Europe, 1890–1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004).

local traditions. The very ethnonym ‘Swabians’ was a retrospective construct, imposed externally and gradually internalized. Beyond literary self-constructions, political frameworks played a decisive role in ‘minority making.’ Wendt (2021) traces how ‘Germanness’ in the Banat was redefined across shifting regimes, from Dualist Hungary to interwar Romania.<sup>90</sup> Wilhelm (2016) reconceptualizes Banat Swabians as a mobile minority, embedded in transnational histories of migration.<sup>91</sup> These studies highlight the contingent and shifting nature of identity, shaped by intersections of politics, mobility, and cultural remembrance.

The trajectory of scholarship reveals three major developments: a move from national to cultural and regional approaches; the recognition of regionality as a category that transcends ethnicity and national frameworks; and an emphasis on literature as both identity work and memory practice. However, significant gaps remain. The Banat Swabians and Transylvanian Saxons are often homogenized under the label of ‘Romanian Germans,’ yet few studies systematically compare their identity formations, particularly in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the narrative strategies through which identity was articulated – whether nostalgic and essentialist, or hybrid and ambiguous – remain underexplored in relation to regional distinctiveness and positionality within broader national and imperial frameworks. This thesis addresses these gaps by focusing on the Banat Swabians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a period often overshadowed by research on National Socialism, forced migration, and postwar memory. By analyzing Müller-Guttenbrunn’s *Der Kleine Schwab*, it reconstructs how Banat Swabian identity was articulated through stories of origin, regional belonging, and intercultural negotiation. In doing so, it contributes to the broader historiography of German minorities in Eastern Europe while offering new insights into the interplay between narrative identity, regionality, and conceptual narrativity.

## 2.5 Method of cultural historic narrative analysis

When Hayden White published *Metahistory* in 1973, the linguistic and narrative-theoretical implications he introduced fundamentally challenged prevailing understandings of history. By claiming that narrative constructions and rhetorical tropes shape historiography – just like literature – White effectively dissolved the dichotomy between fact and fiction, eroding the boundary between historical and literary analysis.<sup>92</sup> Initially perceived as a threat to the

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<sup>90</sup> Wendt, Reinhard. *Die Banater Schwaben: Deutsche Siedler in Südosteuropa und ihre Geschichte*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Wilhelm, Marcus. *Regionale Identität im globalen Kontext: Banater Schwaben zwischen Migration und Erinnerung*. München: Oldenbourg, 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Saupe and Wiedermann, *Narration Und Narratologie. Erzähltheorien in Der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 8.

discipline of history itself, his approach eventually gave rise to new forms of analysis that treated this hybridity of fact and fiction not as a flaw, but as a productive feature. This shift enabled an expanded understanding of where historical meaning-making occurs – not confined to academic historiography, but also present in (auto)biographical writing, collective memory, and popular historical narratives.<sup>93</sup> While such fictional writings may not be granted the complete status of ‘history,’ they were nonetheless received by readers as legitimate representations of a collective past.<sup>94</sup> This is particularly relevant as national and political socialization in the early nineteenth century – closely tied to identity formation – took place to a considerable extent through literary self-education.<sup>95</sup> Against this backdrop, analyzing Müller–Guttenbrunn’s novella as both a literary artifact and a site of identity work becomes particularly productive, as it allows for a combination of a narrative analysis with the historical vocabulary of conceptual history.

Following Riessman (2008), the narrative analysis applied in this thesis is structured along three complementary dimensions. First, a thematic analysis focuses on the content, recurring motifs, and cultural semantics embedded in the text. Here, the dimension of language and genre draws on conventions of *Heimatliteratur* and *Bildungsliteratur*, employing dialectal insertions and evaluative statements as narrative devices to evoke cultural proximity, assert belonging, and confer legitimacy.<sup>96</sup> Second, a structural analysis shifts attention from the ‘told’ to the ‘telling,’ examining emplotment, sequencing, evaluation devices, and the narrative arc.<sup>97</sup> This dimension draws especially on Genette’s distinctions between narrated time and narrating time, as well as Ricoeur’s differentiation between the episodic (the sequential unfolding of events) and the configurational (the integration of events into a coherent whole).<sup>98</sup> Here, the focus lies on temporality, analyzing narrative devices such as summary, scene, and pause to trace how events are rendered meaningful through the compression or expansion of the narrated experience.<sup>99</sup> Further, the ‘fully formed’ narrative is structured around six core elements: an abstract that signals the story’s point, an orientation situating time, place, and characters, a complicating action that drives the plot toward a crisis or turning point, an evaluation where the

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<sup>93</sup> Saupe and Wiedermann, *Narration Und Narratologie. Erzähltheorien in Der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 10.

<sup>94</sup> Ann Rigney and Ithaca and London, *Imperfect Histories The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (2001), 9.

<sup>95</sup> Puttkamer, “Schule zwischen Staat und Nation,” 304.

<sup>96</sup> Jacobs, Jürgen C. 2009. “Bildungsroman.” In *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen*, edited by Dieter Lamping, Frank Zipfel, Sandra Poppe, and Sascha Seiler, 56–64. Stuttgart: Kröner.

<sup>97</sup> Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 54.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 43–44.

<sup>99</sup> Gérard Genette, “Order, Duration, and Frequency,” in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 30–32.

narrator reflects on meaning and emotion, a resolution that provides closure to the sequence of events, and a coda that reconnects the narrative to the present context.<sup>100</sup> To capture all of these dimensions, following Somers, the structural analysis proceeds from the ontological level of temporal-causal sequencing, the public narratives of regional and national belonging, the metahistorical negotiation between the ‘old’ and the ‘new world’, and finally to the conceptual dimension where meaning is anchored.

Third, the analysis considers performance and positionality. While *Der kleine Schwab* is not an oral account or developed within an interview, its narrative performance is nonetheless shaped by Müller-Guttenbrunn’s rhetorical style and his intended readership. Here, the focus lies on how Banat Swabian belonging is performed through narrative choices, vocabulary, and genre conventions.<sup>101</sup> Particularly in this context, attention is given to the narrator and focalization, examining modes of narration – such as first-person retrospective accounts, an omniscient third-person voice, and shifts between internal and external focalization – for how they mediate authority and perspective.<sup>102</sup> Further, the metahistorical and conceptual-historical perspective examines Müller-Guttenbrunn’s use of key political terms such as *Volk*, nation, and state, situating them within the *Sattelzeit* of conceptual transformation and drawing the semantic shifts and their political implications towards the ideological position of Müller-Guttenbrunn’s performance.

### 3. Narrative Analysis

#### 3.1 Thematic analysis – what is said?

##### 3.1.1 *The story of Der Kleine Schwab*

##### **Episodes 1–2: identity crises**

The novella recounts the life story of Johann Mergl, an elderly Swabian *Dorfschulze* (village mayor) in Hungary, who, at the encouragement of his doctor, begins to write his memoirs. His narrative opens with his youth as the third son of a farmer in a small Swabian village, which leads to his enrollment at the Latin gymnasium in Temeschwar (today Timișoara), with the expectation that he would one day become a ‘priest or some other high–

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<sup>100</sup> Riessman, *Narrative Methods*, 78.

<sup>101</sup> Riessman, *Narrative Methods*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Gérard Genette, “Order, Duration, and Frequency,” 27.

ranking official.’<sup>103</sup> Johann lodges with the Austrian civil servant family *Schönwetter* and befriends their son Joseph. His education, however, is abruptly disrupted by the ‘Hungarian revival,’ which results in the introduction of Hungarian as the dominant teaching language.<sup>104</sup> The ‘political earthquake’ further leads to the dismissal of civil servants lacking Hungarian proficiency, forcing the *Schönwetter* family to return to Vienna.<sup>105</sup> Failing the school year, Johann has to return home, where his father decides to send him to a German gymnasium in Transylvania.

### Episodes 3–5: The German bond

The journey to Transylvania becomes a rite of passage, deepening Johann’s bond with his father and exposing him for the first time to the world beyond the Banat. Fascinated with the Banat landscapes of lowlands, forests, rivers, and the Carpathian Mountains; ‘In our lowlands between the Danube, Tisza and Maros rivers, only on the very bright autumn days and from the highest church tower one could see a faint strip of distant mountain ranges in the east.’<sup>106</sup> He describes a culturally rich landscape of a tradition-bound past, as Hungarian and procession of pilgrims, and a more modern, more ethnically diverse world of ‘wild figures, Romanians, Gypsies, Ruthenians’ working on the first railway to Transylvania.<sup>107</sup> Full of awe, he describes his father as the ‘archetype of a German peasant.’<sup>108</sup> Through his traditional costume, his decisive actions when confronted by robbers, and the way he tells Johann about their German ancestors, their migration to Hungary, and Prince Eugene, the father appears as Johann’s role model. With ‘There the Germans live. There we want to stay, finally announces their arrival in the ‘Old Saxon border city of Broos.’<sup>109</sup>

Upon arriving in Herrmannstadt, Johann’s first encounter with the Saxons is religious in nature. Due to their Protestant faith, the gymnasium he is required to attend is likewise Protestant, placing him at odds with the formative Catholic influence of the Piarist gymnasium. For his father, however, the issue is less about confessional difference than ensuring Johann

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<sup>103</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab* (Stackmann Verlag, 1938), 7. German original: “Pfarrer oder sonst ein hohes Tier,” translated by the author.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 15. German original: “Ungarische Erneuerung,” translated by the author.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 14. German original: “politische Erdbeben” translated by the author.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 17. German original: “In unserer Tiefebene zwischen der Donau, Theiß und Marosch konnte man nur an sehr hellen Herbsttagen von den höchsten Kirchtürmen einen dämmernden Streifen ferner Bergzüge im Osten wahrnehmen,” translated by the author.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 17–18. German original: “Wilde Gestalten, Rumänen, Zigeuner, Ruthenen Urbild eines deutschen Bauern,” translated by the author. Note: “Zigeuner” is a historical term used by Müller–Guttenbrunn; today, the appropriate designation is Sinti and Roma.

