In Search of the Emigration Approval

Transnational and Local Networks Involved in the Emigration Process of Romanian Germans

CORNELIU PINTILESCU

Introduction

IN THE context of the current debates on globalization and cross-border migration, the limitation of people's right to free movement has become a recurring topic. The twentieth century witnessed the development of increasingly complex methods to control human migration. The emergence and evolution of institutional mechanisms put in place by the modern state to regulate the movement of people has become a key issue for sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists and historians alike.[1]

In this respect, East European communist states had to face specific situations created by their relationship with their own citizens and developed special institutions and practices to control the movement of people.[2] Stalinist regimes turned the control of the population's internal movement into a means of dispersing the anti-regime opposition (by forced displacement) and of mobilizing human resources in order to achieve certain objectives, such as the reconstruction of their respective countries in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the building of a strategic infrastructure network vital to the economy. According to Paul Hollander, the Soviet-inspired regimes ended up transforming the institutions and practices of people's mobility control into "an integral part" of their "social-political system" and the frontiers were turned into "devices of domestic social-political control."[3] The possibility to leave a society has a strong impact on the citizens' attitude towards the social and political order because "when there are no alternatives, the status quo is more likely to be accepted."[4] Thus, the closed borders heavily contributed "to internal political stability" in communist countries.[5] The destabilizing effect on the Eastern bloc caused by the opening of the border between Austria and Hungary perfectly illustrates this aspect.[6]

As Botakoz Kassymbekova rightly pointed out, Stalin's death led to radical changes in the way Soviet institutions controlled the movement of people, and consequently in the attitude of the East European Soviet satellites towards it. During the de-Stalinization period, cross-border mobility among the communist states increased and there was a small flow of people between the Western and Eastern blocs.[8] The possibility (albeit small) to visit a Western country added more "political meaning" to the external mobility within the East European communist societies.[9] The external mobility, especially towards Western countries, steadily became a "privilege" that the communist authorities could manipulate to obtain the support or the collaboration of its citizens.[10]

The increase in the flow of people, goods, and information across the Iron Curtain during the 1960s accentuated the mirage of the Western consumerist society to the citizens of the Eastern bloc, which greatly challenged communist regimes. The undermining of their legitimacy by their own citizens' desire to emigrate to the West, and by the restrictions that they imposed on the citizens to prevent them from fleeing, is paradoxically well noted by Nikita Khrushchev himself in his memoirs when speaking about the "socialist paradise": "What kind of paradise? Everyone wants to go to paradise. But it's no paradise if people inside it want to escape and the door is locked."[11]

The expressed intentions of a citizen of a communist country to leave the "socialist paradise" for a capitalist country entailed a political act, which made them politically guilty in the eyes of the communist state. This was the case for the majority of Romanian Germans and Jews who, starting with the 1960s, openly manifested their desire to leave Romania for a capitalist country, most of them for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) or Israel. Romania was not the only communist country facing this situation. The Soviet Union and most of its East European satellites had Jewish minorities showing their desire to emigrate. Poland also had a significant German minority who manifested its will to emigrate to the FRG.[12] These cases created a dilemma for the communist states. On the one hand, some members of these communities invoked humanitarian arguments, such as the reunification of families separated by the Second World War, to pressure the government to let them leave. These internal pressures were added to external pressures from Western states and international institutions such as the International Red Cross. On the other side, the approval of their emigration could create legitimacy problems and emulation among their citizens to ask for permission to leave the country.

Some communist countries, such as Romania and Poland, found a controversial solution: they negotiated the emigration approval of the German or Jewish minority with their "homeland states" in exchange for material benefits.[13] While Poland allowed the emigration of its German minority in exchange for a preferential loan from FRG, Romania chose to create a more complex system of squeezing material benefits from the issue of emigration approvals for Romanian Jews and Germans.[14]

In the Romanian case, the issuance of exit visas in exchange for material benefits was first adopted on a large scale with regard to the Jewish community, whose members were extracted and paid for by the Israeli state between 1950 and 1989. In this period, the communist regime sanctioned the emigration of over 240,000 Jews from Romania to

Israel in exchange for money or other economic benefits.[15] As for the Romanian Germans, more than 210,000 emigrated to the FRG between 1968 and 1989 in exchange for money and economic benefits mostly paid and provided by the latter.[16] Ceaușescu's regime distinguished itself by developing and implementing complex institutional mechanisms and practices through which it obtained substantial sums of money in Western currency not only from the West German government, but also from private sources. Under the pretense of rushing emigration procedures, the final payments were collected by the Securitate (the secret police in communist Romania)[17] officers directly from the West German relatives or acquaintances of those who wanted to emigrate.

