

Swiss communities of Bessarabia in the Twilight of Empires Communities' perception of the impact of events

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1. Introduction

This paper aims at bringing to the light the destiny of Swiss settlements, also called 'colonies,' on the Northern Black sea coast during and after the First world war. This corresponds to the topic of the conference entitled «Before and After First World War. The Balkans and Caucasus between 1912 and 1923», held in Milan November 2018. The program of the conference both reflected the shift from a predominantly factual history to a broader focus on social and cultural history in First World War studies, and made space for new interdisciplinary and comparative approaches. This point of view helps us to understand social changes in more depth. It is novel in the research on Swiss emigration to Russia, since we bridge academic and indigenous ways of describing reality. Such a research necessarily branches out in multiple directions, taking diverse approaches to languages and communities. In focusing on the lifestyle and perceptions of the war by Swiss settlers, we in no way wish to minimize the importance of other scholars' contributions or of other disciplines. Specifically, there has been a lack of research about how the past events were lived through by the Swiss settlers. Through this analysis, we seek to assist historians and future research by linking it to cultural studies. In order to watch at the war with Swiss settlers' eyes, private letters for their perceptions of war events conserved in private and official archives in Switzerland, Russia and Germany.

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Sea coast: Linguistic and identity approach» in progress since 2016¹. Our research is focused on the *discourse* on Swiss settlers and their destiny.

2. Swiss settlers on the Northern Black sea shore

2.1 Some facts about Swiss emigration to Russian Empire in the 19th century

Swiss colonists moved under the rule of Alexander I². They were peasants and craftsmen who suffered from the economic crisis in Switzerland. Already during Catherine II's rule Swiss engineers and mathematicians, tradesmen and gouverneurs, missionaries and officers, cheese- and watch-makers moved to Russia. As a result of the latest move two Swiss colonies appeared in the South of Russian Empire : the French-speaking winemakers from canton of Vaud founded the village of Chabag/Shabo in Bessarabia (Odessa region) and settlers from canton of Zurich founded the village of Zürichtahl in the Crimea.

The French-speaking Swiss settlers came to Russia mainly from the canton of Vaud, a rather poor canton of Switzerland of that time. Alexander I, influenced by his preceptor Frederic César De La Harpe (1754-1838), who

¹ The project N°_164069 supported by the Swiss Science Foundation (SNF) and the Russian Foundation for Humanities (RGNF) focuses on the linguistic and identity aspects of Swiss colonial communities in Crimea and the Northern Black Sea coast, from the 19th century to present time. It will be a first attempt to study from various points of view, the complex situation presented by these French- and German-speaking communities.

² The history of Swiss emigration to Russia has been featured especially by a group of scholars in Switzerland led by Professor Goehrke. They published several special studies in the 1980s and 1990s while the summary volume *Schweizer im Zarenreich (Swiss people in the Empire of the tzar, 1985)* presents an overview. See also Collmer, Peter (2001). *Die besten Jahre unseres Lebens: Russlandschweizerinnen und Russlandschweizer in Selbstzeugnissen, 1821-1999.* (= *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Russlandschweizer*, 8). Zürich: Chronos; Collmer, Peter (2004). *Die Schweiz und das Russische Reich 1848-1919: Geschichte einer europäischen Verflechtung* (= *Die Schweiz und der Osten Europas*, 10). Zürich: Chronos; Bühler, Roman; Gander-Wolf, Heidi; Goehrke, Carsten; Rauber, Urs; Tschudin, Gisela; Voegeli, Josef (1985). *Schweizer im Zarenreich: Zur Geschichte der Auswanderung nach Russland* (= *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Russlandschweizer*. Zürich: Hans Rohr. Gander-Wolf, Heidi (1974). *Chabag: Schweizer Kolonie am Schwarzen Meer. Ihre Gründung und die ersten Jahrzehnte ihres Bestehens*. Lausanne: Multi-Office. Goehrke, Carsten (1998). «Die Auswanderung aus der Schweiz nach Russland und die Russlandschweizer: Eine vergleichende Forschungsbilanz». *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 48/3, 291-324. For an overview in English, cf. Gander-Wolf, Heidi (2014). «Once a Swiss Winegrower Colony Chabag in Russia, Now a Modern Wine-Culture Center SHABO in the Ukraine», <https://www.chabag.ch/Once%20a%20swiss%20winegrower%20colony%20named%20Chabag%20in%20Russia.pdf> (2019-05-08).