<sup>108</sup> Müller–Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 17. “Urbild eines deutschen Bauern,” translated by the author.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 21. German original: “alten sächsischen Grenzstadt Broos, Do wohne deutsche Leut’. Do wolle m’r bleiwa.” Translated by the author.

remains a ‘good German.’<sup>110</sup> In the increasingly difficult times facing the Swabians, religious distinctions become secondary: ‘They believe in Jesus Christ, like the Catholics, and that’s the most important thing.’<sup>111</sup> Despite his reservations, Johann quickly grows comfortable in his new host family, the Quandts. Anna Quandt proudly recalls having turned ‘a Romanian student into a Saxon within four years,’ while Johannes Quandt reassures him that his desire to remain Swabian is understandable since he ‘is already a German.’<sup>112</sup> Over the three years he spends in Herrmannstadt, Johann’s name gradually changes to the more common Protestant form—Johannes, or simply Hannes. More significantly, he rediscovers joy in schooling, as none of his professors speak Hungarian. Paradoxically, he enjoys Hungarian as a subject, even naming the poet Sándor Petőfi among his favorites. With the outbreak of the Franco–Prussian War in 1870, Johann’s professors became ‘apostles,’ instilling in him an admiration for the greatness of the ‘National Germans.’<sup>113</sup> For the first time, he experiences ‘an invisible but indissoluble spiritual bond that connects us to the great German people.’<sup>114</sup> His closest friend becomes Karl Konnerz, the son of a prosperous shoemaker, and he develops a romantic infatuation with Karl’s sister, Hanni. As their mother was presumably Romanian and thus not of ‘pure heritage,’ Johann describes Hanni as ‘an exotic being with flaming dark eyes and a Roman nose.’<sup>115</sup> The narrative then digresses into an anecdote about Joseph Meresch, Karl and Hanni’s uncle, and a tailor by trade. When his child was born on Napoleon’s birthday, he named him ‘Napoleon’ and boldly requested, via telegram, that the French emperor serve as godfather. Receiving an affirmative reply left him euphoric, but days passed without further development—until a message arrived that the French general consul would come from Pest (Budapest) to Herrmannstadt. While awaiting the visit, Meresch immersed himself in the works of Napoleon I, which Johann notes would only later be appreciated in the ‘German world,’ while Napoleon III was, in any case, unpopular.<sup>116</sup> On the appointed day, a carriage was sent to Karlsberg, the last railway station, to collect the French consul for festivities at the *Römischer Kaiser*. Johann describes with enthusiasm the French maid carrying the little Napoleon and Hanni, who stood in for the absent godmother, Empress Eugénie. Yet the consul, Goldberger, is depicted in a manner laced with

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 23. German original: “guter Deutscher.” Translated by the author.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 23. German original: “Sie glaabe an Jesus Christus, so wie die Katholische, und des ischt die Hauptsach.” Translated by the author.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 24. German original: “walachischen Schüler in vier Jahren zum Sachsen gemacht hätte” / “ist ja schon ein Deutscher!” Translated by the author.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 25. German original: “Nationaldeutschen.” Translated by the author.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 25. German original: “unsichtbares, aber unlösliches geistiges Band verknüpft uns mit dem großen deutschen Volke.” Translated by the author.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 25–26.

<sup>116</sup> Adam Müller–Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 28. German original: “deutsche Welt.” Translated by the author.

antisemitic undertones. As a result, Meresch became the ‘laughingstock of all Herrmannstadt,’ and with the outbreak of the Franco–Prussian War, he was ‘completely ostracized by the national Saxons.’<sup>117</sup>

Johann next recounts his return to the Banat, where his ‘German patriotic sentiment’ provokes hostility among local officials, particularly Hungarians.<sup>118</sup> Teaching his old friends the patriotic song ‘Die Wacht am Rhein’ and later leading the village in singing it upon news of German victories leads to his denunciation and threats of disciplinary action. The Hungarian press soon reports the ‘catastrophe of Sedan,’ which Johann likens to a second natural disaster.<sup>119</sup> Momentarily shifting to the narrative present, he reflects on what might have been: ‘If the Swabians had had a leader back then... If only a word had been said in their churches and schools about the greatness of their people, they would have become more resilient in the struggle for their schools and their mother tongue that was just beginning.’<sup>120</sup> Without transition, the story resumes with another journey through the Maros valley with his father, who now sends his casks by rail to Karlsburg. In ‘the dear old Saxon city’ of Mühlbach they discover Swabians and even Badenians.<sup>121</sup> Their persistent independence fills his father with pride, while they exchange jokes in the Swabian dialect. That all had forgotten ‘original homeland,’ apart from a vague memory of coming from the Black Forest, prompts his father desire to once return to Germany.<sup>122</sup>

### **Episodes 6–10: Returning (home and to old times)**

Back in Herrmannstadt, the workers’ educational association organizes an autumn festival in the forest on a warm September day.<sup>123</sup> Johann becomes absorbed in describing the mountain scenery and the romantic setting of the celebration, but above all he is captivated by Hanni and her dancing. When they finally share a kiss in the forest, he is ecstatic—only for her to return to her fiancé. During the following winter, tales of wolves circulate in Herrmannstadt, as his mother writes to ask whether he has seen his father. Telling her not to worry, Johann

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 31. German original: “völlig geächtet bei den nationalen Sachsen, (Gespött in ganz Herrmannstadt).” Translated by the author.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 31. German original: “erweckte ich dort Ärgernis und machte Aufsehen durch meine deutsche Gesinnung.” Translated by the author.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 32. German original: “Katastrophe von Sedan.” Translated by the author.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 32. German original: “Wenn die Schwaben damals einen Führer gehabt hätten ... Wenn damals in ihren Kirchen und Schulen nur ein Wort von der Größe ihres Volkes gesprochen worden wäre, sie würden widerstandsfähiger geworden sein in dem eben erst beginnenden Kampf um ihre Schulen und ihre Muttersprache.” Translated by the author.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 34. German original: “Über Mühlbach ging die Fahrt, die liebe alte Sachsenstadt.” Translated by the author.

<sup>122</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 55. German original: “Und doch wussten sie alle miteinander nichts von ihrer Urheimat.” Translated by the author.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 36.

celebrates Easter 1871 by the traditional sprinkling of girls with water. Excited to sprinkle Hanni with rose water, he meets her again, and after another kiss, she bids him – ‘the dear boy’ – and says goodbye forever.<sup>124</sup> The final three episodes follow a single thread: Johann’s search for his missing father. A telegram from his mother abruptly ends this chapter of his life with the urgent plea: ‘Search for the father!’ His investigation leads him to a gypsy campsite where he finds the remnants of his father’s possessions, and after informing the police, they are arrested and trialed in Deva. Upon his return, his family can no longer afford his education, and the school director informs him that his unexcused absence has cost him the school year. ‘Without hesitation,’ Johann accepts his faith, remains in his village, and becomes a peasant.<sup>125</sup> He finds closure and purpose in reaffirming his Swabian identity: ‘I’m Swabian, and I remain Swabian. And today they all know again that they are German people.’<sup>126</sup> He feels no regret, believing that he has fulfilled his duty and that his life’s work, like a farmer tending his field, is just as meaningful in the eyes of God. The novella concludes with him, an old, sick man, awaiting a peaceful death, content with the life as ‘Swabian and nothing else’ he has lived and the legacy he has left behind.<sup>127</sup>

### 3.1.2 *Form and Language*

*Der Kleine Schwab* is a relatively short novella of about 56 pages (depending on the edition, with some published in abridged form). Its auto-fictional biographical structure is episodic, composed of chapters of varying length that alternate between narrative continuity and stand-alone vignettes. Influenced by the tradition of *Bildungsliteratur*, the nine chapter headings often take the form of *how* and *why* questions—for example, the opening episode, ‘How the peasant boy ended up at Latin school, and why he failed.’ This catechism-like framing signals the text’s didactic intention: rather than an open narrative, each episode is staged as a problem to be solved, implicitly guiding the reader toward moral and ideological lessons.

Linguistically, Müller-Guttenbrunn employs simple and accessible prose, in keeping with the novella’s role as a work of *Volksbildungsliteratur*. Yet this surface simplicity is marked by deliberate stylistic choices that reinforce a sense of belonging. Dialect appears whenever Swabian characters speak, inscribing linguistic authenticity and anchoring characters in a recognizable cultural community. At the same time, the narrator’s voice remains in standard

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 45. German original: “Du lieber, lieber Bub!” Translated by the author.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 60. German original: “Ohne Widerrede bin ich daheimgeblieben und Bauer geworden.” Translated by the author.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 60. German original: “Ich bin ein Schwab und bleib’ ein Schwab. Und heute wissen sie’s wieder alle, dass sie deutsche Leut’ sind.” Translated by the author.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 61. German original: “Ich bin ein Schwab und sonst nichts.” Translated by the author.



German, elevating the autobiographical account into a discourse of general cultural significance. The alternation between dialectal immediacy and standard German narration underscores the novella's oscillation between *Heimatroman* and *Bildungsroman*, situating Johann in the Banat Swabian region while simultaneously elevating his life into a universalizable narrative of 'Germanness.' This stylistic layering serves an ideological function. The use of dialect performs local identity and marks Johann's roots, while the standardized narration subsumes these local experiences into the larger horizon of the German *Volk*. In this sense, form and language themselves enact the novella's central movement: the transformation of regional specificity into national belonging.

