

Globalizing Landesgeschichte: Reflections on Narrating Germans' Histories in the Modern Era

H. Glenn Penny

University of California, Los Angeles

I came to the notion of globalizing Landesgeschichte rather inadvertently. I have often said that my primary research strategy is to stumble into problems that irritate or perplex me, and then try to figure them out. In that sense, my incompetence with things like the history of Bayern, Baden-Württemberg, Switzerland, the Tyrol, and Vorarlberg — all political entities scattered across what I have come to call the Southern German borderlands — became a virtue of sorts. Essentially, I happened upon people from these places during my work on German migrants in Latin America; they made me want to know more about the region; and once I started digging into it, I started rethinking German history in productive ways.

Part of this rethinking was already in motion as I was writing my most recent book, *German History Unbound*.¹ It grew out of a culmination of problems I had been wrestling with over the last couple of decades, the biggest of which was trying to

¹ H. Glenn Penny, *German History Unbound: 1750s to the Present* (Cambridge, 2022).

Bulletin of the German Historical Institute 71 (Spring 2023): 41-64

© H. Glenn Penny | ISSN 1048-9134

CC BY-SA 4.0

Illustrations included in this article are not covered by this license.

figure out how to narrate a polycentric German history that places communities of self-proclaimed Germans and their interconnections at its center, rather than the history of the German nation-state, or any states for that matter.

As I did that, I spent a lot of time thinking about Germans all over the world, and I spent a good deal of energy pursuing them throughout Latin America. In part, that was because those migrants had seen much less scholarly attention than their counterparts in Eastern Europe, Russia, and North America. Yet they also appeared to be just as important, if not more important, to what I was starting to think of as a globalized German history, one punctuated less by the radical ruptures of major geopolitical events, or the lives and fates of the regimes dominating the German nation-state, than the many consistent networks and relations that have persisted through them.

To be honest, I also simply wanted to understand why there were so many German communities in Latin America, particularly across the southern cone, and I wondered what their histories might tell me about the last couple of centuries of European and German history, which I had not learned from the secondary literature.

It turns out that the many German communities which took shape across Latin America after the 1880s had quite a lot to teach me, particularly when I thought about things like the soft forms of power that grew along with the emergence of global Germanophone networks of transportation, travel, and trade in the modern era. I also learned a great deal about Germans' interactions with non-Europeans, a topic that has interested me since I entered this profession.

I could continue at length about the arguments in that book, but I would prefer to use this opportunity to open up discussions about three things I have been thinking about since completing it: 1) the often-overlooked historiographical importance of the Southern German borderlands; 2) how

globalizing the Landesgeschichte of these regions might draw that into relief, and 3) how the work of generations of *Volkskundler* (or practitioners of *empirische Kulturwissenschaft*) who have focused on these regions might help us do all of that.

² The standard text is Regina Wagner, *Los Alemanes en Guatemala, 1828-1944* (Guatemala City, 1991).

To get to those points, I need to take you through a bit of my own intellectual journey, which has been filled with poignant false steps and miscalculations that have proven to be surprisingly fruitful; and the place I would like to begin is Guatemala.

When I think of being German in Guatemala, I think of highly inclusive transcultural communities that were locally grounded but globally oriented. These German communities were well established in Guatemala by the turn of the twentieth century; and although there were never more than a few thousand German-speakers in Guatemala at any moment between the 1880s and the 1940s, those communities were and remain the largest concentration of German-speakers in Central America, and throughout those decades they generated a large percentage of Guatemala's GDP. Moreover, while most of them were well-integrated into Guatemalan society, they clearly lived transcultural and transatlantic lives. Many of the leading trading families, in fact, worked simultaneously in Bremen and/or Hamburg while living in the capital of Guatemala City and/or (in the case of the coffee capitalists) on one of their many plantations. Moreover, most of them made sure that their children were Guatemalan as well as German citizens.²

On the one hand, that gave these Germans many advantages — most importantly, they could draw on the many forms of cultural, economic, and social capital tied to being German in Guatemala. For example, and this is quite important, until the 1930s, most of the coffee they produced was traded almost exclusively on the Hamburg coffee exchange. But their insider/outsider status also made these German-Guatemalans incredibly vulnerable, because even though they were the



Figure 1. “Inside Plantation Life on El Perú.”

3 Christiane Berth, *Biographien und Netzwerke im Kaffeehandel zwischen Deutschland und Zentralamerika, 1920-1959* (Hamburg, 2010).

4 Penny, *German History Unbound*, 172-76.

people who most linked other Guatemalans into international trade networks that connected Central America to central European industry and markets, the shifting Guatemalan regimes always had the monopoly on violence within their borders.³ That, in fact, is one of the things that made German connections so appealing to Latin American regimes: they offered a less threatening alternative to the British, the French, and later the United States—all of whom sought economic and political hegemony in the region. Imperial Germany’s political and military weakness at the turn of the century was in fact part of these Germans’ secret to success.⁴

Moreover, while Imperial Germany did set up a favored nation trading agreement with Guatemala in the 1880s, that was only after Germans living there had done the hard work of building relations. Characteristically, and this is critical to bear in mind, in Latin America, the German nation-state followed the actions of German-speakers living abroad. It did not take the lead in building those relationships. Nor could



*Innenräume des
Geschäftshauses von
Nottebohm Germanos*

Gesamtbild des grossen Arbeitsraum

*Druckblick auf den Arbeitsraum
vom Eingang aus.*



it control them. It also could not defend them, and thus in both world wars, as the Guatemalan state broke relationships with the German nation-state, Germans in Guatemala suffered property seizures, and in World War II, there were widespread confiscations as well as internments. In both cases, the Guatemalan state's political elites enriched themselves on German properties during the crises. In neither case could the German nation-state help, and in both cases the rebuilding had to take place by those networks of Germans in Central America — because neither the Weimar Republic nor the young West Germany proved of much value.⁵

None of this sounds much like the kinds of informal imperialism or neocolonial situations that dominate the postcolonial literature on Latin American relations with foreign actors or even most of the literature on Germans in the world—which tends to privilege analyses of colonial connections, particularly forms of exploitation. Except that one might argue that

Figure 2. "Inside the Nottebohm Bank, Guatemala City." Images courtesy of Regina Wagner.