himself was from the canton of Vaud, signed a decree allowing to found colonies to the foreigners who wished to develop wine production on the territories annexed from the Ottoman empire. In 1820 Louis-Vincent Tardent (1878-1836), from Vevey, acquired a permission to found a Swiss colony in a place called 'Asha-Abag' (meaning the 'Lower gardens' in Turkish), which was named by the colonists Chabag or in a French manner Shabo. Today Shabo is a village in the Belgorod-Dniestrovski district of Odessa region in Ukraine. Upon the call of Tardent 15 families of Vaud winemakers with their numerous children started their way across Switzerland, Bavaria, Austria, Poland.

2.2 *Beginnings of the colony of Shabo*

The specificity of the Shabo settlers' situation lies in the fact that their territory changed status many times, and therefore the language policy referring to them changed as well following the changes in the political, economic and social situation.

The initial name proposed for the colony by its founders was Helvetianapolis, which is symbolic itself. Its history was described by Gander³. The study by Olivier Grivat *Les vigneronns suisses du tsar* ('Swiss Winemakers of the tsar', 1993) describes in details how the Emperor invited Swiss peasants of the canton of Vaud to settle in Bessarabia, at the Black Sea coast⁴. The Swiss colony of Shabo flourished for over a century. By the beginning of the 20th century this site becomes a recognized center of winemaking.

The Milan conference showed that thinking about the First World War on a global scale does not mean just looking at different regions, but thinking of them together and fostering comparative, translocal, and interdisciplinary approaches. In our next paragraphs, we will explore the role played by communities in knowledge production and transmission, namely in their perception of the war.

2.3 *Swiss colonies in Bessarabia before the war*

In studying Shabo history, we need to expand the timeframe of 1914–18, because this periodization is less relevant once the First World War is

³ Gander, Louis (1908). «Histoire de la colonie de Chabag». *Revue historique vaudoise*, 16, pp. 115-125 and 149-154; Gander, Louis (1908). *Notice historique sur la fondation de la colonie vaudoise de Chabag, Bessarabie*. Lausanne, Imprimerie Lucien Vincent. <http://paysdevaud.hautetfort.com/files/chabag-histoire-1.pdf>. (2019-05-08).

⁴ Grivat, Olivier (1993). *Les Vigneronns suisses du Tsar* (= Collection Lire son pays), Chapelle-sur-Moudon: Ketty & Alexandre.

perceived from a regional perspective. Namely, the echo of the war will be perceived a decade later, at the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s. To restore the full picture of the life of the Swiss colonists we have to refer to several key-moments of the Russian history of that period. The beginning of the 20th century in Russian Empire was marked by a chain of tragic historical events – the participation in the World War I, severely hurting the country, revolutions, fratricidal civil war.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Shabo had about one thousand inhabitants. It was undoubtedly the biggest agricultural Swiss colony of the Southern Russia, and according to some scholars, the unique Swiss ‘colony’ in the world if one means a social organization where settlers do not work themselves but employ local workers. Among its inhabitants, around 400 were descendants of winegrowers from the canton of Vaud, 200 Swiss-German and 200 German⁵. Not only did they produce wine, but also fruits and vegetables. They had a reputation of honest people and hard-workers.

The most prosperous period for our colony goes from 1880 to the beginning of the war in 1914. Everybody knew that Chabag was one of the most prosperous colonies in Russia; life was prosperous and the inhabitants never knew the lack of money. *Tempora mutantur!*⁶

As for their cultural identity, Shabo colonists identify themselves as being Swiss. They used to send their children in Switzerland at Swiss professional schools. When delivering a view of their perception of political events, it is important to emphasize this point. Louis Gander, who visited Shabo in 1908, depicted that Shabo settlers speak *patois* (dialect of the canton of Vaud). All these aspects constitute their cultural heritage.

On the left shore of the river Dniester and between Dniester and Dniepr, we find many so-called ‘daughter colonies,’ formed by Shabo families. The biggest colony was named Osnova.

3. The war and the collapse of the Empire

In order to understand the destiny of Swiss settlers, scholars primarily relied on the expertise of historians. While this advanced scholarship and

⁵ Berg, Lev (1923). *Naselenie Bessarabii. Etnograficheskii sostav i chislennost'*. Petrograd, p. 27.