### 3.1.3 *Emerging themes as units of analysis*

Johann's memoir in *Der Kleine Schwab* traces the formation, transformation, and contestation of Banat Swabian identity. First, identity formation relies on the interconnection of *Heimat*, religion, and ethnicity. The landscape with its rivers, forests, and distant mountains provokes a romantic perception of regionality, often more immediate than abstract national ties. Catholic upbringing initially sets Johann apart from Protestant Saxon institutions, yet confessional divisions give way to a broader German belonging. This self-understanding is reinforced through both affinity with other German groups and encounters with the Banat's multiethnic population, blending fascination, stereotyping, and pragmatic coexistence. Second, education, mobility, and historical consciousness drive change. Schools become sites where language policy and authority define belonging; the imposition of Hungarian marks rupture, while German schooling in Hermannstadt renews cultural confidence. Travel through Transylvania and the Maros Valley broadens horizons, situating Swabian life within wider regional and imperial networks. Stories of ancestral migration and local history embed personal experience within the *longue durée* of German presence in the region. Third, political upheavals, class dynamics, and memory shape enduring tensions. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 sharpens his *deutsche Gesinnung*, thereby turning patriotic acts into both solidarity and provocation under Hungarian rule. Johann's path from student to peasant mayor reframes agricultural labor as morally equal to elite professions, aligning with romanticized rural ideals. Interpersonal relations reveal ethnic boundaries, while storytelling and reminiscence preserve and transmit the very identity under pressure.

## 3.2 Structural analysis – how is it said?

### 3.2.1 *From biographical to historical*

By introducing the memoir-writing frame in the opening episode, the narrative present is established as the standpoint from which Johann Mergl retrospectively recounts his life, guided by the underlying question: ‘Who am I, and where do I belong?’<sup>128</sup> The episodic structure of the following nine life chapters initially sets the expectation of a coming-of-age story. One anticipates that Johann’s narrated time will follow the sequence of his biographical memories. Yet the narrating time consistently reframes this sequence within a larger historical arc. It does more than order events: it configures Johann’s life into the destiny of a collective. Following Ricoeur, historical narrative frequently takes precedence over lived time, so that the biography is not merely remembered but subsumed within the grander narrative of history.<sup>129</sup>

Johann’s narrated past begins with his first year at the Latin school in Temeschwar. After his arrival, the story immediately introduces historical foreshadowing: the Battle of Königgrätz, a seemingly distant event, enters Johann’s horizon and marks the transition from the personal to the collective dimension. The first dialogue scene expands narrated time to convey the ‘first shocks of the earthquake,’ as the language of instruction begins shifting from German to Hungarian. Explicit and implicit references to the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the following Compromise of 1867 recur throughout this episode.<sup>130</sup> Through their repetition, the historical framework gradually moves into the foreground, overshadowing Johann’s personal school experience. Furthermore, the narrative temporal frame is expanded and refocused away from Johann to the Transylvanian Saxons, who are presented as more resistant to the ‘new times’ due to their deeper anchoring in imperial administration. Johann’s story time pauses while cultural and metahistorical reflections dominate, as ‘hundred-year-old German educational institutions’ are evoked. From here the narrative increasingly oscillates between contraction and expansion. Two years are compressed into a single anecdote, while later chapters become more dialogic and scenic, stretching narrated time. Yet these expansions never serve Johann’s private experience: they open out into broader historical reflection. Recurring motifs – ‘earthquake,’ ‘new time,’ ‘renewal of Hungary’ – signal temporal disruption and locate Johann’s life within the shocks of history as the complicating element.<sup>131</sup> His biography, which

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<sup>128</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52-87.

<sup>130</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 14.

<sup>131</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, “Es ist wie ein Erdbeben” (10-11, 14); “neue Zeit” (9-10, 13); “Erneuerung Ungarns” (14). Translated by author.

in lived time spans scarcely more than a decade – excluding the first and last chapter – becomes porous to historical temporality. Johann's experiences are less the center of narration than a gateway into the larger historical framework. In this sense, the episodic structure of his life is consistently subordinated to the configurational demands of a historic plot. What begins as the story of a Banat Swabian youth unfolds as a historical plot in which history itself eclipses the personal. Ricoeur's insight is borne out: Johann's life is narrated not for its own sake but as the medium through which historical meaning is configured.

Thus, the novella can be read as a history textbook of the German people in the 'borderlands' of the Habsburg Empire: how they arrived, how they developed, how history impacted their present, and how these experiences foreshadowed the future. Johann's father recalls the origins of settlement: 'He also spoke of his grandparents and great-grandparents, who still possessed the writings about the immigration of their ancestors into Hungary. [...] There was even something about Prince Eugene.'<sup>132</sup> The achievements of this community are cast above all in education, though here the narrative already foreshadows decline: 'Hundred-year-old German educational institutions were destroyed in one blow.'<sup>133</sup> The disruption of Johann's youth is repeatedly tied to major events: 'From Königgrätz! The news of the bloody battle reached us late, and I understood nothing of its meaning;' or again at Sedan, when 'the impression on the Swabian peasants was as powerful as that of a great natural event. [...] Pride awoke that Germans had achieved this, and one evening men and boys, students and peasants sang the *Wacht am Rhein*'<sup>134</sup> The *Ausgleich* and the onset of Magyarization are narrated through catastrophe: 'It is like an earthquake. [...] Some professors began to lecture in Hungarian. [...] Hundred-year-old German institutions were destroyed in one blow.'<sup>135</sup> Finally, the memoir frame projects these experiences toward a national horizon: 'And today they all know again that they are German people.'<sup>136</sup>

In this way, the emotional and educational grounding of the *ratio educationis* remained intact, carried by the constant entanglement of history with devotion to *Heimat* and fatherland.<sup>137</sup> The narrative further reflects the emphasis on settlement continuity, a strategy that ethnic minorities resorted to in their own textbooks when confronted with the translation of Hungarian curricula.<sup>138</sup> Particularly striking is that the dynastic realm is still evoked in

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 10-14.

<sup>136</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 60.

<sup>137</sup> Puttkamer, Joachim von. 2021. "Schule zwischen Staat und Nation." 307.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 311.

relation to the period of colonization, yet the references of the present are ultimately tied to the German Reich. This shift implies that the fatherland is the German *Reich* rather than the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. This reorientation away from Vienna toward Berlin signals a more profound transformation, one that not only reshapes the metahistorical framework but also marks the transition from a regional to a national sense of belonging.<sup>139</sup>

### 3.2.2 *From regional to national belonging*

Spatially, the narrative oscillates between the Banat, Transylvania, and the broader region of Southeastern Europe. Johann's travels through the Maros valley, his encounters with Saxons in Hermannstadt, and his father's memory of Germany situate the Banat within overlapping spatial dimensions of belonging: local, regional, imperial, and national. However, Müller-Guttenbrunn's narrative grants access to temporality and historical depth selectively in relation to those spatial and cultural realms, thereby shaping who is admitted into the story of belonging. Swabians are historically and institutionally anchored through 'a hundred years of German schools,' ancestral memories of the Black Forest, and the migration under Prince Eugene, while Saxons are granted even firmer rootedness through references to centuries-old settlements such as Mühlenbach, said to have existed five hundred years before Maria Theresa's settlement policies.<sup>140</sup> In contrast, Hungarians, Romanians, and Roma are denied such temporal frameworks, appearing as ahistorical, impoverished, or 'uncivilized' figures.<sup>141</sup> By refusing them history, the text denies them voice and belonging, situating them as timeless 'others' against which German continuity appears all the more pronounced. Wallachia and Romania emerge only in passing, framed as backward or threatening peripheries, excluded from the temporal order. This reveals a scalar hierarchy: while the Banat is represented as a cultivated *Heimat*, and Transylvania serves as a stage for encounters with an 'older' German culture, the neighboring regions remain marginal to the narrative of belonging.

Here, Paasi's framework of *regional identity* and *regional consciousness* helps clarify the duality of this representation. Regional identity, as Paasi emphasizes, is both an external categorization of space through boundaries, symbols, and narratives, and an internal consciousness that is reproduced by the inhabitants themselves.<sup>142</sup> In *Der Kleine Schwab*, the Banat is constructed as such a symbolic region – its fertile plains, Swabian villages, and church

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<sup>139</sup> Victor Neumann, "Die Vielfalt von Nations- und Staatskonzeptionen während der Zeit von Neoabsolutismus, Ausgleich und österreichisch-ungarischer Doppelmonarchie," in *Das Temeswarer Banat: Eine Europäische Regionalgeschichte*, ed. Victor Neumann (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 313.

<sup>140</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 11, 34.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18, 23.

<sup>142</sup> Anssi Paasi, "Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 477.

towers marking visibility and permanence – while its inhabitants are depicted as cultivating a distinct regional consciousness through labor, dialect, and tradition: evenings at the inn are depicted where ‘the elders truly understood the Swabian chatter from the Banat [...] he teased them with Swabian proverbs and sayings,’ while Johann’s father himself embodies tradition through ‘the broad German hat still worn in the Banat, the dark-blue cloth suit with silver round buttons on the vest, the high polished boots, and the whole sturdy figure firmly rooted in the soil.’<sup>143</sup> Yet this regional consciousness is never allowed to stand on its own; instead, it is subsumed into the higher horizon of Germanness. Johann’s development illustrates precisely this shift: his Swabian rootedness acquires meaning only when redefined as belonging to the German *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community).

The tension between regional and national belonging thus becomes the defining element of the narrative plot. On the one hand, it narrates Banat Swabian life as a regional identity, anchored in landscape and continuity. On the other hand, it leverages this very regional identity as a steppingstone to national integration. Following Paasi, regions are not “self-contained entities [but are] continuously reproduced in wider socio-political contexts.”<sup>144</sup> In Müller-Guttenbrunn’s text, the Banat is precisely such a reproduced region: it is represented, but only as long as it can serve as a gateway into the national narrative of Germanness. Regional belonging is acknowledged, but national belonging is prescribed as its ultimate meaning. This instrumentalization of regional identity directly anticipates the research question of this thesis: not only how Banat Swabian identity was narratively constructed in *Der Kleine Schwab*, but also why *Volk*, nation, and state were mobilized in precisely this way within the socio-political and cultural context of late nineteenth-century Southeastern Europe.