5 Ibid., chapters 5-7.

⁶ See inter alia: J. C. Cambranes, *Coffee and Peasants: The Origins of the Modern Plantation Economy in Guatemala, 1853-1897* (South Woodstock, 1985); Julie Gibbins, "The Shadow of Slavery: Historical Time, Labor, and Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Alta Verapaz, Guatemala," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96 (2016): 73-107; Matilde González-Izás, *Modernización capitalista, racismo y violencia: Guatemala (1750-1930)* (México City, 2014).

⁷ Thomas Schoonover, *Germany in Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1929* (Tuscaloosa, 1998). On integration see: Glenn Penny, *In Humboldt's Shadow: A Tragic History of German Ethnology* (Princeton, 2020), chapter 4.

the Germans who came to dominate a great deal of coffee production and other businesses in Guatemala from the 1880s into the 1930s benefited from the Guatemalan state's efforts at internal colonialism — because the labor on German plantations, like all the plantations in Guatemala, was largely Mayan labor that was forced into debt peonage by Guatemalan state statutes. German capitalists, like everyone else in Guatemala, participated in that system.⁶

And this is where the story gets most interesting, and where my own incompetence turned into a kind of virtue that took me to Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. What we find among the coffee capitalists in Guatemala, and this is something that British, French, and U.S. observers consistently noted and lamented from the 1880s through the 1930s, is that Germans in Guatemala, as in much of Latin America, were quite good at integrating into local cultures, learning local languages, and finding ways to do business that benefited their partners as well as themselves. In the case of many German plantation owners (but by no means all), they quickly found ways to integrate into local kinship networks, learn local languages, including Mayan as well as Spanish, and quickly make themselves the lesser evil among the property owners. There is no question that that paid large dividends, but there is also little question that it was never all about the money. In general, Germans in Guatemala showed a great deal more interest in those cultures and peoples than did their British or U.S. counterparts—not to mention the Ladinos (native born-Spanish speaking elites), who had absolutely no interest in speaking Mayan languages or learning about the cultures of their underclasses.⁷

I was pretty intrigued when I learned about this characteristic, and I spent a lot of time trying to figure it out. Everyone working on coffee capitalism in Central America knew that the Germans in Guatemala were simply better capitalists than their American, European, or Ladino counterparts. And everyone essentially agreed that this was largely due to



Figure 3a. Erwin Paul Dieseldorff and his son in Guatemala, n.d.

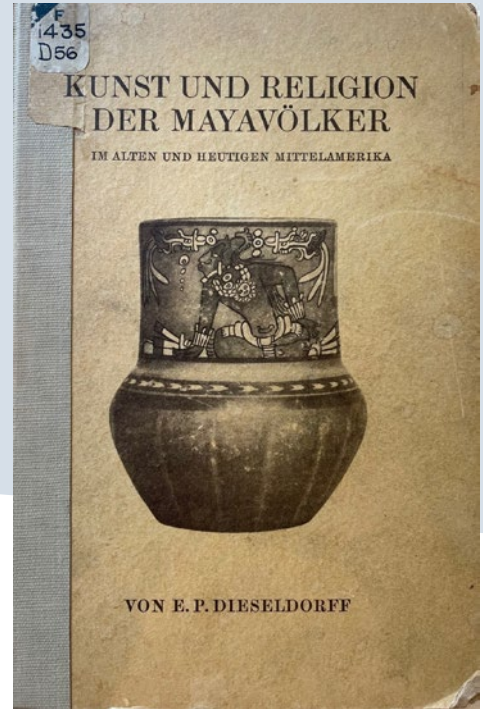


Figure 3b. Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, *Kunst und Religion der Mayavölker*, Berlin 1926. Front cover.

the fact that many of them were quick to learn the languages and integrate into the cultures of the plantation workers. But no one could tell me why. Most of the scholars who put their postcolonial theories first, or who reached back to old models of dependency theory, thought that this was simply base opportunism, a kind of cynical business model that allowed Germans to better control their labor forces and even lure laborers away from other owners' plantations.⁸ And that was indeed one function of their efforts, but it did not take me long to realize that it was not their only intention.

Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, who was one of the leading coffee capitalists of the age and came from a Hamburg trading family, was never trained at a university, but not only learned Mayan languages (there are at least thirty-two) and integrated himself into kinship networks while he built a vertically-integrated coffee empire, he also dove deep into the history of the region—the natural history, the ethnology, the archeology, becoming a central interlocutor with a whole series of American and European scholars interested in Central American and particularly Mayan cultures and history. In fact, Dieseldorff became a reigning expert by the interwar period,

⁸ See Cambranes, *Coffee and Peasants*; and González-Izás, *Modernización capitalista, racismo y violencia*.

9 For a complete Dieseldorff bibliography and much more on his life and work see: Guillermo Nájuez-Falcón, *Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, German Entrepreneur in the Alta Verapaz of Guatemala, 1889-1937* (New Orleans, 1970).