⁶ Girod, Georges (1938). «Aperçu historique», Dossier «Colonie suisse de Chabag. Bessarabie, 1936-1938», Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv, 28.03.1938, Bern, E 220, 15-02-1000-216-153, p. 59.

knowledge, questions regarding the social and cultural being of Swiss settlers often remain unanswered. Namely, only archival materials compared with private documents help us understanding why and how questions of mother tongue, origin, nationality (in the sense of ethnicity, as the term was used in the Russian empire) and citizenship of Shabo settlers become important in the context of the war. In other words, the innovative aspect of our study is that it provides an expertise of social science and linguistics on an important historical question.

3.1 Political issues

Not surprisingly, the first event to affect Swiss settlers' life is the beginning of the war, when Bessarabia still makes part of the Russian Empire. Our survey of historical documents suggests three main reasons for this:

1. general mobilization took away most men; Shabo still got some economic benefit, at least for a few years, the military bases bustled with activities during the war, injecting energy to the colonial economy;
2. the economic crisis caused by the war affected wine export, even wine consumption within the Empire. Several wine makers had to move to cities to find another job;
3. Another factor that affected Shabo's life was linked to the problem of foreign people in the Russian empire. Since most of the colonies were mixt communities, where people of Swiss-German, Swiss-French, but also German origin lived, Bessarabia settlers were sometimes assimilated to German population.

This perception became important in the context of branding of Germans as 'inside enemy'. Following the objective to study their ways of living as affected my political and socio-cultural changes, we try to follow socio-cultural dynamics of these communities.

Swiss settlers risked to be expelled, as many ethnic Germans. During the 1914-1918, German population of the Russian Empire suffered political and economic oppression. As our analysis of historical documents shows, another reason could be explained by the factor of the German identity. The Chief of Odessa military district general Ebelov wrote on November 1914 to general Janushkevitch, that patriotic rise of the population against Germany led to the growing antipathy towards everything German, including newspapers, the

German language and German population, mostly among lower classes of population. This situation presents a social danger⁷.

How could Shabo be preserved from expropriation laws disowning of German landowners, adopted in 1915? A survey of archival materials provides us with explanations of these facts. One official letter dated 1916 informs that Shabo settlers asked the Swiss Legation in Petrograd in July for protection of their interests. The Russian authorities had assimilated them to German population and wanted to confiscate their properties. The attitude of the local authorities seemed to be motivated by the lack of information on their origin.

This episode shows us how at this historical moment Swiss citizenship and Swiss identity become a factor for social cohesion for Shabo colonists, as well as for settlers inhabiting other colonies. The quotation below testifies of the feeling of Shabo settlers expressed by Samuel Buxcel afterword, in the mid-1940s: «We should not forget that we could have thought about Switzerland earlier, but nobody thought about it, as we lived very well. Now we are thinking about it, but it is too late»⁸.

Many other private documents confirm that Shabo settlers of Swiss origin had always thought of themselves as Swiss. This feeling was an important part of their identity. When people think of themselves in terms of their group identity, they perceive themselves and other in-group members as sharing the same attitudes, culture, history and memory of their ancestors. Among these factors, French language played an important role. It is interesting to remark that a Census requested by Swiss authorities in the 1930s took as a criterion of identity the language spoken by Shabo settlers and not their canton of origin⁹.

One could easily imagine the shock caused by the response of the Swiss authorities, which we find in the archival documents. The keynote of the collected materials was the following idea: the return of all Swiss settlers to Switzerland was made impossible by the Swiss authorities. The Swiss Federal authorities' position was clear: Switzerland will help only people of Swiss ancestry¹⁰ and holders of Swiss identity papers ('acte d'origine'). The Federal archive in Bern contains the correspondence exchanged between the

⁷ Ebelov, Mixail (1914). «Pis'mo, Ebelov Janushkevichu, N° 1402», *Fond Aleksandra N. Jakovleva, Nemcy v istorii Rossii*. 1652-1917, doc. N° 168, <https://alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/65556> (2019-05-08).

⁸ Buxcel, Samuel (1946). *Chabag – colonie Suisse*, p. 14.