### 3.2.3 *From the ‘old’ to the ‘new world’*

Until the fifth episode, Müller-Guttenbrunn cultivates a distinctly linear apprehension of time. Events are narrated in a before-and-after relationship to decisive historical moments: Königgrätz leading to the Ausgleich, Sedan leading to the rediscovery of Germanness. Time is presented as a chain of cause and effect, punctuated by radical separations between an ‘old’ imperial era and the dawn of a ‘new time,’ which is consistently associated with crises, ruptures, and existential threat. Within this framework, the plot juxtaposes a romanticized past of imperial calm with the disruptive forces of modernity, symbolized by the arrival of the railway, which cuts across traditional rhythms of travel and trade.<sup>145</sup> Above all, the Compromise of 1867

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<sup>143</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 34, 17.

<sup>144</sup> Anssi Paasi, “Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question,” 478.

<sup>145</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 32-34.

and the imposition of Hungarian as the *Staatssprache* (formal language) is experienced as a profound civilizational rupture. Thereby, the repeatedly described as an ‘earthquake’ shaking the educational and cultural order, becomes the central event, creating a before and after.<sup>146</sup> From episode six onwards, however, the narrative shifts towards a more cyclical apprehension of time. Seasonal change supplants historical events as the primary temporal framework, and Johann’s second crisis becomes increasingly inward and personal. Extended dialogues foreground his encounters and self-reflections, and his voice begins to gesture towards ‘something eternal, something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly events.’ His remark that his life ‘means nothing for the world out there’ underscores the sense that the personal no longer matters for the linear march of history.<sup>147</sup> Religion, initially tied to confessional differences, now functions in eschatological terms, enabling Johann to assume his father’s symbolic role and close his life within a frame of recurrence and timelessness.<sup>148</sup>

This oscillation between linear and cyclical time reinforces the hybrid structure of the novella, which combines elements of the *Bildungsroman*—episodic crises, maturation, and reconciliation—with those of the *Heimatroman*, where landscapes, dialect, and seasonal cycles anchor belonging in a sensorially charged space. As Anderson observes, the ‘new world’ of nation-states displaced the ‘old world’ of imperial orders, generating a temporality of rupture in which national communities were configured by aligning disparate lives into a single plot of continuity and progress.<sup>149</sup> Johann embodies precisely this hybridity: while he nostalgically recalls the imperial past, he is nonetheless woven into the narrative of modern nationalism.

Müller-Guttenbrunn amplifies this metanarrative of modernity through recurring metaphors. The fortress of Temeschwar, once a bulwark of imperial power, is rendered obsolete in the ‘new time.’<sup>150</sup> Castle ruins along the Marosch valley signal the decay of medieval orders, and the ‘catastrophe of Sedan’ inscribes geopolitical changes into a metaphysics of fate.<sup>151</sup> Even Johann’s detour into the story of Napoleon Meresch, who names his son after the French emperor and becomes a ‘laughingstock of Herrmannstadt,’ functions as a miniature allegory of modernity: misplaced loyalties to cosmopolitan figures are punished, while ‘Germanness,’ tied to Prussian victory, emerges as the sole legitimate horizon of belonging.<sup>152</sup> Music, too,

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>149</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 23-24.

<sup>150</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 7-8.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 31.

participates in this metahistorical transformation. The Viennese waltz ‘Miramare’ reflects the dynastic cosmopolitanism of the Habsburg world, but it is displaced by ‘Die Wacht am Rhein,’ the anthem of German unity and blood sacrifice. Its performance in a Banat village re-situates regional voices within the imagined national community of the Reich.<sup>153</sup> This shift from imperial plurality to ethnonational exclusivity exemplifies the novella’s broader movement: the local and regional are staged only to be subsumed within the teleology of Germanness.

The temporal insertion thus emerges as the precondition of narrative inclusion: communities gain voice and continuity only when anchored in historical time. Swabians are granted depth through ancestral memories of the Black Forest and the migration under Prince Eugene, while Saxons acquire historicity through settlements like Mühlbach, said to be five hundred years old.<sup>154</sup> Those left outside these frameworks—Hungarians, Romanians, Roma—remain timeless and ahistorical, denied narrative agency and reduced to static representations of poverty or ‘uncivilized’ figures. This exclusion reflects precisely the logic Anderson describes: national communities are configured by synchronizing some populations into the narrative of modern time while consigning others to its margins.<sup>155</sup> Here, Anderson’s notion of the ‘thin skin’ of nationalism becomes particularly relevant: modern nationalism, unlike dynastic legitimacy, always rests on fragile foundations and therefore requires constant narrative reaffirmation.<sup>156</sup> *Der kleine Schwab* exemplifies this fragility: Germanness is never simply given, but incessantly explained, dramatized, and defended against both external threats (Hungarian assimilation, French rivalry) and internal ambivalence (religious divisions, romantic distractions). The repeated insistence that Swabians are Germans, that defeats are catastrophes, and that victories herald renewal reveals precisely this anxious need for reassurance. Ultimately, the metanarrative of modernity culminates in Johann’s final pronouncement: ‘I am a Swabian and will always be a Swabian. And today, they all know once again that they are German people.’<sup>157</sup> By subsuming his Swabian roots – reflected in the use of dialect in which he says those words – into the destiny of Germanness, the novella affirms that regional and individual identity gain meaning only as part of the national plot. Belonging, here, is narratively produced not through coexistence but through the temporal and symbolic alignment of ‘Swabianess’ with the imagined community of the German Volk.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>155</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 27.

<sup>156</sup> Victor Neumann, “Die Vielfalt von Nations- und Staatskonzeptionen während der Zeit von Neoabsolutismus, Ausgleich und österreichisch-ungarischer Doppelmonarchie,” 309.

<sup>157</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der kleine Schwab*, 60, original: “Ich bin ein Schwab und bleib’ ein Schwab. Und heute wissen sie’s wieder alle, dass sie deutsche Leut’ sind,” Translated by author.

### 3.2.4 From Swabian to Volk, nation, and state

In Johann's story, the semantics of *Nation*, *Volk*, and *Staat* appear only sporadically, yet whenever invoked, they carry decisive weight for the construction of belonging. This is particularly evident in the case of the nation, which surfaces only three times in the fourth episode, but each instance marks a pivotal moment in Johann's self-fashioning. His attendance at the Gymnasium in Hermannstadt is described as shaping him *into a nationaldeutsche* (into the national German), a process that culminates in his retrospective self-identification as a *deutschnationaler* (national German) boy.<sup>158</sup> Through these designations, national consciousness is inscribed into his self-perception. The reference to the 'national Saxons' in the context of the Franco-Prussian War further situates Germanness within the patriotic fervour of the Reich, defined in explicit opposition to France.<sup>159</sup> Importantly, Johann's awakening is presented not as an innate essence but as an acquired identity. Upon his arrival in Hermannstadt, he remains uncertain of his Swabian identity, requiring reassurance from his Saxon host family that he is indeed German. At this stage, he is portrayed primarily as a Catholic Swabian village boy, only secondarily German by ethnicity; yet by the end of the chapter, he emerges transformed, embracing his identity as a national German at heart. This redefinition of self – cast as a rediscovery rather than a new acquisition – becomes the central narrative axis of his life. Returning to the Banat, Johann assumes the role of cultural educator, instructing his fellow Swabians in their German roots. In his final reflections, he defines his life's purpose not in terms of farming, which he accepts as a duty, but in safeguarding the community from anything 'un-German.'<sup>160</sup> National belonging thus eclipses both regional and social identity, establishing Germanness as the superior horizon of meaning and its rediscovery the narrative's guiding principle.

The concept of *Volk*, which occurs five times across the text, carries broader semantic depth. It first appears in connection with the *Volksschule*, recalling the Habsburg educational reforms of the eighteenth century and their role in structuring cultural belonging. At other points, it is framed in religious terms – 'If God is almighty, he must give every nation its own language' – which simultaneously reflects Johann's alienation from Catholic authority and a more egalitarian recognition of Protestant-Saxon traditions.<sup>161</sup> Most significantly, when Johann recalls that 'an invisible, yet indissoluble spiritual bond connected us with the great German

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>161</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 23, original: "Wenn Gott allwisset is, muß er jedem Volk sei Sprach' verstein," Translated by author.



*Volk*,' the narrative reaches its core, as *Volk* and nation converge.<sup>162</sup> Here *Volk* functions as the locus of assimilation, with language as its primary marker, echoing the Herderian shift from territorial (*ius soli*) to blood– and ancestry–based (*ius sanguinis*) understandings of nationhood–transposed into the multiethnic reality of the Banat.<sup>163</sup> This perspective is reinforced through a flashback: 'If the Swabians had had a leader... if only one word had been spoken in their churches and schools about the greatness of their *Volk*,' Johann laments, thereby aligning *Volk* with the institutions of education and religion as the sites where resilience and identity should have been cultivated. Even in proverbial registers, as in the invocation of the *Volksmund* (popular expression), the term embeds individual experience within the collective. Thus, whereas *Nation* appears sparingly but with emphatic weight, *Volk* anchors the narrative's shifting semantics of belonging.

The emergence of national consciousness and *Volksgeist* is also conveyed through cultural markers such as the mentioned folksongs. These songs frame different models of belonging: the Vienna waltz *Miramare, Miramare*, sung in the second episode, reflects the dynastic and imperial ethos of the Habsburg world, while the later appearance of *Die Wacht am Rhein* (The Watch on the Rhine) signals a decisive reorientation. Written during the Rhine crisis of the 1840s in response to French territorial claims, the song invoked notions of 'German blood' and a 'heroic race,' calling for unity in defense of the 'fatherland.'<sup>164</sup> Its popularity during the Franco–Prussian War of 1870/71 cemented its status as a symbol of national awakening, culminating in its association with the Reich of 1871. Within the novella, the juxtaposition of the two songs underscores the transformation from a dynastic-imperial model of belonging, characterized by Vienna's cultivated plurality, to a Prussian–inflected nationalism that emphasized ethnic homogeneity and territorial defense. If the waltz *Miramare* resonates with the cosmopolitan spirit of the Habsburg Empire, *Die Wacht am Rhein* embodies an ethnonationalist romanticism reminiscent of Herder, subordinating regional plurality to a singular German identity. For the Banat Swabians, facing Magyarization pressures rather than French threats, the adoption of this repertoire symbolized a broader reorientation: from the recognition of cultural diversity toward a narrower ethnonationalist framework that left little space for regional or hybrid identities.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>163</sup> Gerhard Seewann, *Geschichte Der Deutschen in Ungarn. Band 2: 1860 Bis 2006* (2012), 3.

