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POST WORLD WAR TWO HISTORY OF THE DANUBIAN GERMANS IN NEW YUGOSLAV REALITY: THE CASE OF THE PFEIFFER FAMILY 1944-1946

Abstract: World War Two had very destructive consequences in Yugoslavia, especially when it comes to demographic changes, as Yugoslavia was among the European states with the highest number of human losses. The focus of authors is on the conditions after the liberation regarding one of the biggest minorities in the region of Vojvodina: Danubian Germans. Although the war was over in Spring 1945, the new authorities of socialist Yugoslavia followed a similar pattern as other Central and Eastern countries regarding their German minorities. As the result ofcollective guilt, Danubian Germans lost their civil rights, their property and eventually they were placed in camps. The conditions were grim, and the mortality rate was high, especially among children. The case of the Pfeiffer family depicts a large part of the historical trauma that the ethnic community of the Danubian Germans went through in the first post-war years. For the research authors used family archives and court papers that Wiliam Phaiffer made available to authors. Stil members of the Pfeiffer family, and especially the children,managed to survive thanks to their Serbian and Jewish friends who came to theiraid in these complicated and hostile circumstances and made their survivalpossible.

Keywords: labour camps, concentration cams, disease, malnutrition, life conditions

Non MeSH: Danubian Germans, World War Two, Yugoslavia

Introduction

World War II generated enormous material destruction, leaving the countries of the old continent in complete economic, political, and social chaos. The perennial war not only shattered the economy but also the social structure of pre-war societies, pushing a large part of the population into forced migratory waves of various kinds that, in a relatively short period, dramatically changed the ethnic structure of the European continent. However, the end of the war did not bring calm to these turbulent processes, on the contrary. It seems that the capitulation of Germany opened a new migratory flow, the protagonists of which this time were the Germans themsleves[1].

During World War II, the population of Yugoslavia and Yugoslav society suffered enormous material, emotional and structural losses. 1700000 people (about 11% of the total Yugoslav population) did not survive, 20% of residential buildings were destroyed, 24% of economic machinery was irretrievably lost, 36% of industrial capacities were destroyed, traffic infrastructure was significantly damaged and destroyed, mines were completely disabled... all this contributed to the creation of a specific feeling of animosity towards the German ethnic community, into whom all the pain, suffering and losses resulting from the war and the activities of the German occupation administration were incarnated. Thus, members of this ethnic minority became socially stigmatized by both the community and the state they lived in as imaginary culprits for the war that was still fresh in the collective memory. Decades after World War II, the saying "to have someone like a German" persisted in public speech, as a painful testimony to a time when it was socially acceptable to hate someone just because they belonged to a certain imagined community (German ethnic group, in this case) that, at a

[1] Large migratory waves of the German population appeared in Europe even before the end of the Second World War. The first big wave occurred in 1944 when the front line approached the eastern borders of the Reich. The Red Army suppressed Hitler's army by occupying areas that had hitherto been under the jurisdiction of the Third Reich. With the withdrawal of the German army, many civilians were withdrawing, mostly of German nationality (from the northern part of East Prussia, which after War became part of modern Poland; from the Baltic countries, especially from the area around Riga where most of population was of Germans origin).

A similar situation was repeated in South-Eastern Europe. After the capitulation of Romania on August 23, 1944, the front approached the territory inhabited by the Danube Swabians. Some 250,000 Swabians from Bačka, Banat, Baranja and Srem managed to escape to Austria, Hungary and Germany during the withdrawal of the German army, in the period from September 27 to October 19, 1944.

After the capitulation of Germany on May 9, 1945, the situation for members of the German ethnic group further deteriorated. In the period from July 17 to August 2, a meeting of the "Big Three" (Stalin, Truman and Clement Richard Attlee) was held in Potsdam, near Berlin, marking the end of the Great War Coalition. The meeting ended with the signing of the so-called Potsdam Declaration. Point 12 of the Protocol referred to the expulsions of the German national minority from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Thus, the spontaneous migration process undoubtedly gained its institutional expression and legal legitimacy. Although the Yugoslav Germans were not the subject of discussion, the conference's decisions influenced them as well.

certain historical moment, was proclaimed by the social consensus as the main culprit for one, undoubtedly devastating, social process.