⁹ «Aus der Schweizer Kolonie in Osnowa, 1929-1931», 12.

¹⁰ Each municipality in Switzerland maintains its own registry of citizens, which is separate from the registry of people living in the municipality. Many Swiss citizens do not live in their place of origin; therefore, they are often required by the municipality in which they live to get a certificate of citizenship ('acte d'origine') from their place of origin.

Swiss Legation in Petrograd and the Foreign Affairs Division of the Federal Political Department in Bern concerning the case of Shabo, between 1916 and 1920¹¹.

We could recognize as Swiss only those settlers of Szaba (sic!) who could prove their Swiss origin ('*indigénat*') by a Swiss passport or act of origin ('*acte d'origine*'). A descendance from a Swiss citizen *does not constitute any prove of nationality*, so we will allow Swiss communes examine each case as for their free will¹².

It was impossible to return 'back' to Switzerland. For the Swiss authorities, they are stateless, they may apply for their citizenship to be reinstated.

4. Socio-cultural dynamics in Shabo during and after the war

4.1 Historical elements

From 1917, settlers are afraid of being occupied by the Ukrainian soldiers of the newly created Ukrainian People's Republic. Yet another thing happens: Shabo is occupied first by French troops of Berthelot, then by the Romanian army. Without entering into the details of the treaty, we will note that on December 10 1917, the United Kingdom and France divided the lands, including Bessarabia. The fate of this region, occupied by the Romanian troops in January 1918, depended on the agreements between various foreign governments. Thus, Bessarabia was under the Romanian rule even before the Treaty of Paris of October 28 1920. The event raised many legitimate preoccupations¹³.

The recent research by Ute Schmidt had shown that under the pressure of Entente powers, the Romanian government signed in 1919 at Versailles the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities¹⁴. However, in reality, the population lived through the Romanization and discrimination of minorities, which concerned Bessarabian Germans, who did not receive any status. The knowledge of the Romanian language became compulsory for all

¹¹ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag, 1920-1930», 142-3. Written as «Saba» or «Szaba».

¹² «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 13.12.1920.

¹³ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 143.

¹⁴ Schmidt, Ute (2008). *Bessarabien. Deutsche Kolonisten am Schwarzen Meer*. Potsdam: Deutsches Kulturforum Östliches Europa, Schmidt, Ute (2011). *Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea*. Potsdam: Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa.

jobs in the administration. The names of German localities were changed, Shabo became *Szaba* or *Şaba*, the city of Akkerman became Cetatea-Alba¹⁵.

4.2 Identity issues

Communities construct themselves differently, depending on diverse social and political environment, in which they live. This study is related to the historical self-perception of a community at a concrete historical period. The sufferings of Shabo settlers, in Shabo¹⁶ and in Bugaz, around 6 km away from Shabo on the Black sea shore, now at the hands of the Romanian troops, gave them a strong sense not so much of who they *were*, but certainly of who they *were not*.

When declaration of war fell upon the colonies, it produced reactions as different as the character of each colony. The settlers wanted to protect their homes and farms. The French-speaking majority had little sympathy for the Romanians. They viewed the new authorities as illegal (since population did not vote for them), while the people of Bessarabia had to accept great powers' decisions. The Romanization had a negative impact on minorities within the 'Great Romania'¹⁷.

All elements analyzed strongly suggest that local Romanian authorities' position was responsible for the conflict with the Swiss settlers. No settler can move from Shabo to any other place, neither to his 'dacha' at Bugaz without asking a special 'pass'. If they try to access their dachas, they would be kicked with arms¹⁸. Soldiers force peasants to take away construction materials and take them to the nearest checkpoint.

A series of archival materials conserved in the Swiss State archives in Bern throw light on these events. At the end of 1920, Georges Girod, Swiss delegue in Shabo (President of the community), complains that his house had been destructed and his vineyard had been destroyed by the Romanian army¹⁹. This incident will last for several months, the Romanian Ministry accusing French soldiers of the fact and Girod insisting in his letter of June

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 303.

¹⁶ Defending their rights to Bessarabia, Romania provided as an argument the decision of the self-constituted Sfatul Tarii (the 'Provincial Council') of a conditional (April 9, 1914) and unconditional (December 10, 1915) annex of Bessarabia to Romania, as well as the Paris Protocol (October 28, 1920), signed by the four countries (Britain, France, Italy and Japan), which hadn't full force and effect, because it was not ratified by Japan. See also Malcev, Denis (2011). «Bessarabskij vopros v gody Grazhdanskoj vojny v Rossii», *Problemy nacional'noj strategii*, 4 (9), pp. 162-183.