10 David Sapper, *Erinnerungen von David Ernst Sapper, Guatemala*. Typescript in the possession of Regina Wagner. I remain grateful to her for providing me with this text.

publishing essays on artifacts, languages, and natural history in scholarly journals, participating in international scholarly meetings, and creating sizable archeological collections that he donated to museums in Europe and Guatemala.⁹ There was no profit in that.

But Dieseldorff also understood the utility, or the cultural, social, and political capital, of his knowledge gathering, and while I was reading the private papers of David Sapper, the cousin of Richard Sapper, another, equally important coffee capitalist in Guatemala, I was fascinated to learn that David Sapper, who traveled alone from Germany to New York, and then from New Orleans to Guatemala when he was only fifteen years old, learned to speak Q'eqchi' from Dieseldorff after they met by accident on the ship that took Sapper across the Caribbean. It was a chance encounter, but once Dieseldorff learned who David Sapper was, and on which plantation he would be working, he made a point of teaching him the Mayan language he would need on that plantation so that the young Sapper would be ahead of the game when he arrived.¹⁰

I found that amazing, particularly because it was relatively easy for the fifteen-year-old David Sapper to learn the language. But then he could already speak German, English, French, Italian, as well as the dialect common around the Southern Italian city of Bari, on the Adriatic Sea, where he had attended a German school supported by its German colony while his father worked there as a merchant. As a result, David Sapper learned his first Mayan language before he even learned Spanish, because, as Dieseldorff taught him, it would be much more important for his work, just as the local Italian dialect around Bari had been more important for his father's work than written Italian based on Tuscan, the standard literary dialect in Italy.

This linguistic talent seems typical of trade families from Hansa states. In fact, it also seems that it was the history of Hansa city states, much more than the German nation-state,

that best explained a great deal of these Germans' successes in Guatemala, as people like the Dieseldorffs and the Sappers continued to live and work in places where others held the monopoly on political power and violence while they simultaneously tied themselves into local cultural and linguistic networks and worked within transnational and transcultural Germanophone networks of travel, transportation, and trade. After all, Hansa trading families had been doing that for centuries.

In fact, I was rather pleased with myself when I made this argument in a 2017 essay for *Geschichte & Gesellschaft* about migrants and knowledge production.¹¹ It was not until a few years later, however, that it dawned on me that there was a problem in my thinking: David Sapper's family was not from Bremen or Hamburg or one of the northern trade cities. They were from Stuttgart. In fact, a good number of people who worked on their plantations were from this region as well, which is why one could still encounter the mixed-race children of those people speaking the Swabian dialect on those plantations right through the second world war and into the postwar period.¹²

Moreover, there also was no shortage of people from the region living in Latin America. Franz Joseph Lentz, who had worked as a teacher at the German school in Guatemala City before publishing his massive *Aus dem Hochland der Maya* (1930), made this abundantly clear in a 1965 letter to the Hamburg ethnologist Franz Termer. During his decades of working as a teacher near the Bodensee, he explained, he had continued to give slideshows and public talks about Guatemala across the region. They "aroused a great deal of interest here in Schwaben," he noted, "because almost every family here has relatives in Latin America."¹³

Is that not striking? Mayan workers speaking Swabian in the hills of Guatemala? Families across Schwaben with relatives in Latin America? It is not as if I was not aware of the global

11 Penny, "From Migrant Knowledge to Fugitive Knowledge? German Migrants and Knowledge Production in Guatemala, 1880s-1945," *Geschichte & Gesellschaft* 43 (2017): 381-412.

12 See, for example, the detailed letter from David Sapper in Guatemala to Karl Sapper in Germany, February 13, 1936, in Karl Sapper Nachlass, MARKK Museum Hamburg, Karton 4: Signatur 2.2.

13 Lentz to Franz Termer, November 18, 1965, Franz Termer Nachlass Folder 22.2, MARKK Museum Hamburg.

14 Penny, *In Humboldt's Shadow*, 110.

trade networks that cut across southern Germany or the great amount of out-migration from Baden and Württemberg to places as diverse as the Caucasus, Minnesota, Argentina, Venezuela, or Chile. In fact, one of the interesting things I discovered while working through the files of the *Deutsches Auslands Institut* (DAI) in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin is that while the DAI compiled lists of leading Germans, their businesses, and opportunities for German migrants all over the world, and particularly in Latin America during the interwar period, they also had a second list for Schwaben. Really: the DAI was not only one of the most important organizations for emigrants in Weimar Germany, and one of many meant to promote the safe migration of Germans abroad and their continued connections to their homeland, it also actively promoted global Schwaben networks and connections to that homeland as well.¹⁴ That should not surprise us: after all, the DAI was in Stuttgart.

So, once I realized my mistake, once I understood that I had allowed the almost hegemonic tale of Hamburg's dominance over Germanophone global trade in the modern era to color my analysis of Germans in Guatemala, as well as other parts of Latin America, I started to pay even more attention to the eclectic mixes of Germans in Latin American locations and think about what allowed them to succeed in such a wide variety of places. I also started to wonder more concretely about the integrative character of these German communities abroad—both the ways in which they often brought together wide varieties of German-speakers into so-called German communities, associations, businesses, churches, schools, and other organizations, that included Germans from all over central Europe as well as Russia and North America, and how and why they often did so well economically and professionally within their various host communities.

Here again I wondered about fluidity, mobility, transcultural and multilingual communities, and after a while, I realized that all those things would have been familiar to people from

the Southern German borderlands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — perhaps even more so than among Germans from the north, in places like Prussia. That was true even if the southern borderlands and those characteristics get very little attention in the broader narratives of German history.

