

The representation of Germanness in Transylvania during the 1920: the microcosmos of a Braşov-based philo-German

Abstract

The study aims to capture the Transylvanian Romanians' image of the German, the Austrian, and Germanness, during the period when Transylvania moved from an imperial to a national/post-imperial state structure; a process generated by the political changes after 1918. If the status of Romanians within the Austro-Hungarian Empire was one of assimilation with those nationalities living throughout the monarchy and defined by their minority character, then after the political-social turn which occurred following the Great Union and the incorporation of Transylvania into the structures of Greater Romania, their role changed and they became the majority within the new statehood. The research question which we formulated is as follows: How did Romanians imagine the German who was near (Saxon) and far (Prussia), the Austrian, and Germanness in the years after the Great War? In order to answer this question we will analyse the memoirs of Sextil Puşcariu, one of the most important Romanian intellectuals, who had no hesitation in expressing his pro-German perceptions. Although he was subjective, he offers a critical and detailed analysis of the society, rendering several images of Germanness.

Keywords

Transylvanian Saxons • Greater Romania • image of the German • imagology • postimperial realities

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Conceptual and methodological delimitations

The present article aims to capture the image of the German, the Austrian, and of Germanness in general among Transylvanian Romanians during the period in which Transylvania underwent a shift from an imperial state structure to a national/post-imperial one. The major paradigm shift after 1918 would greatly influence the evolution of the successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Cuşco 2014). If Romanians within the Empire had been assimilated by the various imperial nationalities and were defined as a minority, then after the political-social turn following the Great Union and the inclusion of Transylvania in the structures of Greater Romania, their role changed, as they became a majority within the new statehood. The purpose of the present research is to pursue the way in which the new majorities perceived Germanness during a period marked by political, economic, and social transformations.

According to Michel Foucault's contributions to the field of imagology, the image of the German during the 1920s belongs to the imagological field (2002). He argues that the history of ideas transcends the boundaries of historical disciplines by treating and reinterpreting the subject from the outside. The history of ideas is an analytical framework which takes into account the historical elements of science, literature, and philosophy, describing the empirical knowledge lying at the heart of subsequent formalisations. It revisits immediate experiences inscribed into discourse, describing historical continuities and reassessments. The history of ideas shows how scientific knowledge, philosophical concepts, and literary works interact and migrate between different fields, linking social customs

and techniques to cultural practices. It therefore becomes the distinctive discipline of interference and of the description of different layers of labour.

Manfred Beller (2007, p 25) argues that the depiction of other nations and peoples became crucial in political and literary debates by introducing the concept of *Vorstellungsbilder*.¹ Imagology gained importance following the shift from Humanism to the Age of Enlightenment and to political nationalism after the French Revolution. Depictions of other nations throughout art and caricature are defined metaphorically and perceived visually, but their primary origin is the mental representation. The resulting *images* strongly inform opinion and behaviour towards the Other, as they are also shaped by cultural and linguistic differences. Selective value judgments, illustrated by travel writing and literature as well as media analysis, contribute to the formation of these depictions. Memorial works offer valuable insights into the image of the Other.

Sorin Mitu argues that historians analyse the nation as an imagined community which emerges in the late 18th century. He emphasises the differences between the perspectives shared by anthropologists, literati, and historians in regard to this imagery. Some philologists argue that literary texts simplify the complexity of individual characteristics. Groups and peoples are seen as collective units, often represented through stereotypes, which in turn are the basis of prejudice (Mitu 2020, p 12). Leerssen (2008) links

¹The concept of *Vorstellungsbilder* contains a variety of meanings in German, which makes it difficult to translate into English through a single notion. The closest meaning would be that of 'images of the imagination', designating, in fact, the mental representation of an image.

the concept of the *images of the Others* to the European national consciousness as it developed during the modern period, when nations were defined by territory, ethnicity, language, religion, history, and tradition. The formation of the modern European state historically coincided with this process, beginning with the Western European centralised states and continuing with those of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The study of the depiction of nations reveals active prejudices and stereotypes in imagological representation.