<sup>164</sup> Eva March Tappan, ed., *The World's Story: A History of the World in Story, Song and Art*, 14 vols., vol. 7, *Germany, The Netherlands, and Switzerland*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914, pp. 249–50.

<sup>165</sup> Neumann, Victor. 2023. *Das Temeswarer Banat. Eine Europäische Regionalgeschichte*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter. 314

The *Staat* appears most explicitly in the domains of administration and education, where its impact on Banat Swabians was immediate and tangible. References to the *Staatsdienst* (civil service) depict the state as a bureaucratic career path promising prestige and integration into the imperial order, yet also marked by precariousness, as civil servants could be transferred arbitrarily to Galicia or Dalmatia.<sup>166</sup> More decisive is the invocation of the *Staatssprache* (official language), which, after the Compromise of 1867, meant the imposition of Hungarian in schools and public life. Here, the state emerges not as a neutral framework but as an active agent of cultural assimilation. These usages reflect the broader transformation of the *Staat* from a corporative–monarchical order into a sovereign actor. Yet, in Müller-Guttenbrunn’s narrative, the state is not idealized as a guarantor of popular sovereignty or constitutional progress; rather, it is experienced as an intrusive force that destabilizes the cultural continuity of the German minority. Placed alongside *Volk* and nation, state thus appears external and antagonistic – an authority in tension with communal and national identities. The contrast highlights the precarious position and ‘identity crisis’ of the Banat Swabians, whose sense of belonging rested less on loyalty to the Habsburg state than on the cultural and linguistic bonds of Germanness.

### 3.3 Interactional analysis – why in that way?

Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn is often remembered as the *Erzschwab*, the emblematic representative of the Banat Swabians, whose literary and cultural work gave voice to the community’s collective identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This reputation crystallized during his most productive literary period between 1907 and 1918, when works such as *Götzendämmerung* (1907), *Der kleine Schwab* (1908), and *Der große Schwabenzug* (1913) directly engaged with the history and destiny of the Banat Germans. In these texts, Müller-Guttenbrunn reconstructed the migration of German settlers to the Banat and, more importantly, explored the existential question of what it meant to be Swabian in a region marked by cultural plurality and rising nationalist pressures.

Although Müller-Guttenbrunn spent only his childhood in the Banat, these years proved formative for his life and writing. *Der kleine Schwab*, in particular, reads as a near-autobiographical reconstruction of this period, reflecting both his personal experiences and the broader socio-political transformations of his youth. Born on 22 October 1852 in the village of Guttenbrunn (today Zăbrani), he entered a world still shaped by the aftermath of the 1848-49 revolutions.<sup>167</sup> At the time, the Banat belonged to the short-lived ‘Voivodeship of Serbia and

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<sup>166</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 13.

<sup>167</sup> Weresch, *Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn. Sein Leben, Denken Und Schaffen*, 18.

Banat of Temeschwar,' a Habsburg administrative unit established in response to nationalist uprisings. The 'Bach era' of centralist absolutism that followed reinstated German as the binding language of administration and education, embedding linguistic politics deeply into everyday life.<sup>168</sup>

Müller-Guttenbrunn's early biography was shaped by both social upheaval and personal adversity. He was the illegitimate child of Adam Luckhaup, the eldest son of a wealthy peasant family, and Eva Müller, the daughter of a craftsman.<sup>169</sup> His mother's marginalization – first due to the social stigma of an unequal relationship, later through accusations that forced her into precarious refuge – left lasting traces on the young Müller-Guttenbrunn. Weresch points to the bitterness instilled by these experiences, which informed both the tone and themes of his later works.<sup>170</sup> His school years coincided with a decisive political shift. After excelling at the German Volksschule, Müller-Guttenbrunn was sent to the Piarist Gymnasium in Temeschwar. Yet, during his studies, the Habsburgs transferred control of education to Hungary in the wake of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, marking the beginning of an era of increased Magyarization. The replacement of German with Hungarian as the language of instruction marked a decisive rupture, confronting Müller-Guttenbrunn directly with the cultural and political dislocations that would later permeate his literary work.

Up to this point, *Der kleine Schwab* follows a largely autobiographical trajectory, with the notable exception of the portrayal of the father. From the moment the narrative turns to the protagonist's schooling, however, the text enters a more contested terrain. While Weresch maintains that Müller-Guttenbrunn attended the Gymnasium in Hermannstadt, other accounts dispute this claim. What remains uncontested, however, is that after Johann's return to the Banat, the narrative increasingly abandons strict autobiography and moves into the realm of fiction. Strikingly, it is precisely these fictionalized elements that reveal the greatest capacity for projection. Johann's father is cast as the prototype Banat Swabian: virtuous, educated, and endowed with a pronounced German consciousness. The latter part of the novella, which revolves around Johann's return to the Banat to educate his community, assumes a central role in the narrative arc. It culminates in the protagonist's acceptance of his fate – remaining in the Banat Swabian village. These two moments of overt fictionalization thus emerge as key narrative devices: they stage not what Müller-Guttenbrunn had lived, but instead he articulates what should have been as the ideological blueprint for future developments. In this sense, the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 46-48.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 49.

novella serves as a medium through which the author reconciles his personal memories with his idealized vision of the Banat Swabian identity.

### 3.3.1 *Genre and mode of narration*

*Der kleine Schwab* stages identity as something performed through narration: a retrospective act of life-writing that converts the contingency of crisis into a meaningful trajectory. The memoir frame signals that the decisive ‘Who am I?’ moment is not captured in real time but reconstructed from the vantage of later life. This positions the text squarely in the orbit of the *Bildungsroman/Entwicklungsroman*: the plot moves from dislocation to orientation, from conflict to a reconciliation between the self and the world.<sup>171</sup> The decision to write after a break in life – what autobiographical theory describes as a crisis-caused caesura – functions performatively as self-historicization, therapy, and emancipation: the narration is not merely about identity; it does identity work. Formally, the novella advances in ten uneven episodes that cohere into three movements. The first two chapters serve as exposition, explaining why the narrator writes and introducing the central disruption: political and linguistic upheaval that compels a move. From the second to the fifth chapters, the developmental core emerges, tracking travel, schooling, first love, and a nascent sense of national belonging. The second half of the novella appears to drift into side figures and detours, but the dispersion culminates in a second, internalized crisis that precipitates return, reflection, and resolution. The pretext reinforces this pedagogy: chapter headings formulated as questions establish a call-and-response rhythm, giving each episode a problem to solve and producing a lesson-like cadence. Following McAdams description of narrative identity, then, the book not only tells a life; it orchestrates recognition through a pattern of posing and answering, problem and resolution.<sup>172</sup>

The first-person, retrospective mode is crucial to this performance. The “I”-voice foregrounds memory’s selectivity and the labor of interpretation, granting intimate access to pride, pain, irony, and longing. This intimacy translates ‘History’ into embodied experience: the *Ausgleich*, Magyarization, and the Franco–Prussian War are not inert backdrops but forces that contour a childhood, redirect schooling, and rescript aspiration. In Paul Ricoeur’s terms, narrating time configures lived episodes into a metahistorical arc in which the old imperial order yields to modern nationalism; history displaces biography to the foreground.<sup>173</sup> The

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<sup>171</sup> Jürgen C. Jacobs, “Bildungsroman,” in *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen*, ed. Dieter Lamping, Frank Zipfel, Sandra Poppe, and Sascha Seiler (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2009), 58.

<sup>172</sup> McAdams, Dan P. 2019. “‘First We Invented Stories, Then They Changed Us’: The Evolution of Narrative Identity.” *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 3 (1): 6.

<sup>173</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 52-54.

performative effect is double: readers are invited to feel with Johann while being led to see through him – the self becomes the prism for a collective story.

Generic hybridity intensifies this effect. The text fuses *Heimatroman* features (romanticized landscape, dialectal colour, pastoral tone, spatial rootedness) with a *Bildungsroman* arc (episodic crises, maturation, reconciliation). Heimat motifs do not merely decorate; they anchor the identity being performed in a sensorially charged space, making belonging feel natural, affective, and inevitable. At the same time, the educational logic assigns teleological value to each episode: every success, delay, or detour is retrofitted as functional to the overarching development. The hybrid thus produces a script in which the ground's identity is placed while the plot justifies it.

Within this script, identity is enacted through concrete elements of belonging. Language, school, and song function as performative operators: Gymnasium instruction, the prestige of German as a medium, and shared repertoire (from Viennese waltz to “Die Wacht am Rhein”) convert diffuse sympathies into articulated Germanness. The key categories of *Volk*, nation, and state are not abstractions but roles the narrative assigns and tests. *Volk* and nation are staged as positive horizons of meaning: an ‘invisible yet indissoluble bond’ that lifts the local into a larger whole.<sup>174</sup> The state, by contrast, appears ambivalent and often antagonistic, materialized in bureaucratic transfers and language policy; it is the institutional counterforce against which cultural continuity is defended. In performance terms, Johann learns which scripts ‘fit’: Catholic Swabian village boy, Saxon-influenced German pupil, and national German youth, while the state supplies the friction that makes these scripts salient.