15 Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and the Marvelous* (Charlottesville, 2008).

As my time researching and teaching in Tübingen over the last few years has taught me, people from Württemberg have long been steeped in a great deal of polycentrism, cultural diversity, and multiplicities of dialects and landscapes. Moreover, the people from this region, like much of what I keep calling the Southern German borderlands, for lack of a better term, have been quite familiar with labor migrations and other forms of mobility for a very long time — centuries really. In that sense, what I was analyzing in Latin America would have been familiar to people from the region running roughly from Salzburg through Innsbruck and Bregenz to Freiburg and Basel. It was only, like so many other things by the end of the nineteenth century, a question of upscaling — greater distances, larger numbers of people, and more mixing. But in that sense, it was not unlike the shift by Southern German trading houses around Augsburg from Mediterranean to global trade in the preceding century — which also was pretty seamless.¹⁵

In a lot of ways, I credit Covid-19 for helping me figure this out. In 2020, I received a Guggenheim fellowship to complete a project I had been calling: “Being German in Guatemala.” That was going to require about another six months of archival research in Guatemala City, which I expected to complete that year. Unfortunately, I still have not been able to return. In addition, my effort to shift my focus to completing work I had begun in Chile in 2019 was stymied by the same problem, because although Chile managed to do very well during the first wave of Covid-19, many of the members of the Chilean middle classes had the regrettable idea to travel to Brazil for vacation in the summer of 2020, shutting down that country to me soon afterwards.

As luck would have it, however, I was able to turn my lemons into lemonade (so to speak) by traveling to southern Germany instead. Initially, my thought was that if I wanted to better understand German speakers in places like Argentina and Chile, where such eclectic mixes of Germans and Swiss founded colonies and communities that thrived, I might do well to learn more about the communities that produced them in Europe.

That proved to be true. At the same time, however, I learned a great deal about the region that made me want to study it more closely for its own sake, which is what I am doing now: thinking about the global implications of its Landesgeschichte and allowing that to help me rethink our narratives of German history and Germans in Latin America and other parts of the world.

To begin with, I started to wonder why the southern German border had received so little attention in the more general narratives of German history. After all, historians have filled rooms with books about the Eastern German border: where it was, where it should have been, how it moved, how its role in people's lives shifted and changed across our clearly periodized political histories. The Eastern border seems, at least from the view of states and the historians who study and promote them, to be a perennial problem, one demanding solutions, which led to a great deal of violence. I certainly would not want to dispute its importance.

I wonder, however, if the eastern border is any more important than the southern German border, which, if we are seeing like a state, does not appear to be much of a problem at all. It is true, of course, that Bavarian armies invaded the Tyrol during the French Revolutionary wars — there is a huge panorama exhibit in Innsbruck dedicated to that outrage; Vorarlberg's citizens also tried to leave Austria and become a part of Switzerland after World War I; and during the National Socialist period, Nazi officials redrew their administrative

boundaries across that border.¹⁶ But it always seemed, more or less, to snap back into place with little bloodshed or much consternation on the part of the states involved.

So are we missing some critical lessons by ignoring that process or the fact that it was actually a relatively peaceful one as well? Are peaceful historical processes not instructive? I think they should be. And what about the people who lived in this borderland region? What can they teach us? In what ways, for example, did their mental maps compare to the political maps we use in our textbooks?¹⁷ I am afraid that German history, particularly as it is narrated in English-language texts, has very little to say about this, and the political maps we use are often exercises in all kinds of reification. In addition, in many of our history books the lack of violence seems almost synonymous with a lack of importance. But again, I would like to suggest that the opposite is true. In some ways, I believe this neglected region can tell us more about the contours of a globalized German history than those regions that were animated for so long by a series of titillating and often violent ruptures.

To see that importance, I am afraid we must see less like a state and perhaps more like a region. The Bodensee, for example, is the kind of region I have in mind, not a regional state. Yet it is clearly a place of belonging, one bordered by political boundaries that played limited roles in many people's mental maps, while the Bodensee itself has long been a point of orientation, a center, or perhaps a set of many centers, for people living all around it and oftentimes rather far from its shores.¹⁸

Fragestellungen zu Grenzen und deren Überschreitungen (Wiesbaden, 2017), 237-53. For belonging, see: Bernhard Tschofen, *GrenzRaumSee. Eine Ethnographische*