¹⁷ Schmidt, U. *Bessarabien...*, cit., p. 301.

¹⁸ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 176.

¹⁹ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 65-6.

4 1921 on the fact that the French had nothing to do with it²⁰. The facts would be reported even to the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Take Ionescu.

On December 11 1920, the Minister of Switzerland in Bucharest Ferdinand de Salis²¹ informs Girod of having passed an agreement with the Ministry of Territories ('Ministère des Domaines'). A particular status was promised to Shabo settlers, but it concerned only vineyards, they will not be confiscated. As for other lands and properties, the Ministry could not guarantee anything. Indeed, the revolutionary authorities claimed that the lands should be divided among peasants, for free, and it seems very difficult to return to the previous situation. The only hope remains that Swiss could conserve some more lands than others²².

4.3 Time of quiet

Some years later, things went differently. The end of the war brought a return to normality in terms of the political life, and the renewal of ties with Switzerland thanks to the implication of Swiss authorities.

The Romanian government, however, guaranteed their freedom of language and religion.

Indeed, it must be emphasized that one of the major factors of the Swiss settlers' identity in Shabo was their religion. This factor is also important for all German communities of the Russian Empire²³. Church activities were authorized in Shabo, for both the German-speaking and the French-speaking community. It is interesting to notice that both communities shared the same church. No agreement was achieved with the Romanian authorities concerning school issues. This need for a school in mother tongues became a symbolic tie with Switzerland.

How could one explain that Shabo was preserved while all other minorities were repressed? We can easily observe that more the situation of Shabo settlers becomes dangerous and more the language adopted by Swiss representatives becomes diplomatic. This changing discourse could be observed when analysing the diplomatic correspondence about the lands and houses in Shabo and Cetatea-Alba. In a letter of January 31 1923, the Swiss

²⁰ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 63-4, 249. «Je proteste de la manière la plus énergique contre l'assertion que ces vols ont été commis avant la domination roumaine, pendant l'occupation du Bugaz par les troupes françaises».

²¹ The exact titre was *Envoyé extraordinaire et Ministre Plénipotentiaire de la Confédération Helvétique*.

²² «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 77-8, 264.

²³ Moskaluk Lev (2008). *Soxranenie jazyka, tradicionnoj kul'tury i problema samoidentifikacii rossijskix nemecev, Nemcy Rossii: Istoricheskij opyt i sovremennye problemy samoorganizacii*. Moskva: MCNK-Press, 50-52.

Consul in Galatz addresses a request for a particular status of Shabo to the Romanian Minister of Agriculture Constantinescu. «Our Mother land, the Great Romania».

They remained foreigners (Swiss), but they still remain a model as for agriculture and viticulture for neighbouring population. I could assure your Excellence that they are perfectly loyal and feel love and are grateful for their Mother land, the Great Romania²⁴.

In 1922, a special festivity was organized in Shabo for the 100 years' anniversary of its foundation²⁵. It should be considered as a positive marker of the Romanian authorities' attitude.

5. Political status of Shabo settlers

It should be emphasized that discussions on the national status of Shabo settlers that we are able to follow thanks to archival data provide us an explanation of the tragic history of the Swiss colonies of Bessarabia until 1944.

5.1 Feeling to be Swiss

As stated before, Shabo settlers felt to be Swiss. This was not only words. Settlers sent money for the victims of disasters in the Rhone valley in Switzerland. During the time of peace and prosperity, they proved in this manner their solidarity with the Swiss population of Switzerland which they considered to be their 'compatriots'²⁶. They attached great importance to their community of interests with their Swiss relatives.

It should be highlighted that the theme of Switzerland as 'Motherland' was one of the recurring themes in the correspondence between Shabo settlers and the Swiss authorities. «Compatriot» is also the term used by the Swiss Legation. Our analyses, based on archival materials, have led to various conclusions. For example, this notion of «compatriot» neither automatically corresponded to the political status of Swiss settlers, nor gave them any right.