The hypothesis and aim of the present research revolve around the following question: How can the Romanian depiction of the proximate German (the Transylvanian Saxon), the distant German (the Prussian), the Austrian, and of Germanness in general, be described in the years after the Great War? While addressing the image of the German in Transylvania, we are compelled to limit ourselves to a less extensive geographical and regional area. For this reason, we chiefly refer to the cultural production of Braşov—one of the most prototypical Transylvanian settlements—as this area entertained close ties with the German space during earlier centuries, but especially during the 19th century, thanks to the Transylvanian Saxons. The link between these Saxons and the German and Habsburg space was very close. This is illustrated through economic exchange but also, especially, cultural exchange. Both the Saxons and Romanians studied at universities in Germany; there was significant importation of German books and cultural products, while popular literature and the dramatic works performed on stage in Braşov and other cities and towns belonged to the German and Austrian cultures. In the following article, we shall delve into the imaginary of the Transylvanian Romanians regarding the German and the Austrian, taking into account the changes Transylvania has gone through since 1918. How does the Romanian relate to the German and the Austrian during the period after the Great War? The image of the German has previously been addressed from a linguistic point of view (Hanák 1999, Heitmann 2014, Heitmann 1996, Hâncu 1998, Oişteanu 2012); our study intends to contribute to this knowledge with notions related to the socio-cultural context of German-Romanian interference during a very complex period, with the aim of augmenting the empirical heritage of 'productive imagination' (Beller 2007, p 3).

Philo-Germanism

Sextil Puşcariu's *Braşovul de altădată* (Braşov of Yesteryear) conveys subjective perspectives on the German and the Austrian, and on Germanness, capturing philo-German impressions of German culture and daily life. Although he is subjective, the author provides a critical and detailed social analysis, capturing several distinctive renditions of Germanness. Born in 1877, Puşcariu studied in Leipzig, Vienna, and Paris, which allowed him to deeply understand Western culture. His stay in two major cities within the German and Austrian space allowed him to sense the *zeitgeist/spirit of the age* and to become familiar with the various forms of Western daily life; this is clear in his memoirs, which, therefore, represent a good primary source for the present study.

In his memoirs, Puşcariu refers to the different nationalities of the German and Austrian, or Saxon and Swabian, attributing characteristics and specificities to each. He appreciates high German culture but criticises German cuisine and attire. He also remarks on the Austrian influence on theatre and operetta, and on Viennese traditions. Reflecting on the channels through which German and Austrian influences made their way into the Transylvanian space, Puşcariu (1977, p. 55) argues that German influence entered the Romanian cultural space in two ways.

One is related to Lutheranism and shares its origins with the poems of Schiller and Goethe, the music of Bach and

Schumann, books and magazines, but also poorly tailored clothes and tasteless food using the same sauce for all steaks.

The linguist is appreciative of high German culture, with its famous exponents, Goethe and Schiller, and Bach and Schumann, as well as German popular culture, which is represented by books and magazines intended for the general public. However, he is critical of the rather formal aspects of German cuisine and attire, which he considers tasteless. According to him, the second influence is Austrian and Catholic, represented by

Viennese theatre and operetta, the waltzes of Johann Strauss and the grace of Mozart and Haydn, with handsome officers twirling mademoiselles in three-quarter time and discussing world affairs in cafés, with fashion magazines, delicious cakes, 'buns', and freshly baked baguettes. (Puşcariu 1977, p. 55)

The cultural and everyday products of the Viennese *zeitgeist* of the Belle Époque are highly appreciated, with theatre, operetta, and slow Viennese waltzes being especially popular, alongside the most popular, highbrow musicians of the time.

In trying to understand and decipher Habsburg society, Puşcariu draws a holistic image of national structures within the broader supranational construct (Kann 2019), noting that

Czechs and Poles with German names, and Germans with Czech or Polish names, all came together in the great Habsburg melting pot. All of them were Austrians. The capital of Hungary was inhabited by Germans, German officers had Croatian parents ... this is the face of Austria-Hungary before the dualism.