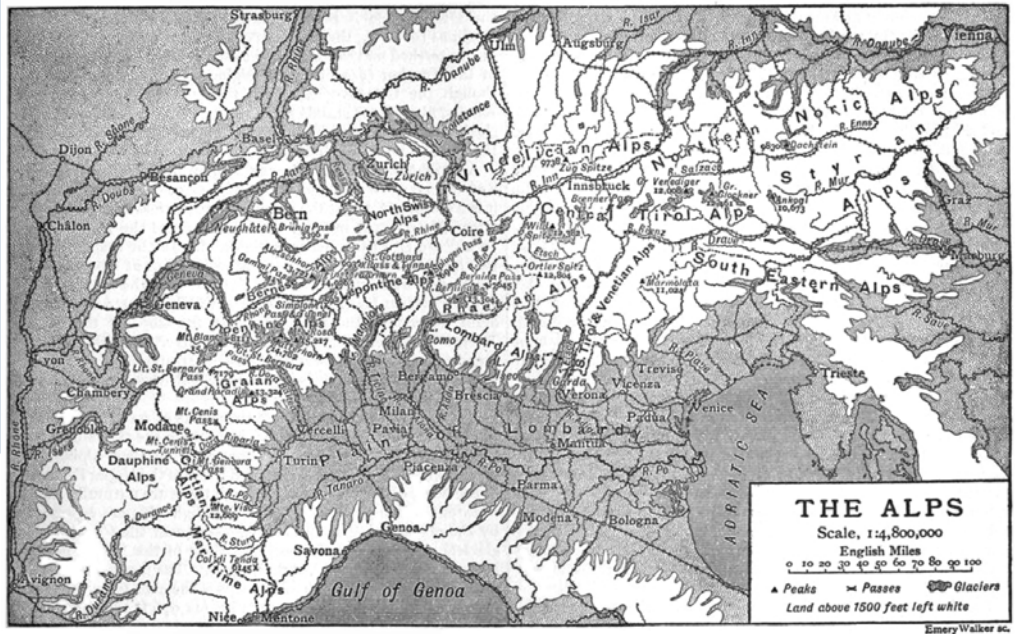
Reise durch die Bodenseeregion (Tübingen, 2008), and Tschofen, "Der See: Deutungsgeschichten eines grenzüberschreitenden Gedächtnisortes," in Reinhold Weber, Peter

Steinbach, and Hans-Georg Wehling, eds. *Baden-württembergische Erinnerungsorte* (Stuttgart, 2012), 312-23.

¹⁶ <https://www.tyrol.com/things-to-do/attractions/all-attractions/a-tirol-panorama>; Ulrich Nachbaur, *Vorarlberger Territorialfragen, 1945-1948. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Landesgrenzen seit 1805* (Konstanz, 2007).

¹⁷ Barak Kalir, "Moving Subjects, Stagnant Paradigms: Can the 'Mobilities Paradigm' Transcend Methodological Nationalism?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39 no. 2, (2013): 311-327.

¹⁸ Since 1869, the Bodensee also has had a scholarly association devoted to it, which has consistently underscored its transnational membership while producing a journal devoted to all aspects of the region's history: *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung* (Lindau, 1869-2022). On regional networks, see: Roland Scherer, "Eine Grenzregion als Wachstumsregion: was man von den Governance-Strukturen der Bodenseeregion lernen kann," in Martin Heintel, Robert Musil, and Norbert Weixlbaumer, eds., *Grenzen. Theoretische, konzeptionelle und praxisbezogene*



I think it is also worth noting that the wild animals who move through these mountains do not seem to notice the political borders — it is one of the controversies at the center of the reintroduction of wolves into the region — there has been some fantastic scholarly work recently.²¹ Moreover, many of the people who tended domesticated herds and flocks nearby moved regularly across those borders for generations and over centuries in instructive ways. That is just how life worked; that is what was necessary to regulate the lives of cows and the production of hay — and none of the big, geopolitical shifts that punctuate our typical national narratives of central Europe managed to upset much of that.²² So what does that tell us about our reliance on those narratives as we both structure our analyses at home and abroad and live our lives in modern Europe?

Of course, we could choose to be splitters rather than lumpers and still make the same point. After all, why is Vorarlberg, and Bregenz in particular, so affluent today? In many ways, it has a great deal to do with a history of labor mobility, which not only included many peddlers and the now famous *Schwabenkinder*, who streamed north across the border during the last decades of the nineteenth century to seek employment during times of need, but also the highly-skilled weavers who were

Figure 5. Map of the Alps, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911.

²¹ See Michaela Fenske and Bernhard Tschofen, *Managing the Return of the Wild: Human Encounters with Wolves in Europe* (New York, 2020).

²² Nicole Stradelmann, Martina Sochin D'Elia, Peter Melichar, eds., *Hüben & Drüben: Grenzüberschreitende Wirtschaft im mittleren Alpenraum* (Innsbruck, 2020).



Figure 6. Portrait of Lucie Varga, 1930. Photo: Peter Schöttler.

23 Michael Kasper and Christof Thöny, "Schwabenkinder und andere Formen der alpinen Arbeitsmigration – eine Spurensuche zwischen gestern und heute" *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 68 no. 2 (2020): 81-96; Stefan Zimmermann and Christine Brugger, *Die Schwabenkinder: Arbeit in der Fremde vom 17.*

able to travel all over Europe and the Americas by the end of that century working for the highest bidders.²³ They could do that because of their skills, developed largely in textile industries founded by Swiss industrialists who saw advantages in setting up business just down the shore, so to speak. Because down the shore was also across the border, which gave them untaxed access to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire as well as its cheap labor, and those interconnections persisted for

bis 20. Jahrhundert (Ulm, 2012); and Loretta Seglias, *Die*

Schwabengänger aus Graubünden: Saisonale Kinderemigration nach

Oberschwaben (Chur, 2004).

more than a century — before, during, and after the fall of that empire.²⁴ I could continue down the list of things that crossed the borders and tied more places and people together, like the ubiquitous tourism that grew with mountaineering as a leisure activity and tied the region to a great many major cities, including most major cities in northern Germany.²⁵ The ski industry, as Andrew Denning taught us, only expanded that during the postwar era.²⁶

We could also talk about the Annales historian Lucie Varga's fantastic 1936 ethnography of a valley in Vorarlberg, which demonstrated that while Vienna remained the capital of Austria at that time, its auspicious place on political maps did not have its counterpart in her subjects' mental maps. Vienna was no center for them, and when they thought of cities it was first Bregenz, Innsbruck, Munich, or Zurich, where many of her subjects had been, long before it would have been interwar "Red Vienna," which few bothered to think about much less to visit.²⁷

There was, in fact, a great deal of transnational life happening in this region and a great many transcultural places there as well. To see those, however, it helps to look on these borders through the eyes of ethnologists rather than historians of Germany. *Volkskundler*, in particular, have been casting their focus on the border regions for generations, paying a great deal of attention to a multitude of borders, not just national ones, and to a whole range of languages many of us would call dialects. So too have the people engaged in what is sometimes dismissed as *Landeskunde*, who have long been aware of the diversity in their regions.