The results of the Census of all the inhabitants of Swiss colonies in Romania (except Galatz), held on January 1st, 1924²⁷ and ordered by Bern,

²⁴ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 41.

²⁵ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 229-37.

²⁶ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 89-94.

²⁷ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 179-80.

are particularly interesting. According to the Census, Shabo had 1241 people, that the census divides by languages that they spoke: 620 spoke German, 283 spoke French, 39 spoke Italian, 97 spoke Romanian and 12 spoke 'other languages'. The census certainly did not take in account the real use of languages. We could hardly understand if the census' results were actually used to support any politic decision. However, another series of archival materials, namely the correspondence of December 1924 informs us about the politic status of Shabo settlers.

5.2 Official discourse on Swiss settlers' status

It is important to stress here that the Bessarabian Treaty allowed all Bessarabian people, including the Swiss settlers, to choose between refusing or maintaining their Romanian citizenship. They had twelve months to take the decision, to inform authorities about it and to emigrate to their 'country of citizenship'. They could conserve their lands and properties in Bessarabia. Meanwhile, the Consulate in Galatz became a turning place of Swiss re-emigration, since Swiss citizens crossing the Soviet territories would come to cross the boundary in Odessa. «No founds are allowed for this purpose», was the reply of local Swiss representatives²⁸.

On December 10 1924, the Romanian Ministry of Interior informs the Swiss Legation in Bucharest that Swiss settlers leaving in Shabo refused Romanian citizenship in order to be exempted from military service. The Swiss Legation's answer provides a more detailed information about it. According to the answer, the Swiss settlers of Shabo are «not Russian citizens and do not have the Romanian origin». «They have never chosen their Swiss citizenship by any act, since they always held it, they undertake their military service in Switzerland»²⁹. However, this situation does not seem to be general, since private letters sometimes say just the opposite. Georges Girod writes to the Swiss Legation, on November 29 1924, that «some Swiss have become Romanian» in order to keep their lands. Girod complains that local police had confiscated their passports and residence permits³⁰.

As our analysis suggests, Swiss settlers had to make a difficult choice, felt as choosing between the Swiss citizenship and their properties. Bern authorities were aware of their situation and have attempted to solve the problem. The Swiss Minister informs Bern in November 1924 that Minister

²⁸ «Consulat Suisse à Odessa», 1918.

²⁹ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 147.

³⁰ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 158-9.

of Territories «highly appreciates the presence of Swiss settlers on the Dniester river so close to the Soviet boundary». He says that he prefers their presence to the Romanian settlers, who are more instable and less organized³¹. The Swiss Minister to the Vaud State Council (‘Conseil d’Etat’), writes on June 4 1922:

I have visited the colony of Shabo last autumn and was impressed by the attachment that its members have for their Motherland (‘mère patrie’), that most of them have never visited. They speak Russian between them and in their families, but they conserve the Swiss mentality, with its integrity, honesty and rectitude. I think it would be a patriotic action if we facilitate their efforts to bring up their children in the respect of Swiss traditions³².

January 1923, Swiss Legation asks the Minister of Agriculture for a special status for Shabo settlers, who have always been loyal. This status quo will last until 1939.



Figure 1. Map of the Shabo region, by Paul Margot. www.chabag.ch

³¹ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 168.

³² «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 173.

5.3 School and church

The Soviet linguist Vladimir Shishmarev visits Shabo in 1928 during his field research *Romanskie poselenija na Juge SSSR (Romance-speaking villages of the Southern Soviet Union)*, to be published after his death in 1975³³. According to his statistics, Shabo has 211 families, among which 30 are Swiss citizens³⁴.

Shabo is leaving the time of «linguistic reaction,» affirms Shishmarev. This phenomenon mostly affects German-speaking settlers. Two cultural associations exist. The «Verein Aurora» organizes concerts, lectures for German-speaking members and for children. The French-speaking school teacher Anselme created a group for discussions in French, as well as activities for children. Even a division of the *Alliance Française de Bucharest* had an office in Shabo for some years. These interesting activities could be followed by analysing the reports of the association Aurora³⁵. The quotation below, by the Soviet linguist Shishmarev, asserts :

A long-lasting existence within Russian-speaking region, for quite hundred years, had a strong impact on way of life and psychic life of Swiss settlers. This was the main reason why Romanian influence could not gain the colony so as the rest of the Bessarabia region³⁶.