The metaphor of 'the great Habsburg melting pot' captures, on the one hand, the wide array of nationalities assimilated by the monarchy prior to dualism, while on the other, the impressive territorial size of the state, defined by the existence of a single centre—Vienna. At the same time, Puşcariu remarks on the successful mixture of different nationalities peacefully coexisting, referring to the multicultural and multinational nature of the empire, appealing to the demographic policy of the emperors in Vienna during the 18th and 19th centuries. The common denominator of these nationalities is their Austrian citizenship. The turning point, however, was the establishment of Austro-Hungarian dualism, when Transylvania fell under Hungarian influence (Pál 2010). In the new political construct of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after 1867, according to the Braşov philologist the Austrians lose their influence on the East, abandoning the Hungarian nationalities.

Puşcariu continues his journey across Austrian cultural history, discussing the architectural aspects and their influences. A complex spirit, Puşcariu (1977, p. 65) draws interesting links between historical and European cultural and architectural phenomena: 'But when the huge wigs worn by Louis XIV were replaced by the wigs of his successors, Louis XV and XVI, and the baroque style developed into the rococo, Austria was still Catholic and German'. The influence of the French culture of the 17th and 18th centuries was, therefore, also noticeable in Catholic and German Austria through the import of baroque and rococo architectural styles, and through adopting the specific *joie de vivre* of these two movements. The author then discusses the regional-local Transylvanian periphery:

In Braşov, safe from political turmoil, neither Catholicism, nor Austrian Germanism, nor the Rococo and Biedermeier that followed had much influence on public and private buildings, unlike in the other two larger Transylvanian cities, Sibiu and Cluj, considered 'political capitals'.

Puşcariu suggests that the Saxon fortress at the base of Tâmpa Mountain is of rather peripheral importance, and mentions that the urban aspect of public and private buildings was not strongly influenced by the West during the 18th century when compared to the Transylvanian urban centres of Cluj and Sibiu. The author's argument is the following:

Baroque and Rococo palaces such as Brukenthal and Bánffy speak of times when the refined Austrian political art knew how to make even the local elites pursue the same goals as the Habsburgs. And the Blaj cathedral proves that the very same Romanians who had joined the Union, embracing Rome, also embraced Vienna.

Drawing on the example of the two emblematic buildings of 18th-century Transylvanian Baroque, the Brukenthal and the Bánffy palaces, Puşcariu refers to Austrian political art, which he describes as being 'refined' and which was presumably using the local elites to achieve its goals. The poetic reference to the Greek-Catholic elite who embraced Vienna is imprinted in the baroque building of the Romanian cathedral in Blaj (Sabău 2005).

The philologist from Braşov discusses the centre-periphery dichotomy between urbanistic development in cities under German-Austrian influence and those in Braşov, identifying the rococo architectural style in Austrian and German palaces. Thus, he notes that 'we have only insignificant traces of the rococo style in Braşov'. He then goes on to compare the two centres of power with the cultures they influenced: 'The two famous palaces of Schönbrunn near Vienna and Sans-Souci in Potsdam were two unreconciled rivals'; thus referring to German and Austrian culture as competing powers and formulating a series of speculations reminiscent of alternative history:

I often wonder if it would not have been a better outcome for the German people if the battle had concluded with the victory of Maria Theresa instead of Frederick the Great. Of course, under her and her successors, the German empire would not have made the progress it enjoyed under the Hohenzollerns; but under Austrian leadership, the Germans would certainly have acquired that empathy that the rigid Prussians lack so completely and because of which the peoples who suffered under their domination and even their co-nationals from elsewhere find them so averse. (Puşcariu 1977, p. 66)

The quotation illustrates the attributes of the Habsburg power centre embodied by Maria Theresa (Stollberg-Rillinger 2017) and the Prussian one represented by Frederick the Great. Had the Habsburgs won the Seven Years' War and control over the Prussians, they would not have made such significant progress as the Hohenzollern dynasty did, but they would have most likely softened the dominant German nature, thus they would cease to be the famously '*rigid Prussians*'. Moreover, Puşcariu's projection of an alternative future also reveals the power dynamics occurring between the *joyless Prussians* and those they conquered or *roughed up*, on the one hand, and between the Prussians and their compatriots on the other. Therefore, Puşcariu's depiction of the Prussian character is not a positive one, albeit, he acknowledges their effectiveness and ability to speed up historical processes.