I think it is part of the cunning teleology of the nation-state that causes those of us who claim to be historians of Germany to frequently dismiss *Landeskunde* in the first place — as something with only local importance, perhaps useful to cite but seldom to engage. As for the *Volkskundler*, recast as European ethnology or *empirische Kulturwissenschaft*, many

24 Meinrad Pichler, *Auswanderer: Von Vorarlberg in die USA 1800-1938* (Bregenz, 1993).

25 Kurt Luger and Franz Rest, eds., *Der Alpentourismus: Entwicklungspotenziale im Spannungsfeld von Kultur, Ökonomie und Ökologie* (Innsbruck, 2002).

26 Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History* (Berkeley, 2015).

27 Lucie Varga, "Ein Tal in Vorarlberg—zwischen Vorgestern und Heute," in Peter Schöttler, ed., *Lucie Varga Zeitenwende: mentalitätshistorische Studien, 1936-1939* (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), 146-69.

28 Hermann Bausinger, *Volkskunde: von der Altertumforschung zur Kulturanalyse* (Habel, 1971); Muhterem Aras and Hermann Bausinger, *Heimat. Kann die weg?* (Tübingen, 2019).

29 Hermann Bausinger, Markus Braun, and Herbert Schwedt, *Neue Siedlungen: Volkskundlich-soziologische Untersuchungen des Ludwig-Uhland-Instituts Tübingen* (Stuttgart, 1959); Bausinger, *Dialekte, Sprachbarrieren, Sondersprachen* (Frankfurt, 1972).

historians interested in *Alltagsgeschichte* began working with them in the 1990s — particularly in urban settings, sometimes within the context of *Werkstattgeschichte* — but dialects, villages, and rural communities — not so much.

For my own work, however, getting over such disciplinary divisions is part of the practice of rethinking German history, and I find the scholarship produced by people devoted to EKW particularly compelling. To some degree, that is clearly because the field formerly known as *Volkskunde* was forced generations ago to come to terms with the nation-state's influence on it — as scholars such as Hermann Bausinger focused on the lives of people rather than the lives and fates of states. Or as he once wrote, while riffing on Berthold Brecht — focusing on *Bevölkerung* rather than *Volk* or *Völker*. It is an important distinction that, particularly when combined with his ongoing response to the putatively rooted character of *Heimat* histories, that people have legs, not roots.²⁸ Those are two powerful insights that remind us of the importance mobility has long played in the region.

As a result, already in the 1950s and 1960s much of Bausinger's work around Tübingen focused on questions of migration, transference, and large and small networks crisscrossing the region. He was in fact writing about the influx of foreigners, *Vertriebene*, long before it was fashionable; he was teaching us about the great variety of dialects in the region, some imported by those new arrivals; and he was tying all of that into notions of belonging a half century before I took part in a conference devoted to just that topic in Tübingen in 2021.²⁹

It is stunning, in fact, to read his 1971 *Volkskunde: von der Altertumforschung zur Kulturanalyse*, which underscores two incredibly important forms of postwar mobility that mattered a great deal: flows of refugees across the new Bundesrepublik and tourism beyond localities and across all borders. Both of those helped to usher in fundamentally new forms of spatial orientation, which gave many traditional cultural

markers new meanings and functions—which he traced and analyzed.³⁰

One of the most important things he wrote about is the constructed character of culture, particularly historical traditions, and their transference through these new forms of mobility. It is amazing to realize that he wrote about that more than a decade before Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger transformed cultural history pretty much globally while introducing their arguments about the “invention of traditions.”³¹ Clearly, they were not aware of the fact that Bausinger and his colleagues in Tübingen already had been thinking and writing about just that for decades. But I do not feel comfortable criticizing them, because until quite recently, neither was I.

I am not interested in hagiography, and I am not looking to convince anyone to join me as the new Bausinger disciples. That is not the point. I think it is also important to understand that Bausinger, too, was channeling things that pre-dated him. He seemed to understand that. For close to a century, in fact, and even after the hyper-nationalization of the field by the end of the nineteenth century, *Volkskundler*, he wrote in 1971, had been exploring overlapping notions of belonging, thinking about the many borders that persist in our heads: where, for example, is Oberösterreich? And how many people in Baden-Württemberg know when they enter former Hohenzollern lands today? Some people do, and for them it matters — for others it does not.³² We all move through our own worlds and mental maps often unaware of the phantom landscapes animating the lives of others around us. There is some great work on this by Kathleen Conzen, who wrote a lot on German communities in the American Midwest.³³ Its application, however, is not limited to that location.

Let me return, for a moment, to those older practitioners, who included people such as Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, who sought unity in diversity, and who also were pursuing questions about performing identity, a topic that was long a great inter-

30 Hermann Bausinger, Wolfgang Kaschuba, Gudrun M. König, Dieter Langewiesche, and Bernhard Tschofen, *Ein Aufklärer des Alltags. Der Kulturwissenschaftler Hermann Bausinger im Gespräch mit Wolfgang Kaschuba, Gudrun M. König, Dieter Langewiesche und Bernhard Tschofen* (Vienna, 2006), 22-29.