The fact is that the process of social stigmatization of a certain social group is never exhausted only within the personal space. In this particular case, emotionally initiated, the process quickly gained its institutional expression. Once initiated, the process at the level of society changes the individual perception of the place of the stigmatized social group in the network of social relations of all members of society, and not only those who have real personal reasons for such an attitude. Thus, this "learned attitude" towards a stigmatized group becomes a "no doubt/ truth" in accordance with which the members of the given society model their own individual behavior and actions. Thus, for example, a careful textual analysis of history textbooks used in Serbia from 1907 until today shows changes in the institutional perception of the characteristics of the German ethnic community that are undoubtedly conditioned by certain historical circumstances that determined Serbian-German relations in this historical period. Unlike the relatively balanced image of Germans in history textbooks before World War II, post-war textbooks offer a substantially altered picture. The Germans are perceived as "eternal enemies, as a nation that tends to solve its problems with 'iron and blood' (Bismarck), as a nation accustomed to enslaving and subjugating others, and as eternal enemies of the working class." [1 p282-290]. This change in attitudes towards the German ethnic community was accompanied by a declining trend in the percentage of citizens who declare themselves as German nationals in the population of Yugoslavia. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. – Presence of Germans in the overall population of Yugoslavia, percentage

Annual census	Presence of Germans in the overall population of Yugoslavia, percentage
1921*	4.22
1931*	3.5
1948**	0.35
1953**	0.36

Sources:
* [2 p8].
** [3 p164].

In the area of Vojvodina, the Danubian Germans or Danubian Swabians represented one of the most numerous national minorities before the Second World War. Most of them were in the areas of Banat and Bačka. The total number of Danubian Germans before the beginning of the Second World War in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was close to half a million, of which almost 350,000 lived on the territory of today's Republic of Serbia (see Figure 1).

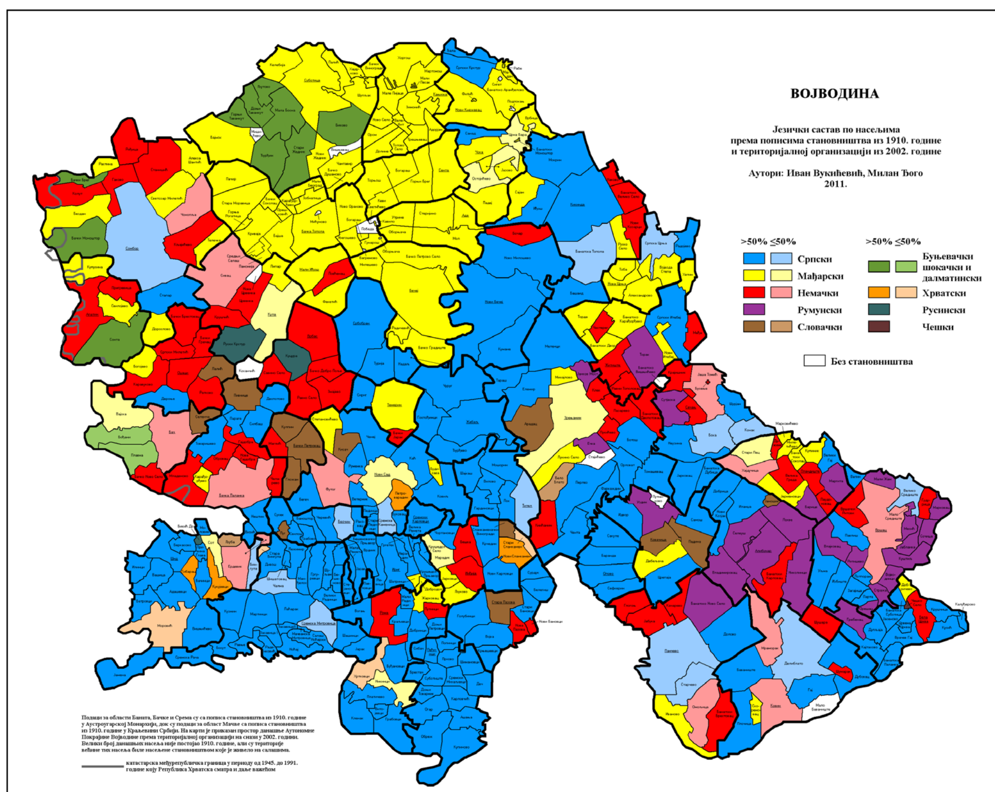

Figure 1. – Linguistic composition of the population by settlements according to the 1910 censuses and the territorial organization from 2002 in Vojvodina.