The culmination is a didactic closure typical of the *Bildungsroman* narrative: return, recommitment, and renunciation. Johann embraces faith, accepts his social station, and reaffirms Swabian-German belonging. The final formula – ‘I am a Swabian and will remain a Swabian. And today they all know again that they are German people’ – functions as a performative pronouncement: by saying it, he completes the self he has narrated.<sup>175</sup> Harmony is achieved not by erasing conflict but by subsuming it into a moral of continuity; the story closes the circle it opened, converting crisis into vocation. In this sense, *Der kleine Schwab* is not just a narrative about identity under pressure; it is a device that performs and stabilizes a threatened identity by choreographing memory, place, history, and genre into a single, persuasive arc.

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<sup>174</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der kleine Schwab*, 25.

<sup>175</sup> Horst Fassel, “Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn (1852–1923): Die Unbekannten,” in *Temeswarer Beiträge zur Germanistik*, 5th ed., ed. Roxana Nubert (Temeswar, 2006), 109.

### 3.3.2 Context of creation

The recollection of Müller-Guttenbrunn's journey in the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* in July 1907 reveals a profound 'experience of ethnic spaces,' articulated through symbolic–semantic contrasts of light and dark.<sup>176</sup> Bright houses with red roof tiles, prosperous peasants, and a romantic landscape signified a culturally superior Austrian-German realm, juxtaposed with the darker Hungarian countryside, characterized by disordered dwellings and an 'uncivilized' ethnic other. A binary logic guided this perceptual framework: on one side, a cultivated, German world; on the other, a deficient, stagnant, and ethnically impure landscape. Within this civilizational divide between the Orient and the Occident, the motif of the rural idyll of Swabian heritage became a double bearer of superiority, anchored in both the Habsburg realm and the imagined community of Germans.<sup>177</sup>

Already in this recollection, one can discern the contours of the literary worldview that would shape his subsequent fiction. Müller-Guttenbrunn's descriptions reflect not only an aesthetic perception but also a process of identity construction, centered on Germanness and Swabian heritage, which contrasts with the ethnic 'other.'<sup>178</sup> Landscape depictions and the recurring motif of rural tradition became symbolic vehicles for this binary order. This experience unfolded in a societal context in which assimilation was increasingly tied to national belonging. Language in particular marked cultural transformation: for Germans in the Habsburg lands, under the influence of Herderian thought, the nation came to be understood less in territorial terms than in ethnic and genealogical terms. In the multilingual environment of the Banat, this shift sharpened the tension between regional coexistence and ethnocultural exclusivity. It was within this context that Müller–Guttenbrunn returned to the Banat in 1907, an experience that inspired a new literary phase culminating in *Der Kleine Schwab*. Especially after the First World War, these works contributed to fostering a distinct Banat Swabian identity – a nationalized regional belonging narrated at the intersection of *Heimatroman* and the *Bildungsroman*.

### 3.3.3 Adam Müller–Guttenbrunn's ideological position

Müller-Guttenbrunn's *Der Kleine Schwab* struck a nerve of the Zeitgeist, offering an answer to the pervasive identity crisis among Banat Swabians. It was in this societal environment that Müller-Guttenbrunn returned to the Banat in 1907, inspiring him to write works such as *Der kleine Schwab*, which, particularly after 1918, fostered a sense of belonging

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>178</sup> In adaptation of Hall, "Minimal Selves," 45.

and a Banat Swabian identity that endures to this day. Müller-Guttenbrunn's literary and ideological project must also be read in the context of broader debates on *Volksbildung* (popular education) and *Leserlenkung* (reader guidance) in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Central Europe. Popular education was closely tied to hopes of completing national integration by cultivating a culturally homogeneous nation. It aimed to 'refine' the *Volk*, resolve the 'social question,' and complement the political unification of 1871 with cultural integration.<sup>179</sup> The guiding assumption was that education carried transformative power not only for individuals but for the nation as a whole – a conviction shared across liberal, socialist, and Catholic milieus despite their ideological antagonisms.<sup>180</sup> Within this framework, literature was not a neutral cultural domain but a central vehicle of national pedagogy. The fierce debates over *Leserlenkung* – whether and how to guide readers toward the 'right' books – illustrate the politicization of reading practices. Especially in the Wilhelmine era, public libraries and reading societies became arenas where competing 'social and moral environments' sought to imprint their visions of the nation on the public. Even 'free' libraries, ostensibly neutral, defined their task as leading readers toward 'higher literature' and away from literary 'trash and filth.'<sup>181</sup>

Müller-Guttenbrunn carefully guides his readers through a series of didactic strategies that transform the novella into a work of *Volksbildungsliteratur*. The structure itself reveals this intention: most chapters are framed as questions whose answers unfold in the subsequent narrative, resembling a catechism or schoolbook and priming readers to expect instruction rather than open-ended storytelling. Johann's father is elevated as 'the archetype of the German farmer' - virtuous, educated, and marked by a clear German consciousness - while neighboring groups are reduced to wild or impoverished figures, serving only as background to the Swabian drama. This binary leaves little interpretive space: the Swabian appears as the model to emulate, the others as a cautionary contrast. Even confessional divides are subordinated, as Protestants and Catholics are presented as essentially united in their shared Christian faith.

Here, Germanness eclipses religion, echoing Paul de Lagarde's call to replace confessional divisions with a unifying 'national religion' binding the German *Volk* together. The narrator's retrospective commentary further restricts interpretation, frequently interrupting the plot to insist that his personal life 'means nothing for the world out there,' while his true role lies in preserving Germanness in the Banat.<sup>182</sup> Historical events such as Königgrätz, Sedan,

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<sup>179</sup> Dieter Langewiesche, "Volksbildung und Leserlenkung in Deutschland von der wilhelminischen Ära bis zur nationalsozialistischen Diktatur," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 14, no. 1 (1989): 108.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 115-17.

<sup>182</sup> Fritz Gschnitzer et al., "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," 374-76.

or the *Ausgleich* are not presented neutrally but anchored as moral signposts: defeats symbolize decline, while German victories stand for renewal. This trajectory culminates in the novella's emphatically didactic closure, where Johann reaffirms his nationalized regional self-localization. In this conclusion, the protagonist becomes the teacher not only of his community but also of the reader, leaving no ambiguity about the intended lesson: Swabian identity acquires meaning only when subsumed into Germanness.

Such strategies of *Leserlenkung* aligned with broader nineteenth-century conceptualizations of *Volk* and nation. As Leopold von Ranke had stressed, people were not merely cultural communities but historical actors whose role was to carry forward state development; in this sense, Johann's transformation into a guardian of Germanness reflects the conservative view of the *Volk* as *Staatsvolk*, subordinated to political and historical destiny. Heinrich von Treitschke further sharpened this logic by excluding Slavs and Poles from any comparable national legitimacy, defining Germanness in terms of political loyalty and imperial mission. Müller-Guttenbrunn's narrative choices resonate strongly with these discourses. While acknowledging the Banat's multiethnic landscape, he denies non-Germans historical depth or agency, rendering them as static backdrops against which the German *Volk* asserts vitality. His language of poor and 'uncivilized' others recalls the conservative dichotomy between the *kulturtragendes Volk* (culture-bearing people) and the deficient, stagnant peripheries.<sup>183</sup>

This program of pedagogical narration also parallels the *völkisch*-annexationistic tradition articulated by Lagarde and Julius Langbehn. Lagarde had envisioned Germans as a spiritual race destined to colonize Austria-Hungary, 'until nothing remains of the pitiful nationalities of the imperial state.'<sup>184</sup> While Müller-Guttenbrunn never advocates outright dissolution of other groups, his narrative nevertheless mirrors this essentializing logic: Swabians emerge as cultivators and bearers of history, while others are relegated to ethnographic color without temporal agency. *Der kleine Schwab* merges the genre conventions of Bildungsroman and Heimatroman with the ideological imperatives of *Volksbildung*, mobilizing literature as an instrument of national education. The reception history further underscores this entanglement. Incorporated into school curricula and circulated in abridged editions during the interwar years, the novella's impact was amplified through selective *Leserlenkung*: episodes highlighting regional belonging were pruned away, leaving a distilled narrative of Germanness as the only authentic form of identity. In this way, Müller-

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Fritz Gschnitzer et al., "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," 375.



Guttenbrunn's text illustrates how literature served as a cultural technology for disciplining readers into perceiving Germanness as both an educational norm and a political destiny.

### 3.4 Synthesis

The research question guiding this thesis is not only how Banat Swabian identity was narratively constructed in Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn's *Der kleine Schwab*, and how the concepts of *Volk*, nation, and state were mobilized to articulate a sense of belonging, but also why these concepts were deployed in this particular way within the socio-political and cultural context of late nineteenth-century Southeastern Europe. From a structural perspective, *Der kleine Schwab* stages identity as something performed through narration. Johann Mergl's memoir frames the contingency of crisis as a meaningful trajectory, transforming his life into an allegory of Swabian – and ultimately German – destiny. The episodic structure configures lived time into historical meaning, where events like Königgrätz, the *Ausgleich*, and Sedan function not as background but as moral signposts. In Paul Ricoeur's terms, biography is subsumed within history: Johann's story is less about an individual than about the allegorical reawakening of a people. This becomes evident in the selective attribution of temporality. Swabians and Saxons are anchored in deep historical time—through ancestral memories of the Black Forest, centuries-old settlements like Mühlbach, and the notion of an 'invisible but indissoluble spiritual bond' to the German *Volk* while Romanians, Hungarians, and Roma are depicted as 'wild figures' or 'miserable shapes,' denied historical agency and left outside the narrative of progress.<sup>185</sup> Belonging is thereby constructed as fundamentally temporal: to be part of history is to be part of the *Volk*.