31 Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrance O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

32 This continued during his career; see, for example, “Grenze a. D.: Zum Nachleben von Baden und Württemberg,” in Weber et. al., *Baden-württembergische Erinnerungsorte*, 52-63.

33 Kathleen Conzen, “Phantom Landscapes of Colonization: Germans in the Making of a Pluralist America,” in Frank Trommler and Elliott Shore, eds., *The German-American Encounter: Conflict and Cooperation between Two Cultures, 1800–2000* (New York, 2001), 7–21.

34 Bausinger, *Volkskunde*, 53; Aras and Bausinger, *Heimat*, 94.

35 See, for example, Philipp Schorch, *Refocusing Ethnographic Museums through Oceanic Lenses* (Honolulu, 2020). More generally: <https://www.indigen.eu/about>.

36 "Ausstellung in Chicago 1888-1893," in Jacobsen Nachlass, MARKK, Hamburg. For a Pacific Northwest Coast perspective on Jacobsen's collecting in Alaska and Canada see: Ann Feinup-Riordan, *Yup'ik Elders at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Fieldwork turned on its Head* (Seattle, 2005), especially xii-xiii, 33-35.

est of mine. Moreover, as Bausinger later realized, they did that precisely at the moment when radical modernization had gripped these landscapes during the middle of the nineteenth century, causing a dramatic uptick in the scale of mobility and industry. So, while historians during that era ignored everyday life, *Volkskundler* began studying it, collecting material culture from people's homes and hometowns, and exploring the fluidities of the Southern German borderlands.³⁴

The important point is not to celebrate them, but to recognize that those records are extant. Of course, such records are never unbiased, unfiltered, or complete; but then neither are the ethnologies of non-European cultures that a variety of scholars, including many working with indigenous interlocutors, many of whom are scholars as well, are successfully harnessing to reconstitute histories and revitalize languages and cultures in a great variety of non-European locations today.³⁵

I would like to suggest that we can use the records of European ethnologists who moved throughout the Southern German borderlands in equally successful ways, and we can place them into productive comparative analyses. After all, in many cases they used the same collectors. I would be remiss if I did not point out that after Adrian Jacobsen traveled to the coast of British Columbia in the 1880s to collect what remains one of the most complete assemblies of material culture from that part of the world for Adolf Bastian's Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, Rudolf Virchow hired him to travel to Bavaria and the Tyrol to generate one of his earliest *Volkskunde* collections — which he did for precisely the same reasons: to capture the vestiges/records of cultures on the cusp of radical transition, using exactly the same methods and encountering, in many cases, some of the very same challenges he had faced in British Columbia and Alaska.³⁶

Those records, and the work compiled by later ethnologists, sometimes called *Volkskundler*, can, for example, teach us a

great many things. Just reading Bausinger's accounts of singing cultures in Alpine villages, for instance, reminded me a lot of the compartmentalized character of Hopi religion. Not everyone on the three Hopi mesas knows it all. But until this moment, neither I nor anyone else had thought much about comparing those two locations. Maybe we should; if not with the Hopi, than other non-Europeans.³⁷

It is pretty stunning to read Bausinger's work from the 1970s, which underscores the reifications inherent in mapping, the fundamental problems with any system of typologies, and explanations that *Volkskundler* efforts to sort things like varieties of German houses only led to the disheartening conclusion that those types of houses were never only created and used by German-speakers, nor were they generally exclusive to one, clearly inscribed region. Even terms like Schwaben, he warned us, elide differences, and they obscure things like class, whereas the reanimation of folk art he witnessed and wrote about in sub-alpine regions during the postwar era is stunning for several reasons.³⁸

Here again, his observations resonate in instructive ways with those of ethnologists focused on similar problems in other parts of the world. Alpine artisans working in the age of high tourism, he realized, increasingly produced objects, like furniture, for urban tastes rather than due to any devotion to tradition or an undying artisanal culture.³⁹ That response to market mechanisms was commonplace on the Hopi mesas as well.⁴⁰ That is well documented, and in fact, that dialogic is something that Sally Price wrote about in her blockbuster 1989 *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* — but again, only decades after Bausinger's studies had analyzed similar processes in Europe.⁴¹

Even the ties Bausinger wrote about between the postwar *Heimat* renaissance of the 1980s and the histories of German-speaking refugees and “guest workers” in Baden-Württemberg speaks volumes about the global cultural

37 <https://www.hopifoundation.org/about-hopi>

38 Bausinger, *Volkskunde*, 113-21; Bausinger, *Dialekte, Sprachbarrieren, Sondersprachen; Bausinger, Die bessere Hälfte: Von Badenern und Württembergern* (Stuttgart, 2002).

39 Bausinger, *Volkskunde*, 160.

40 Andreas Franzke, Wolfgang Haberland, Hans-Ulrich Sanner, and Brigitte Templin, eds. *Katsinam: Figuren der Pueblo-Indianer Nordamerikas aus der Studiensammlung Horst Antes* (Lübeck, 2000).

41 Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago, 1989).

42 Aras and Bausinger, *Heimat*, 73.

43 Reinhard Johler, *Die Formierung eines Brauches: Der Funken- und Holeyfannsonntag. Studien aus Vorarlberg, Liechtenstein, Tirol, Südtirol und dem Trentino* (Vienna, 2000).