Web source: https://www.superjoden.nl/etnicka-karta-vojvodine.html
Vukićević Ivan i Đogo Milan (2011)

World War Two and the occupation of Vojvodina

The role of the Danubian Germans during the occupation depended largely on the zone in which they lived. Thus, Banat, which was annexed to administratively occupied Serbia, was a zone in which the Danubian Germans had executive power and full responsibility for the fate of members of other ethnic groups, while in Bačka and Srem this was not the case. Bačka was annexed by Hungary, while Srem was annexed by the ISC (Independent State of Croatia). Members of the German ethnic community who actively participated in the war, in most cases withdrew from the territories that were liberated in the fall of 1944 by the Red Army and the NLM (National Liberation Movement). The Germans who remained in Bačka and Srem, unless they were

members of military formations, did not participate in the racist policy of the occupying authorities (in the case of Srem and Bačka, NLM and Horthy's Hungary). Nevertheless, in the first post-war years, they also faced retaliation from the new authorities, who transferred collective responsibility for the crimes committed by members of the German national community who did take part in the military actions of the occupying authorities. In some cases, citizens of German nationality were imprisoned, tortured and killed, despite the fact they used to help the partisan movement during the war [4 p347]. Of the three regions that make up today's Vojvodina, the evacuation of Germans was only completely organized on the territory of Srem, while in the case of Banat and Bačka (except the city of Novi Sad), the evacuation of Germans was slower and relatively chaotic [4 p335].

Since the fall of 1944, when the liberation of the territory that would later form the Second Yugoslavia began, there were changes in the conditions in which the Danubian Germans lived. The Red Army liberated Banat from September to October 1944, and in the following months liberated Srem and Bačka together with NLM units. According to estimates by German historians, about 200,000 Germans remained in the area. Most of them ended up in the camps immediately after the end of the war. The local historiography operates with somewhat smaller numbers than those listed. Recent Serbian historiography states that there were between 130-150,000 Germans who remained in that area, while the official post-war data mention the number of about 110-120,000 people. Out of that number (however big it was, AN), over 96,000 people were interned in the camps. Of course, it should be noted that these numbers, which have been used since the 1950s, were far from accurate, because the most recent historiographical research has confirmed that the numbers are incomparably higher. Thus, according to these recent data, out of the remaining 195,000 Germans, as many as 170,000 were interned, while between 50-60,000 of them died in the camps, which is a very high mortality rate of about 30% [5 p260-261, 4 p347]. The lack of selectivity in treating Germans can also be seen in the attitude the new authorities had towards this ethnic community, without considering the differences in their potential involvement in war crimes according to different regions in which they lived. Thus, all the the Germans were treated equally, regardless of whether they are from Banat, Srem or Bačka. This put the Germans from Bačka in the most difficult position because during the war they belonged to the zone occupied by Horthy's Hungary, in which they did not even have many opportunities to participate in the occupation government

With the arrival of the Red Army and partisans, many Danubian Germans were shot, often just because they were Germans. Many had their property confiscated and then deported to camps. A more detailed overview of the conditions in the camps will be given, but statistics are important for understanding the situation in the camps. The detainees in the camps were mostly women, children and the elderly. Many of them died as a result of starvation, cold, illness, and torture. Some were killed, while there were also those who found salvation from bad living conditions in suicide.