Puşcariu's memoirs descend more and more into the regional-local sphere, focusing on Braşov society and its particularities. As to the Romanian-German interference with the Saxon fortress under Tâmpa Mountain, the philologist tells us the following: 'Romanians from the Fortress were different from those from Schei. Words of German origin and idioms

modelled after German crept into their speech ... and some of their customs were borrowed from the Saxons'. As historians and ethnographers have observed, the blending (Haldenwang 2008, pp 157-169) of German, Hungarian, and Romanian customs and dialects was present in southern Transylvania, particularly in the 19th century. In the following lines, Puşcariu reflects on the presence of the Macedonian-Romanians in Braşov: 'Instead of their usual gown, the merchants from the Turkish Empire wore German clothes. In this case, "German" means "Saxon", but especially "Austrian"'. The assimilation of German fashion by the Aromanians and Romanians from southern Transylvania fits the dissemination model of Western Habsburg forms throughout the empire; Puşcariu making a clear distinction of what the 'German' attire signified, as it was actually borrowed from the Viennese and from the Saxons. Therefore, in the collective understanding of Romanians from southern Transylvania, the confusion between 'German' and 'Viennese' was generated at the level of everyday language, so that the German attire was seen as originating in Vienna.

The musical inclination of the Saxons, the Swabians, the Austrians, and the Germans—of Germans generally—is renowned, and with the emergence of modernity, musical associations, philharmonics, orchestras, and brass bands were all part of everyday urban and rural life (Corbea Hoisie & Gräf 2023). A German stereotype shared among Transylvanian Romanians was that of the German 'piano teacher', 'musician', and 'composer'. For example, Puşcariu's memoirs (1977, p. 154, 214) mention the way in which the private education of high school girls in Braşov was carried out: 'Girls could not yet attend high schools, but their instruction was done privately through piano, French, and tailoring lessons'. In this context, he mentions that

piano was mainly taught by Humpel, married to a sister of Titu Maiorescu, and Krummel, who came to Braşov from Germany with his whole family, consisting of countless tall sons and girls with thick pigtailed, two of whom were good pianists, specialising in playing the most difficult unison pieces on two pianos at once. Their playing was naturally devoid of any individuality and personal touch.

Professor Krummel's family is stereotypical for the structure and appearance of a *German* family who fits Romanian expectations: a family with many children, of whom the boys are tall, here negatively connoted as *lanky* and ungraceful. The girls have long, braided hair: '*thick pigtailed down their backs*'. As accomplished pianists, Puşcariu appreciates that the stereotypically German girls could play highly difficult compositions on two pianos simultaneously, but nevertheless describes their performance as flat, rigid, and uncreative: 'Their performance was, of course, devoid of any individuality and personal touch'.

Puşcariu (1977, p. 215) analyses the musical culture in Transylvania from the comparative perspective of different ethnicities: 'In contrast to Romanians and Hungarians, the Saxons listened less to fiddler music and more to the music played by the city orchestra on the promenade or at the "Pomul Verde"'. Having become a stereotypical trope tied to the German who listens to and produces music, the image of the Transylvanian town or village orchestra completes the musical portrait of the Saxon and of the German more generally. A particular social leisure, consisting of strolling along the promenade (Stanciu 2020), was an integral part of daily life for all Transylvanian townspeople from the late 19th to the early 20th century. This social practice was complemented by brass bands which marched along the promenade or the urban Corso playing military music during certain hours of the day or evening. Valeriu Branişte (2014) describes the playing of brass bands

on the Sibiu promenade as being *Platzmusik*, and as providing daily entertainment for urban dwellers.² These orchestras are also mentioned by Pușcariu:

I have spoken about these 'tower players'³ elsewhere. Most of them came from other parts, they were especially Germans or Czechs, both very musically gifted. Their conductor at that time was the elegant Brandner, from the Sudeten Mountains from the German part of Bohemia, who, when conducting the orchestra, stood with his face turned to the audience, greeting acquaintances with a smiling face, just like Johann Strauss, whom he also resembled in his moustache.