Müller-Guttenbrunn carefully guides his readers through a series of didactic strategies that align the novella with the broader project of popular national education (Volksbildung). The chapter headings themselves take the form of questions – 'How did the peasant boy end up at the Latin school, and why did he fail?' – which mimic the rhythm of a catechism or schoolbook and prime readers to expect instruction rather than ambiguity. Characters embody clear models: Johann's father is elevated as the 'archetype of a German peasant,' while neighboring groups serve as static counter-images.<sup>186</sup> Confessional divides are subordinated to national identity: Johann remarks of the Protestant Saxons, 'They believe in Jesus Christ, just like the Catholics, and that is the main thing.'<sup>187</sup> In this logic, Germanness eclipses religion,

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<sup>185</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der kleine Schwab*, 25, 17-18.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

echoing Paul de Lagarde's call to overcome confessional division in favor of a unifying 'national religion.'<sup>188</sup> The narrator's retrospective commentary further restricts interpretation, explicitly stating that his personal life "means nothing for the world out there" and that his true role lies in preserving Germanness in the Banat.<sup>189</sup> Historical defeats and victories are not narrated descriptively but interpreted as civilizational signs: Sedan becomes a French 'catastrophe' whose lesson is the need for leadership.<sup>190</sup> The conclusion is explicitly didactic: 'I am a Swabian and will remain a Swabian. And today they all know again that they are German people.'<sup>191</sup> The reader is left with no doubt about the intended lesson: Swabian identity is valid only insofar as it is subsumed into Germanness.

This program of narrative education resonates strongly with the pedagogical framework of *Nationalerziehung* (national education) in the late nineteenth century. Contemporary curricula emphasized three axes: language, literary history, and patriotic history.<sup>192</sup> Emotional attachment to homeland and fatherland was prioritized above rational instruction, in line with the older *ratio educationes* that emphasized affective loyalty as the foundation of civic identity.<sup>193</sup> History lessons in particular carried the motif of reconciliation between nation and dynasty, echoing Benedict Anderson's observation of the 'thin skin' of national identity, which required ritual reinforcement.<sup>194</sup> Around the turn of the century, however, this system came under pressure from Magyarization, with non-Hungarian schools forced to translate Hungarian textbooks.<sup>195</sup> Literature like *Der kleine Schwab* offered a cultural counterweight: where state curricula sought assimilation, Müller-Guttenbrunn provided a narrative of Germanness that restored cultural continuity.

The novella also reflects the historiographical strategies prevalent in the region. A central theme of school history was the emphasis on settlement continuity: the claim that Germans had inhabited the Banat for centuries, turning wastelands (*desertum*) into fertile, culturally flourishing landscapes.<sup>196</sup> This image, persistent since the eighteenth century, reappears in Johann's recollections of the Banat as a land made prosperous by Swabian cultivation. At the same time, the text reproduces the Saxon-centric perspective of Transylvanian historiography, framing Hermannstadt and other Saxon cities as centers of

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<sup>188</sup> Fritz Gschnitzer et al., "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," 375.

<sup>189</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der kleine Schwab*, 25.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>192</sup> Puttkamer, Joachim von. 2021. "Schule zwischen Staat Und Nation." 307.

<sup>193</sup> Puttkamer, Joachim von. 2021. "Schule zwischen Staat Und Nation." 307.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

civilization. The resulting narrative often implied a happy symbiosis: a coexistence of nationalities under Habsburg order, yet one in which Germans appeared as the cultural bearers and guarantors of progress.<sup>197</sup> Tellingly, the maxim that ‘a realm with only one language and one custom is weak and fragile’ appears not as a defense of pluralism per se but as a justification for German leadership within diversity.<sup>198</sup>

Taken together, these elements reveal why Müller-Guttenbrunn mobilized the categories of *Volk*, nation and state in the way he did. *Volk* functions as the central marker of continuity, anchoring identity in descent, culture, and education, while the nation appears sparingly but with decisive weight, inscribing Johann into the broader horizon of the German *Kulturnation*. The state, by contrast, is consistently depicted as an antagonistic force – through Magyarization, administrative transfers, and language policy – that destabilizes identity rather than securing it. In this sense, the novella mirrors both the conceptual history of these terms and the political pressures of Southeastern Europe: belonging was imagined not through loyalty to the state but through historical depth, language, and affective ties to Germanness. Thus, *Der kleine Schwab* can ultimately be read as more than a novella: it functions as a textbook of the German nation. It employs pedagogical strategies from national education, emphasizing emotional attachment to *Heimat*, continuity, and the reconciliation of dynastic and national narratives, while translating them into literary form. In doing so, Müller-Guttenbrunn transforms Swabian regional experience into a didactic allegory of Germanness. His work narrates not only the story of a Banat peasant boy but also the imagined curriculum of a nation in search of itself.

## 4. Conclusion

In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives.  
Jerome Bruner (1987)

This thesis set out to investigate how Banat Swabian identity was narratively constructed in Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn’s *Der kleine Schwab* (1908), how the concepts of *Volk*, *Nation*, and *State* were mobilized to articulate a sense of belonging, and, crucially, why these concepts were deployed in this particular way within the socio-political and cultural context of late nineteenth-century Southeastern Europe. By combining historical discourse analysis, Begriffsgeschichte, and staged narrative analysis, the study has illuminated both the

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 312-13.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 313.

content of the novella – themes, identity markers, ideological motifs – and its narrative strategies: the temporal framing, the performative construction of memory, and the didactic techniques of *Leserlenkung* that made the text function as an instrument of *Volksbildung*.

At the heart of the novella lies the life story of Johann Mergl, a Banat Swabian peasant's son who, in the process of writing his memoirs, retrospectively narrates the path from childhood to maturity. On the surface, this is a Bildungsroman-like story of crisis, education, and reconciliation. Yet the analysis has demonstrated that Johann's biography is consistently subordinated to a larger historical and cultural narrative. His personal crises – failing at the Temeschwar gymnasium, falling in love, losing his father – gain significance only when inserted into the collective destiny of the Banat Swabians. In Ricoeur's terms, historical time displaces lived time: biography is configured within history, and the individual becomes the prism through which the narration of collective belonging is told.<sup>199</sup>

This process is most visible in the novella's temporal strategies. Early episodes follow a linear logic, placing Johann's childhood experiences within the before-and-after sequence of decisive historical ruptures such as Königgrätz, the Ausgleich, and Sedan. Later episodes oscillate toward cyclical time, marked by seasonal rhythms, rural idylls, and religious eschatology. This temporal oscillation naturalizes Germanness as both historically situated and eternal: as something embedded in historical crises yet also transcending them. At the same time, narrative selectivity is decisive. Swabians and Saxons are endowed with temporal depth—through references to 'hundred-year-old German schools,' ancestral migration under Prince Eugene, and centuries-old settlements in Mühlbach.<sup>200</sup> Hungarians, Romanians, and Roma, by contrast, are relegated to 'wild figures' or 'poor shapes' devoid of agency.<sup>201</sup> To be granted history is to be granted belonging; those denied temporality are excluded from the narrative of continuity. Within this framework, the conceptual markers of *Volk*, nation, and state play distinct but interlocking roles. *Volk* appears as the 'invisible yet indissoluble spiritual bond' connecting Banat Swabians to the greater German people.<sup>202</sup> The nation surfaces more sparingly but with decisive weight: Johann's education in Hermannstadt transforms him into a 'national German,' marking the passage from a regional Swabian identity to a German nationalist one.<sup>203</sup> The *State*, by contrast, is consistently depicted as an antagonist — responsible for Magyarization, bureaucratic oppression, and linguistic impositions. In sum, Johann's final

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<sup>199</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52-87.

<sup>200</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 11, 33-34.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

declaration – ‘I am a Swabian and will remain a Swabian. And today they all know again that they are German people’ – condenses the performative logic of the entire text: Swabian identity is meaningful only insofar as it is subsumed into Germanness.<sup>204</sup>

The second major finding of this study is that *Der kleine Schwab* must be read not merely as literature but as *Volksbildungsliteratur*: a text designed to educate, discipline, and guide readers into a particular conception of identity. The structure itself betrays this pedagogical function. Most chapters are framed as questions whose answers unfold in the subsequent narrative (‘How the peasant boy ended up at Latin school, and why he failed’), mimicking the catechism or schoolbook format. This ‘call-and-response’ rhythm prepares readers to expect moral lessons rather than open-ended stories, exemplifying the techniques of *Leserlenkung* described by Langewiesche.<sup>205</sup> The didactic cast is reinforced through archetypes and moral signposts. Johann’s father is presented as the ‘archetype of a German farmer’—virtuous, educated, bearer of German consciousness—while other ethnic groups appear merely as backdrop, either picturesque or threatening, but never agents of history.<sup>206</sup> Confessional differences are relativized: Johann’s comment that ‘They believe in Jesus Christ, just like the Catholics, and that is the main thing’ collapses centuries of denominational division into a higher principle of Germanness.<sup>207</sup> Historical events are recounted as moral exempla: defeats (e.g., Königgrätz, Sedan) signify decline, while victories stand for renewal.<sup>208</sup> The didactic trajectory culminates in Johann’s final pronouncement of ethnic loyalty, which functions as a performative closure: by saying it, he realizes it.

These strategies aligned closely with contemporary debates on national education. As school curricula emphasized language and patriotic history over abstract cognition, emotional attachment to *Heimat* and fatherland was prioritized.<sup>209</sup> Textbooks were designed to reconcile nation and dynasty, narrating the long continuity of settlement and the ‘desertum’ myth of empty lands brought to bloom by industrious Germans.<sup>210</sup> *Der kleine Schwab* reproduces precisely these motifs: the Banat is depicted as barren until cultivated by German peasants, the continuity of migration is linked back to the Black Forest, and the symbiosis with Saxons is portrayed as proof of German civilizational strength. In this sense, the novella can be read as a parallel to contemporary history textbooks – a literary work that narrates the German nation as

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>205</sup> Dieter Langewiesche, “Volksbildung und Leserlenkung in Deutschland von der wilhelminischen Ära bis zur nationalsozialistischen Diktatur,” 108-109.