The difficult position in which the Danubian Germans found themselves after the end of the Second World War was not in accordance with the official state policy of equality of all peoples and nationalities. On November 21, 1944, the presidency of AV-

NOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) passed the "Decision on the transfer of enemy's property to state ownership, on the state administration over the property of absent persons and on the sequestration of property forcibly alienated by the occupying authorities". On that basis, all property of persons of German nationality could be confiscated, with certain exceptions. This decision legitimizes the beginning of a painful process of structural discrimination, abuse and displacement of members of the German ethnic community, which resulted in a historical crime whose consequences have not yet been corrected in reality or on a symbolic level. Shortly afterwards, the Yugoslav government took the position that all Germans should be displaced and sent to Germany. The fate of the Danubian Germans was sealed with the third session of AVNOJ and the work of the Provisional National Assembly of the SFRY (Social Federative Republic of Yugoslavia) in August 1945, when the Law on Voters' Lists was passed. The new acts deprive citizens of German ethnicity of their civil rights and delete their names from the voter lists. On March 3, 1946, the Ministry of the Interior of the SFRY sent a letter to the regional and provincial ministries of the interior regarding the manner of conducting the internment of the Danubian Germans, in accordance with the interpretation of the Decision by the Presidency of AVNOJ [6 p289, 291, 294, 295].

Living conditions in the camps

The researches conducted over the past 30 years by local and European historians have confirmed the original numbers of Danubian Germans who remained in Yugoslavia after the withdrawal of the German army and liberation of Yugoslavia. In the period from the end of 1944 till 1948 (when most of the camps ceased to operate), the total number of camps on the territory of Yugoslavia ranged from 70, according to Geiger and Jurković, to over 90 according to Janjetović. Characteristic of the camps after their establishment was the fact that the model applied by the authorities enabled the collective indiscriminate punishment of the entire German ethnic community without a previously detailed investigation that would allow separating the occupier's collaborators from other citizens who were not collaborating with the German, Hungarian and other occupation authorities. However, there were some differences between the camps. The literature lists the camps based on their purpose:

1. Concentration camps
2. Collective collection and work camps (Samellager), and
3. Camps for the sick and children

Within the first group, in which the living conditions were the most difficult, and thus the lowest chance of survival, there was also a camp in Bački jarkak, apart of Barčki jarak, the first group also included the following camps: Knićanin, Gakovo, Kikinda, Molin, Kruševlje, Sremska Mitrovica [5 p265-266]. All members of the Pfeiffer family were detained in that camp, with the exception of Father Anton Pfeiffer.

Pfeiffer family: short synopsis

Based on family archives and court papers provided by William Pfeiffer to the authors of this paper, a reconstruction of the life of this family was made during the last war years and the period after the end of World War II until their departure to West Germany in 1954 with the special emphasis on the period in camps.

William Pfeiffer was born on January 13, 1944 in Bačka Palanka, to father **Anton** (organist and carpenter by profession), who belonged to the German ethnic community that immigrated to the Danube region during the German colonization of the Habsburg era. William's mother **Eva**, maiden name Suhany, was a member of the Hungarian community. Based on their statements, as well as the statements of neighbors and witnesses (Jovin Nikola and Ulharik Magdalena) in the process of rehabilitation of members of the Pfeiffer family and the Suhany family, it was confirmed and proved that as active members of the Roman Catholic community they were pacifists and even opponents of the Nazi regime during the war. The documents state that members of this family, in several cases, participated in and actively helped the illegal transfer of Jewish children from Ilok, which was located on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, to Bačka Palanka, which was Hungarian territory. Anton and Eva had five children. William was their youngest child.

The circumstances in which the Pfeiffer family found itself after the Fall 1944 did not differ much from the fate of most of the Danube Germans who remained in Bačka and Banat and waited for liberating armies without fear of being treated in a way that would endanger their existence. That assumption was quite wrong.

Members of the Pfeiffer family first were first separated in September 1944, when Anton was forcibly mobilized by Nazis. The rest of the family remained in Bačka Palanka until the end of November 1944, when Bačka Palanka was liberated by partisan units. The Pfeiffer family without Anton, together with older members of the Suhany family and Anton's parents Jakob and Terezia, were taken in the Bački Jarak camp by the end of December, after a three-week forced stay in Sava's village in very grave conditions (open air, without roof). They remained in the camp until the summer of 1945, when they got temporarily released thanks to a decision allowing ethnically mixed married couples could leave the camp. Eva managed to prove that, through her maiden name, that she was born in a Hungarian family. After she left the camp with her children in September, she understood that their house and property have been confiscated, as well as her parents' house, so they had no place to stay. Shortly afterwards, Eva and the children were returned to the camp in Bačka Palanka, with the exception of their two youngest kids, who managed to stay with a friend in Bačka Palanka.