The proclivity for music could be found throughout the whole German world, both in Saxon homes and in those of officers and officials who came to Transylvania from different parts of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy:

Even among the Catholic Germans in Brașov, who all came as officials from other parts of the monarchy, one could encounter many musically talented people such as Faflik, Weiwar, and others. They, together with some other Saxons, Romanians, and the 'tower players', formed a philharmonic orchestra that gave quite successful concerts from time to time. The most popular concerts were those given by artists from Brașov, most of whom lived abroad. Malcher the violinist, Miss Brennerberg, the cellist Gartner, and especially the three Gmeiner sisters, together with their brother, always played to a full concert hall when they returned to Brașov. Among them, the greatest artist was Lula Gmeiner-Miess, about my age, who became one of Germany's great lieder singers, with a velvety alto voice. She was equally wonderful when interpreting Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Max Reger, Richard Strauss, and others, as well as [being] beautiful. (Pușcariu 1977, p. 217)

Lula Gmeiner-Miess (Kösters 2022) was a well-known soprano during this period, and was born in 1876 in Brașov to a middle class Saxon family. She acquired her artistic training in Vienna and Berlin, where she performed numerous times. She toured throughout Germany, but also travelled to Iceland, the US, Russia, France, the Scandinavian Peninsula, Italy, England, etc., collaborating with the great composers of her time: Max Reger, Franz Schrecker, Eduard Behm, Emil Mattiesen, and Richard Strauss. The soprano's professional history is relevant because it delivers an image of a *German* who was not only passionate about music, but who made an artistic career out of her passion, coming into contact with the cultural environments of two of the period's uncontested artistic centres: Vienna and Berlin.

Pușcariu (1977, p. 219) also points to the fact that the German world is a hotbed for the dissemination of musical innovation:

I was acquainted with the true beauty of the *Lied* ... in the two German musical centres—for this musical genre is born and cultivated in Germany and Austria—Leipzig and Vienna. It was also abroad that I understood the magical power that can emanate from a great conductor.

²An important Romanian journalist and politician during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Valeriu Braniște left behind a valuable diary. Braniște's memoirs recount the period from June 25, 1885, to April 17, 1886, when he was a seventh-grade high-school pupil (eleventh grade in today's schooling system) at the State Hungarian High School in Sibiu.

³Tower-singers (*turneri*) were trumpeters, kettle drummers, or flute players—generally educated musicians—who sang the choir from the watchtowers at certain times of the day, accompanied religious services, participated in school celebrations and funeral processions, and collaborated closely with the instrumental orchestras in Brașov. Their beginnings are mentioned as starting from the 16th century.

Therefore, even if the periphery imitates and adapts to the central models, according to Pușcariu, these two cities still dictated and dominated the musical scene.

Last but not least, the philologist from Brașov also explains the ways in which elements which make up the German and Austrian musical world were assimilated by the city under the Tâmpa Mountain by invoking the case of the piano:

[T]he *Klavier!* In Vienna's town hall museum and in the house where Schubert lived, one can see the pianos of the two great composers from the beginning of the last century. ... In Brașov, the piano made an early appearance, first in the homes of the Germans, but soon also in those of Romanian merchants. It was brought at great expense from Vienna, where a flourishing piano industry had existed from the very start. My mother's cousin's piano was brought from Vienna in the mid-19th century, and during my childhood, all my relatives had a 'Klavier' in their homes. (Pușcariu 1977, p. 218)

The importation of fashionable cultural practices from the Viennese centre was noticeable in the Saxon Transylvanian city, as they penetrated not only Saxon life, but also that of their Romanian co-nationals. These practices were imported and adapted, creating a cultural mixture:

[W]hen a visitor came, the eldest daughter had to sit down and play a piece by Czerny or—depending on how the visitor was 'punished'—a sonatina by Mozart, or a sentimental romance. Piano-playing was as important as refreshments, sweets, or Turkish coffee offered to the visitor, and the tuner was a much sought-after craftsman. In Brașov, he could not stand the Prussians and when he took the Germans' money, he used to chase after the children who shouted, 'Long live the Prussians!' (*hoch die Preussen*). (Pușcariu 1977, p. 218)

Therefore, this sort of cultural form was imported from German and Austrian culture and imitated in everyday life of the city under the Tâmpa Mountain.