<sup>206</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 17-18.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>208</sup> Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Der Kleine Schwab*, 32.

<sup>209</sup> Puttkamer, Joachim von. 2021. “Schule zwischen Staat und Nation,” 307.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 311.

a cultural and moral community. The reception history confirms this didactic orientation. Incorporated into school curricula in the interwar period, *Der kleine Schwab* was abridged to foreground episodes that culminated in nationalist affirmation, pruning away ambiguity and producing a distilled lesson in Germanness. Such abridgements exemplify *Leserlenkung*: the conscious guiding of readers toward ‘higher literature’ and away from ‘trash and filth.’<sup>211</sup> In this way, Müller-Guttenbrunn’s novella became not only a Heimatroman but a cultural technology of national pedagogy.

The third key finding concerns the ideological reasons why Müller-Guttenbrunn mobilized *Volk*, nation, and state in this precise manner. The answer lies at the intersection of personal biography and broader socio-political transformations. Biographically, Müller-Guttenbrunn was marked by a rupture born as an illegitimate child in 1852. He grew up during the ‘Bach era’ of centralist absolutism. He excelled in a German Volksschule but experienced the trauma of Magyarization when Hungarian replaced German as the language of instruction in the 1860s. These dislocations – linguistic, cultural, social – shaped his perception of Germanness as both fragile and essential. In his fiction, autobiography blends with projection: the father figure, more idealized than real, embodies the prototype Swabian peasant; Johann’s return to the Banat represents the path Müller-Guttenbrunn himself did not take but wished to prescribe for his community. Ideologically, the novella resonates with conservative and völkisch thought of the late nineteenth century. Historians such as Leopold von Ranke defined *Volk* as *Staatsvolk*, carriers of political development, while Treitschke excluded Slavs and Poles from similar legitimacy, reserving Germanness for those loyal to empire. Paul de Lagarde radicalized this tradition, calling for the unification of Germans into a spiritual nation and the dissolution of “pitiful nationalities” within Austria.<sup>212</sup> Julius Langbehn further equated Germanness with peasantry and purity. Müller-Guttenbrunn’s novella reflects these strands: Germans are historicized, temporally anchored, portrayed as cultivators and carriers of civilization; others are depicted as static, deficient, or picturesque. The ‘archetype of the German farmer’ aligns with Langbehn’s valorization of the peasantry. At the same time, the emphasis on an ‘invisible spiritual bond’ recalls Herderian and Lagardian notions of unity based on blood.

The antagonistic role of the *State* also reflects the Banat Swabians’ predicament. The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 transferred control of education to Hungary, thereby intensifying Magyarization and threatening the identities of minority groups. In this

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>212</sup> Fritz Gschnitzer et al., “Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse,” 374-76.

environment, ‘Germanness’ could only be stabilized through cultural and narrative means. Literature thus became a surrogate state: a vehicle to preserve, discipline, and reproduce identity under pressure. It is for this reason that *Der kleine Schwab* took the form of a didactic Bildungsroman rather than an open autobiography: it was less about telling one life than about teaching a community how to see itself. The ideological stakes extended beyond the text. During the interwar period, abridged editions transformed the novella into a primer of nationalist German identity. By the 1930s and 1940s, National Socialists retrospectively claimed Müller-Guttenbrunn as a ‘bridge builder into the Reich,’ and his invocation of Prince Eugene as protector of Germanness was echoed in the Waffen-SS Prinz Eugen Division.<sup>213</sup> While it would be an exaggeration to draw a direct line from the novella to the SS, the discursive continuities are evident: romantic regionalism sliding into völkisch exclusivism, cultural pedagogy paving the way for racial ideology.

The analysis of *Der kleine Schwab* demonstrates how literature in multiethnic borderlands functioned as a cultural technology of national identity formation. On the one hand, the novella preserves the memory of Banat Swabian life: its landscapes, dialects, and traditions. On the other hand, it reframes this memory into a nationalist script, subsuming regional belonging into Germanness. This double function explains both its lasting resonance within the Swabian community and its susceptibility to later instrumentalization. More broadly, the case of Müller-Guttenbrunn illustrates how minority identities in Southeastern Europe were negotiated through narrative at a time when dynastic empires gave way to nation-states. Identity was not simply inherited but instead performed and stabilized through stories that configured personal memory into collective history.

In this sense, *Der kleine Schwab* is not only a novella but also a textbook of the German nation: a didactic script that naturalized Germanness as both cultural heritage and political destiny. For the Banat Swabians, this script provided orientation in times of upheaval, yet it also narrowed the horizons of belonging, marginalizing the multiethnic realities of the Banat. The ambivalence remains: Müller-Guttenbrunn’s romantic vision of Swabian rootedness carries within it both a nostalgia for coexistence and the seeds of exclusion. Understanding this ambivalence sheds light not only on the fate of the Banat Swabians but on the broader dynamics of national identity formation in Central and Southeastern Europe at the turn of the century.

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<sup>213</sup> Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division Prinz Eugen: Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2003).

## 5. Reflection

The novella *Der Kleine Schwab* stands out as an exceptional historical document, offering profound insight into the processes of identity formation and how narrating the nation intersected with this process. As a literary text situated in the vulnerable space between worlds, it demonstrates how fragile identity construction can be, how it is tied to history, and how the narration of the nation became central in defining belonging. The link between narrative theory and narrative analysis thus proves to be a promising tool for historical research. At the same time, however, this work revealed a key difficulty: the absence of a clearly defined methodology. While I framed my approach as a cultural-historical analysis, the distinction between narrative theory and historical method remained less integrated than I had anticipated.

One of the main challenges of such a semantic analysis is the language itself, as well as the differences in meaning between German and English. The German concept of *Reich*, for instance, carries associations and semantic resonances that cannot be fully captured by the English term ‘empire’ and vis versa. At times, I chose ‘realm’ as a partial equivalent. This constant reevaluation of vocabulary compelled me to reflect critically on how conceptual meaning is conveyed across languages and how translation choices influence interpretation. As the analysis progressed, the project also assumed a more hermeneutic character, approaching the text in the spirit of objective hermeneutics.<sup>214</sup> The meaning structures embedded in Müller-Guttenbrunn’s narrative revealed themselves as reflections of the broader semantic and conceptual structures of the time. In this sense, the categories of *Volk*, nation, and state drawn from conceptual history, offered crucial tools to intensify the analysis and ground it in the historical semantics of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, this thesis should be read as a ‘proof of concept’ rather than a final analysis. It marks a beginning: an attempt to bring narrative theory and conceptual history into dialogue, while demonstrating the potential of literary texts as sources for historical identity research. Future work could extend this approach by incorporating Adolf Meschendörfer’s *Leonore*, a comparative novel from a Transylvanian Saxon perspective. The deeper I engaged with Müller-Guttenbrunn’s text, the more perspectives opened up: discourse analysis, memory studies, conceptual history, and biographical narrative. Taken together, these lenses promise a more holistic understanding of how identities were narrated, contested, and imagined at the shifting margins of empire.

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<sup>214</sup> Reflecting Overmann’s pragmatist approach highlights the reconstructive process at the core of analysis: meaning structures are not simply given but must be pieced together through interpretation. This perspective draws attention to the ways in which narratives, concepts, and categories gain significance only within the act of reconstruction, making explicit the methodological work of uncovering the underlying structures that shape historical experience.



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# Glossary

## **Ausgleich (1867)**

The Austro–Hungarian Compromise of 1867; agreement between Austrian and Hungarian elites establishing the Dual Monarchy. It granted Hungary autonomy in internal affairs while retaining common ministries for foreign policy, military, and finance. The Ausgleich significantly altered political balances and intensified debates over the rights of national minorities.

## **Banat**

Banat region; a historical area now divided between Romania, Serbia, and Hungary, historically multiethnic with a large Swabian (German) population.

## **Broos**

Orăștie, a town in western Romania, historically a Saxon border settlement in Transylvania.

## **Déva**

Deva, a city in Hunedoara County, Romania, located in Transylvania.

## **Heimat**

Homeland: the place of one's origin or cultural belonging, often imbued with emotional and symbolic meaning. In nationalist discourse, Heimat is often idealised and tied to historical continuity.

## **Hermannstadt**

Sibiu; city in central Romania, historically the political and cultural center of the Transylvanian Saxons.

## **Magyar, Magyarization, Magyar Nationalism**

*Magyar* refers to the ethnic Hungarian people. In the 19th century, Magyar nationalism sought to strengthen Hungarian sovereignty and identity within the Habsburg Monarchy, often by promoting the Hungarian language and historical narratives centered on Magyar origins. Magyarization describes state-led policies in the Kingdom of Hungary, especially from the late 19th century, promoting Hungarian language, culture, and identity—frequently at the expense of minority languages and cultures, for example, through language requirements in administration, education, and the military.

## **Mühlbach**

Sebeș, a town in Alba County, Romania, historically part of Transylvania and a settlement of Transylvanian Saxons.

**Nation**

A political and cultural community, often tied to sovereignty or national identity. In 19th-century nationalist thought, the term “nation” was often defined along ethnic-cultural lines rather than purely civic ones.

**New Time / Old Time**

Concepts from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). “Old time” refers to a sacred, cyclical conception of time where past and present intermingle, often grounded in religious or dynastic authority. “New time” refers to the modern, secular, homogeneous, and empty time of the nation-state, where historical events are placed in a linear sequence and measured chronologically, enabling a shared sense of simultaneity among members of a nation.

**Siebenbürgen**

Transylvania, a historical region in central Romania, is home to various ethnic groups, including the Transylvanian Saxons.

**State**

A political entity with governing authority over a defined territory. In 19th-century nationalist discourse, often associated with sovereignty and legitimacy.

**Temeschwar**

Timișoara, a city in western Romania, is historically a major urban center of the Banat region.

**Volk**

People, in nationalist discourse, often imply an ethnically or culturally defined community bound by shared heritage, language, and traditions.