During that time, Anton Pfeiffer successfully escaped his unit in which he was recruited by the Nazi authorities and immediately head to his home where on December 29, 1944, he voluntarily surrendered to the partisans. The new authorities deprived him of his liberty and sent him to a labor camp near Bačk Palanka, where he remained until July 1948. The following stop for him was a camp in Sremska Mitrovica that was his last transfer before he was released.

Very fortunate circumstance for the Pfeiffer family was that their neighbor and friend, who was a partisan during the war, Aleksa Jovin, vouched for Eva and her children, so that they could stay with him. If Aleksa had not guaranteed for her and her family in January 1946, Eva would have been returned with her children to the camp in Bački Jarak, with little chances of survival for all of them. The opportunity to leave the camp proved to be the life-saving one for the Pfeiffer family, who never again became inmates, except for Anton, who was detained in the camp in Sremska Mitorovica until 1948. During her stay with Aleksa and his family, Eva helped with fishing, netting, patching fishing nets and also worked as a housewife for three other families. One of those families was the family of a Jew from Bačka Palanka, Ivan Dejanović, who recommended her to another family. Eva's ability to work as a housewife was also an important source of income. During the stay with Aleksa Jovina, Eva's children who were of school age were able to attend school. It was only in February 1948 that Eva was officially released from the camp in Bački Jarak by a written decision. She avoided staying in the camp thanks to the guarantees of Aleksa Jovina. After the decision to release Eva and her children, for the first time, since 1945 and their stay in the Bačka Palanka camp, they saw Anton, whom they visited in the Bačka Palanka camp.

Anton Pfeiffer was released from the camp in Sremska Mitrovica in 1948, afterwords the family began living together in Bačka Palanka. Aleska Jovin's guarantees were no longer necessary, and the family could live independently in the house they temporary received from the state. Anton was obliged to work in the Military Administration for another three years, until 1951. In the same year, after Anton's work condition expired, Anton and Eva submitted a request to leave Yugoslavia. Their request was approved three years later in 1954, when they were allowed to leave the country with freshly received passports of the Federal Republic of Germany. Before leaving, they both got imprisoned and interrogated for two weeks, only after they were allowed to leave the country, which they did in December 1954. After staying for some time in the Federal Republic of Germany, the family emigrated to Chicago, Illinois.

Living conditions of the Danubian Germans in the post-war years: Pfeiffer family 1944-1946

In the period from November 1944 to April 1946, a total of 15,000 Germans were detained in the Bački Jarak camp. Of that number, a total of 9,300 died. From December 1944 to July 1945, William and his mother Eva were prisoners of that camp. Anton and Eva Suhany, Eva Pfeiffer's parents, were also detained in the same camp, where they unfortunately died. Eva Suhany in December 1945 and Anton Suhany in January 1946.

The mortality of children in these camps was extremely high due to several factors, of which malnutrition and constant epidemics of various diseases were the most common reasons. The epidemic of typhoid fever in 1945 and 1946 was especially dangerous for the inmates. In addition, typhus caused by lice bite has often plagued camps and increased mortality. The survival of William and his mother Eve could be considred a miracle considering his age, esspecialy consdiering that he was a year old on-

fant when he arrived at the camp. His mother Eva entered the camp with her four children and elderly parents who, unfortunately, did not survive these difficult conditions. They died shortly after they were dissmised fromt the camp. In addition to starvation, the death toll in the camp was also affected by very poor living conditions. Most of the camp inmates slept on the ground, a smaller part had aluxory of straw as a kind of madrace. One of the reasons for such a poor condtions in the camp is that in Bački Jarak camp there were never 10% of total number of inmates were ablče to wrok, so the camp authorities did not try to provide better living conditions.