In regard to the German language and its grammatical specificities, Pușcariu invokes an anecdote which circulated in Brașov society, and is relevant to capturing the linguistic humour which can arise between a Romanian and a German. The anecdote is all the more interesting in that it offers an insight into the multicultural nature of Transylvania, whose *habitus* had been influenced by the presence of German culture over time:

It was told that Lengher, the lawyer, was once traveling by train to Banat, to where he was from, when a blonde German got into his compartment and, as was Lengher's custom, he started talking to him. The German, [who] was from Germany, ceremoniously tapped his heels and introduced himself: 'Lang.' Smiling, the Romanian said 'Lengher'⁴ and presented himself. At first, the German thought he was making fun of him by putting his name in the comparative form, but as a sign of respect for the old man, whose white hair made its way at the temples from under an ancient blonde wig, he said, loudly and energetically: 'My name is Lang.'—'And I am Lengher,' was the reply. (Pușcariu 1977, p. 251)

Conclusions

Pușcariu's memoir is particularly relevant for capturing the image of the German and Austrian with all their contributions to Transylvanian culture: music, art, architecture, and a certain

⁴A play on words. 'Lang' means 'long', and 'länger' ('lengher' in a Romanian spelling) means 'longer'.

modus vivendi which significantly influenced the Romanians' lifestyle. It should be borne in mind that Pușcariu was a philo-German through his cultural heritage and his university education, therefore, conveying positive images of the Germans and Austrians.

The image of the Other among Romanians in southern Transylvania after 1918 is a dynamic, multifaceted one, characterised by continuous change in accordance with changing historical coordinates. This first assertion is supported by the fact that in Transylvanian imaginary there is no single defining image of Germans or Germanness, but rather varying representations, created according to their authors and conveyors, and according to the German whose image is being described: the German or Austrian from afar (from the empire), or the German who sits in close proximity to the observer, the Saxon. Whereas, during the imperial period, the urban model, by definition, was Vienna, Munich or, more rarely, Berlin, the press would later, in the post-imperial period, no longer recall *famous Vienna* or *cosmopolitan Berlin*.

Pușcariu delivers positive images of the German and the Austrian, appreciating their positive cultural influence on the Transylvanian urban milieu through urban architecture, Viennese-style cafés, the waltz, and musical culture. The cultural patterns shared by Pușcariu and all the other philo-German and philo-Austrian citizens of Transylvania are all great German and Austrian personalities. The different forms of cultural expression imported from the German and Austrian space are critically assessed by the Brașov philologist, who sanctions German cuisine and considers it bland and boring while also holding the Austrian café culture in high regard. Another assessment made by Pușcariu concerns a cultural import from the German space, which consists of highbrow and mass culture. This observation paints a picture of the cultured German who is interested in news and in keeping himself up to date by reading newspapers and magazines.

Austria and Germany are regarded as nations which possess and propagate high culture, which sets the tone for significant historical and cultural changes; the example given by

Pușcariu is that of removing the baroque style in architecture and music—mentioning the Schönbrunn and Sans-Souci palaces, as well as Bach, Mozart, etc. At the same time, Vienna becomes the centre which inspires the Transylvanian periphery through the importation of cultural models and lifestyle practices. The ongoing relationship between cultural actors in Brașov and Sibiu and the Viennese centre are noted and analysed as a form of imitation of the centre. The proximate German—the Saxon—is described by the philologist under several of his guises: a good musician, and a stable and industrious man whose language has an influence on the local Romanian language. He also discusses the stereotype of the Saxon and the German who make and enjoy music through orchestras and music associations. German music teachers and the importation of pianos to the periphery were cultural practices which would also inspire the Romanian bourgeoisie. Another emerging stereotype relates to the physical appearance of Germans, with the boys being described as lanky and the girls as having thick braided pigtails. We therefore conclude that a simple, homogenous image of the German, the Austrian, and of Germanness generally has not been fully drawn, but rather there are several multifaceted images, stemming from the different types of experience of those who articulate and propagate them.

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