BESSARABIENSCHWEIZER DER KOLONIE CHABAG							
in Chabag		in Rumänien		in Deutschland		unbekannt wo	
Besson Gustave	2 P.	Besson Anatole	4 P.	Agours-Forney	2 P.	Anstra-Buxcel	3 P.
Besson Jeanne	1	Besson Victor	3	Descombas César	3	Besson François	2
Gander César	2	Buxcel Bernard	2	Descombas Henri	4	Dogay Alexandr.	1
Gander Lucien	2	Buxcel Joseph	3	Descombas Louis	2	Gander Amy	1
Hochler Henri	2	Chevalley Henri	3	Dogay Alexandre	3	Miéville Ant.	4
Miéville Nicolas	3	Dogay François	3	Dogay Marie	1		11 P.
Tapis Alexandre	2	Gander Edmond	4	Dogay Nicolas	3		
Tapis Eugène	3	Gavrilkouk-Margot	3	Dogay Victorine	2		
Tardent Raoul	1	Laurent Nicolas	3	Kiener Charles	2		
Thévenaz Gaston	3	Sedenko-Laurent	2	Laurent Arnold	2		
	21 P.	Thévenaz Charles	3	Laurent Georges	3		
			33 P.	Margot Gustave	1		
					28 P.		
							total 98 Personen

Figure 2. Statistics on the population of Shabo by 1930, «Aus der Schweizer Kolonie in Osnowa, 1929-1931», 12.

³³ Shishmarev, Vladimir [1929] (1975). «Shvejcarskoe poselenije v Shabo», *Romanskie poselenija na Juge Rossii*, Leningrad.

³⁴ Shishmarev, V. «Shvejcarskoe poselenije v Shabo»..., cit., p. 129.

³⁵ Cf. «Protokoll der Hauptversammlung des 'Aurora'», 1920-1924.

³⁶ Shishmarev, V. «Shvejcarskoe poselenije v Shabo»..., cit., p. 143.

5.4 *Swiss colonies between Romania and Soviet Union: a divided community, 1918-1939*

As said before, a smaller colony called Osnova remained, from 1918, separated from Shabo, its ‘mother colony,’ by the political border. Archival materials provide few information on it, but we found some interesting documents in private archives of Swiss settlers’ descendants living in Switzerland and in Germany.

Some contacts were maintained between the Church of Shabo and the settlers of Osnova. The community tries to help the latter to join their relatives in Shabo by addressing the Swiss Minister in Bucharest. «Settlers from Osnova ask us for help. The hail had destroyed their vineyards, so they will not be able to exchange grape for food and will have no food for the winter»³⁷.

De Salis makes efforts to transmit the case, with the list of Swiss settlers, to the Romanian Delegation of the International Red Cross in October 1922³⁸.

From the cultural point of view, they were living in a different situation. Liturgy is forbidden, two classes exist at school, French and German-speaking settlers are grouped in a kolkhoz, they receive help from their relatives in Shabo.

5.5 *Destinies before and after 1939*

Our research founded on historical archives from the Swiss State Archive in Bern strongly suggests that, perhaps inevitably, the lack of information on Swiss settlers’ destinies around 1940 and the beginning of the Second war led to all kinds of speculation as to their real destiny. An exception is the research by Ute Schmidt on all ethnic Germans³⁹. Without engaging a new research on this topic, we would like to emphasize a point relevant for this topic: the issues of citizenship and national identity of Shabo settlers aroused newly in 1939-1940 and had political and social consequences.

In 1939, we still find the Shabo Swiss in their village, thanks to the Swiss authorities’ implication they had a special status, even if it was not defined. In March 1938, the Swiss Legation in Bucharest still had to remind the local authorities that Shabo had played an important role in the fight against revolutionary elements. All arguments were used to obtain a special status,

³⁷ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 53, 48.

³⁸ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 53, 47.

³⁹ See Schmidt, U. *Bessarabien...*, cit.

in the conditions where non-citizens could not possess properties in rural areas⁴⁰. Yet an important consideration is that Swiss settlers still had the perception of being discriminated. Let us recall that as for ethnic Germans, in the 1930s, Antonescu granted the Germans in the country a special status, which largely subordinated them to Nation-Socialist Germany⁴¹.