The situation in the camp in Bački Jarak became even more grim after April 1945, when Germans from Buljkes came to the already overpacked camp. Out of a total of 930 new camp inmates who came to the Bački jarak on that occasion, 655 died by 1946, of which 172 were children. This is one of the highest mortality rates recorded in the camps intended for the Danubian Germans [7 p41-50]. During the first two years of camp existance, mortality rates were high, mostly due to famine. The packages sent by the Red Cross surprisingly did not reach the camp in Bački Jarak [7 p42-49]. According to the death rates, the camps in Bački Jarak and Gakovo were among the camps where living conditions were the worst and where the chances of the surviving were the lowest. Daily food intake consisted of 200g of corn bread. Soups made for camp inmates were often made from leaves from trees, old leather or anything that could be cooked. Mleka skoro uopšte nije bilo, a ni sledovanja koja su dobijala deca nisu bila dovoljna There was almost no milk at all, and the portions that children received were not enough [5 p223, 8 p80]. In the table 2, which was reconstructed based on archival material. The data represent the lower limit of the known number of registered victims of the camps in which the Danubian Germans were accommodated.

Table 2. - Death rates in post-WWII concentration camps in Vojvodina

	children	Women	men	Total number
Death of starvation	5524	25740	16390	47654
Killed	14	157	396	558
Commited suicide	4	32	24	60
Dissapared/lost	40	40	95	175
Total number	5582	25987	16878	48447

Source: [5 p337]

In the case of Anton Pfeiffer, William's father, the Bačka Palanka camp, where he was detained from December 1944 to June 1946, belonged to another group of camps (labor camps) in which the chances of survival were slightly higher. Despite the fact that a higher percentage of adult men were in this group of camps, compared to the previous group, the mortality rate shows that the biggest problem in these camps was the similar as in the prvious group - lack of food, which with heavy physical work caused high mortality among middle-aged men [4 p355-358].

But for Anton Pfeiffer there was an additional danger, and that was the possibility of deportation to the USSR to one of the collective farms where living conditions were better because food was more regular, but the probability of survival of ethnic Germans was quite low. And the numbers of Germans that survived those conditions and returned to Europe from Soviet collective farms was even lower. From December 1944 to mid-1945, the largest number of transports with the Danubian Germans was sent to the USSR. The greatest danger for the captured Germans was the road itself. The wagons in which they traveled carried up to six times more people than the optimal number of passengers. The captured Germans were transported to mines and / or collective farms located in areas all the way to eastern Ukraine. During the transport, the conditions were extremely bad, which incresead high mortality of the detainees during the transport itself [7 p35].

Conclusion

The case of the Pfeiffer family depicts a large part of the historical trauma that the ethnic community of the Danubian Germans went through in the first post-war years. This paper seeks to show by the example of the fate of one family – Pfeiffer family the historical injustice done to a part of the domicile population (ethnic community of the Danubian Germans) who fell victim to (justifiably) negative sentiment towards the German occupying forces, that (unjustifiably) spilled over to ordinary citizens who were members of this ethnic community. The story of the Pfeiffer family's fate during that relatively short period shows the devastating consequences that this historic moment of insufficiently selective social articulation of the state's policy of punishing for crimes committed by the German occupation forces had on the lives of ordinary ethnic Germans who were not involved in the war.

At the same time, this is also a story about the resilience of multiethnic communities and friendships that people who lived together manage to build and keep in those traumatic years. Members of the Pfeiffer family, and especially the children, managed to survive thanks to their Serbian and Jewish friends who came to their aid in these complicated and hostile circumstances and made their survival possible.

The circumstances that shaped the historical injustice committed to the ethnic community of the Danubian Germans cannot be changed, but it is possible, as reseraches in former Yugoslavia showed in their reseach in the last thirty years, to shed light on deliberately forgotten and decades-hidden facts about the fate of the Danubian Germans. They were also Yugoslav citizens that the state deprived of their civil rights and detained without prior determining their potential guilt.

Keeping this topic in the focus of public interest is an important lesson about the injustice and devastating consequences in people's personal lives produced by ill-considered institutionalization of the discourse of collective guilt that took lives of many members of the Danubian German ethnic community in this grave historical moment. The story of the Pfeiffer family is a piece of the puzzle that reminds us that guilt for a crime must always be individual.

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