44 Werner Richner and Hermann Bausinger, *Baden-Württemberg: Landschaft und Kultur im Südwesten* (Karlsruhe, 1994), 6.

mobilities through and from this region and the many modes of performing Germanness that scholars are only now discovering as they compare the current semiotics of beer, festivals, and folk costume in places like Brazil and Bayern, or ponder the longer histories of in-migration and integration into German-speaking Europe, while arguing about the implications of the so-called welcoming culture of the Federal Republic today.⁴²

So again, it seems to me that a return to reading the writings of those scholars who, before and after Lucie Varga's stunning work on Vorarlberg, were and have been digging into everyday life in the Southern German borderlands, means the chance to engage in a complex *Alltagsgeschichte* that most historians of Germany have long overlooked. And again, it is often the quiet instances in this history that are the most compelling: be they the rather peaceful history of the region in the modern era; the seldom told success stories of well-integrated "guest workers" before and during that period, but especially in the second half of the twentieth century; the equally overlooked fact that postwar Germany was incredibly diverse and able to integrate a large percentage of outsiders, or the fact that the polycentrism I like to place at the center of German history always has had its counterpart in such a striking number of distinct cultures, dialects, and landscapes in even small areas of the Southern German borderlands.⁴³ If you do not believe me, take the trip between Isny im Allgäu and the interior of the Schwarzwald which Bausinger sketched out in great detail some decades ago, and which I did on a bike. If you do, get ready for a treat: you will encounter incredibly varied and polycentric regions and spaces all along the way.⁴⁴

Moreover, it is not just Bausinger, and none of this is limited to Tübingen or Baden-Württemberg. I've been stunned by some of the work by Konrad Kuhn, who teaches Volkskunde in Innsbruck, on the origins of Swiss masks, or Walter Lehmgruber from Basel on dialects and code switching in Switzerland and the many histories of mobility and migration that were

overlooked by scholars and politicians for far too long — all the Swiss living outside of Switzerland, and all the non-Swiss living inside it, creating it, building and maintaining it.⁴⁵ Here too, the longer history of those successful labor migrations (white as well as blue collar) and multiple modes of belonging are often lost in political debates; but many scholars today on all sides of the national borders are now drawing them out, and to my mind, that mobility needs to be given more attention in our more general narratives of German histories in Europe and abroad.⁴⁶

I will end by underscoring that one of the most compelling arguments coming out of Switzerland, for example, has been about colonialism without colonies — which is also simply about Swiss people and things in the world.⁴⁷ These arguments have been animating the Swiss academy for over a decade, but they also have a lot to teach us about how to think of colonial connections in the German-speaking world north of Switzerland. Official colonialism, and particularly violence, gets all the scholarly and political attention. The Swiss story reminds us, however, that one need not have participated in official colonialism or even visited a colony to have moved in and been part of the imperial world.

In that sense, our obsession with official colonies often reifies the many ways in which people from German-speaking Europe engaged with the non-European world, either during or after that era. It makes us overlook many of the ways in

45 See, for example, Konrad J. Kuhn, "Markt-Masken. Dinge zwischen materieller Produktion und ökonomischen Marktbedingungen," in Karl Braun, Claus-Marco Dietrich, and Angela Treiber, eds., *Materialisierung von Kultur. Diskurse – Dinge – Praktiken* (Würzburg, 2015), 155-164; Kuhn, "Relics from the «Lost Valley» – Discourses on the Magic of Masks," in Tatiana Minniyakhmetova and Kamila Velkoborskà, eds., *Rituals in Magic and Magic in Rituals* (Innsbruck, 2015), 203-212; and Walter Leimbruger, "Assimilation, Integration, Kohäsion, Partizipation," in Reinhard Johler and Jan Lange, eds. *Konfliktfeld Fluchtmigration: Historische und ethnographische Perspektiven* (Bielefeld, 2019), 65-80; and Leimgruber, "Aktuelle Entwicklungstendenzen des Profils der Auswanderinnen und Auswanderer aus der Schweiz," *Politorbis* 62 no. 2 (2016): 33-40.

46 André Holenstein, *Mitten in Europa: Verflechtung und Abgrenzung in der Schweizer Geschichte* (Baden, 2014); Barbara Lüthi and Damir Skenderovic, eds., *Switzerland*

and Migration: Historical and Current Perspectives on a Changing Landscape (Cham, 2019). Peter Melichar, Andreas Rudiger, Gerhard Wanner, eds., *Wanderungen. Migration in Vorarlberg,*

Liechtenstein und in der Ostschweiz zwischen 1700 und 2000 (Vienna, 2016).

47 See, inter alia Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné, eds., *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism*

from the Margins (New York, 2015); Andreas Zangger, *Koloniale Schweiz: Ein Stück Globalgeschichte zwischen Europa und Südostasien (1860-1930)* (Bielefeld, 2011).

which German speakers came together and worked together while abroad. Some reflection on that can remind us of the fact that there were many more Germans in Argentina than all the official German colonies combined, and that places like Guatemala far outshined the economic importance of Imperial Germany's official colonies. It also reminds us that those people from German-speaking Europe who went abroad frequently remained connected to it across the radical ruptures of the twentieth century. Perhaps even more importantly, as Franz Joseph Lentz, the schoolteacher from ostensibly provincial Sigmaringen explained in the 1960s to the Hamburg Museum director Franz Termer, they also helped to connect individuals, families, and groups in incredibly varied and polycentric locations within the Southern German borderlands to people and places throughout Latin America and, we can imagine, many other parts of the world.

H. Glenn Penny is Professor of History and the Henry J. Bruman Endowed Chair in German History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author, most recently, of *German History Unbound, 1750s to the Present* (Cambridge UP, 2022), and currently engaged in an in-depth study of belonging in the Southern German borderlands over the last two centuries.