From June 1940 Bessarabia makes part of Soviet Ukraine, and another epoch for Swiss settlers begins, in the context of the evacuation after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. On June 17, Molotov accepted the request for the people of German descent to be evacuated to Germany⁴². It is important to emphasize that Swiss settlers of Shabo and other colonies were also included in this list. «One only had to demonstrate that one had some German descent», they say afterwards in their Memories. Indeed, but it is how we could say it today, the other option, for them, was to remain in Shabo. This argument needs to be studied further.

The conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (23 August 1939) decided the future of these 'ethnic Germans'. The Fuhrer trumpeted his new politics of repatriation, within the boundaries of the Reich, of the ethnic German from the East and the South-East of Europe. The Germans from Bucovina and Bessarabia, frightened by an eventual Soviet assault on Romania, rallied to the politics of the Fuhrer⁴³. On September 15 1940, the German Resettlement Commission arrived. The Commission went door to door through the village, assessing the property of each family. The villagers would only be allowed to take a small number of possessions with them — they were to leave the rest to the Soviets and to be reimbursed once returned to Germany⁴⁴.

Contrary to the orthodoxy of most historians, it can now be shown, beyond reasonable doubt, that the Bessarabian German, but also the Swiss communities in Romania who had settled in Romania and contributed to the local societies for two centuries, were to almost completely disappear from Romania not as a result of post-war expulsion by the Soviets or Romanian

⁴⁰ «Colonie Suisse à Chabag», 101.

⁴¹ Ursprung, Daniel (2015). «The German minority in Romania: A Historical Overview», *Euxeinos*, 19-20, pp. 7-15.

⁴² Weinberg, Gerhard L. (1954). *Germany and the Soviet Union*. Leiden: Brill, p. 163. For more detail, cf. Weinberg 1954, quotations of original documents provided.

⁴³ Tulus, Arthur Viorel (2011). «The Germans from Southern Bessarabia (Bugeac). From Colonization to Repatriation». Brie, Mircea; Şipoş, Sorin; Horga, Ioan. *Ethno-confessional realities in the Romanian area: historical perspectives (XVII-XX centuries)* (Eurolimes, Supplement). Oradea: Ed. Univ. din Oradea, 2, p. 295.

⁴⁴ See Schott, Carolyn (2014). «Hoffnungstal, Bessarabia – History of a German Village (Part 5)», <https://carolynschott.com/ukraine/hoffnungstal-bessarabia-history-of-a-german-village-part-5/>.

Communists, but by the diplomatic policy of Adolf Hitler⁴⁵. According to Browning⁴⁶, Hitler, refusing to allow these long-influential German communities to fall under the hegemony of Soviet ‘Jewish Bolshevism’, determined that all of these ethnic German populations were to be deported and transferred to Germany under the ‘Heim ins Reich’ (‘Come home to the Reich’) doctrine aiming at repatriating all ethnic Germans and resettling them.

According to Schmidt⁴⁷, most of Germans left for Germany, and so did most Swiss settlers of Shabo. The resettlement was not forced, they preferred to leave, and they believed to the promises of lands and compensations in Germany, it is what follows from our analysis of the correspondence between Swiss authorities in Bern and the Consulate in Galatz.

6. Conclusion

The economic and political changes due to the First world war, have entailed increased rates of mobility and several consequences were observed including frustration over the transience, fragility of social relationships that result and that have negative consequences for the political life of a community.

Overall, this research’s objectives aimed to provide insights into key questions: how did the war *modify the Swiss community’s life*? To what extent were their destinies affected by World War I? We addressed these questions in order to complement the knowledge produced by historians. We tackle these issues in a new and different light from the descriptions mentioned above, how the particular emphasis on the notion of motherland and the associated concepts of mother tongue, heritage culture and ‘feeling as Swiss’ became important during social changes.

⁴⁵ Institute for Research of Expelled Germans. (2009) «The disappearance of the Transylvania Saxons and Swabians from Romania through mass emigration and planned deportation», <http://expelledgermans.org/transylvaniasaxons.htm>. (2019-5-28).

⁴⁶ Browning, Christopher R. (2010). *The origins of the Final Solution*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Schmidt, Ute (2008). «Germans in Bessarabia: historical background and present-day relation». *Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 11, 3, p. 312.. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43293275?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents (2019-05-08)

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