Romanian Germans wanted to leave the country in the 1970s and 1980s for various reasons. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Romanian Germans were the target of several repressive measures, such as the 1945 deportation of the adult population to the Soviet Union as compensation for the material destruction inflicted by Axis troops and the expropriation of Romanian German property.[18] Consequently, Romanian Germans developed a self-image of victimhood in their relationship with the Romanian state.[19] In contrast with the Romanian state's negative image in their eyes, Romanian Germans constructed an idealized image of postwar West German society.[20]

In their contributions, Radu Ioanid, Hannelore Baier, Peter-Dietmar Leber, Florian Banu, Luminiţa Banu, Florica Dobre, and Cosmin Budeancă approached various aspects of the Romanian communist regime's practices of obtaining foreign currency and other material benefits from Israel and the FRG in exchange for the issuance of exit visas.[21] Yet transactions of the same kind that were done through informal channels, as well as the discourse of the parties involved, received little attention in the literature.

This study aims to analyze the practices of the Romanian communist regime regarding the trafficking of emigration visas, with an emphasis on the transnational and local informal networks involved in this process, and on the main actors' narratives legitimizing these practices. At the theoretical level, I owe a great deal to John Torpey, who argues that one of the defining elements of the modern state is its monopoly on the right to authorize and regulate the movement of individuals.[22] He also underlines that "the emergence of passport and related controls on movements is an essential aspect of the state-ness of states."[23] The main sources for my research are various pieces of legislation which regulated the issuance of passports and visas, documents from the Securitate archives, and interviews with Romanian Germans (mostly Transylvanian Saxons) who emigrated from the 1960s until the late 1980s. Using these, I intend to provide answers to a series of questions: What is the relationship between the increase in the cross-border flow of people during the post-Stalinist period and the practice of trafficking exit visas in communist Romania? What does this practice tell us about the state-citizen relations in Ceaușescu's Romania? What kind of role did the transnational and local networks play within this mechanism, and how did the Securitate deal with it? How do the actors involved in the trafficking of exit visas legitimize this practice in their narratives? How do those who went through these experiences remember the bureaucratic odyssey to obtain the exit visa?

The Increase in the Flow of People between the West and Communist Romania: Opportunities and Challenges

THE 1960s and 1970s witnessed a rapid growth of international and domestic tourism in the Eastern bloc countries. In Romania, for example, the number of foreign tourists increased from 676,000 in 1965 to more than 2.9 million in 1972.[24] Tourism flourished not only among communist countries, but also between the latter and the West. In Romania, the emergence of national communism during the 1960s and the country's distancing from Moscow led to the establishment and cultivation of economic ties with Western countries. Romania was motivated by the desire to find new sources of technology, which were meant to replace those brought from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) member states, and new markets for Romanian exports. The development of economic ties with the West also led to an increasing number of Western tourists visiting Romania. For example, in 1968, of the 300,000 foreign tourists that spent their holidays on the Romanian Black Sea coast, 200,000 were from Western countries.[25] To a lesser extent, authorities also issued visas to Romanian citizens who wanted to visit Western countries. These were perceived as a real privilege granted by the regime to the most trustworthy members of the managerial, technical or intellectual elite.[26]

The Securitate perceived this increasing flow of people entering and exiting the country, many of them coming from or going to Western states, as a risk factor, but also as a source of opportunities. The need to monitor it can partially explain the steady development of the Securitate's surveillance policies at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s.[27] Among the risks mentioned in the internal discourse of the Securitate were increased espionage and "Western propaganda" activities. As for opportunities, the institution identified the possibility to recruit informants and plant agents in Western countries, to obtain significant amounts of foreign currency deemed necessary to pay for the new Western technologies, and to pay off the external debt, which grew significantly in the 1970s.[28]

The growing flow of people on Romania's borders in the second half of the 1960s led to significant changes in the legislation and the institutional apparatus that controlled it.[29] Thus, in 1970, a new legal framework regulating the issuance of passports was outlined in Decree no. 156/1970 that was later amended several times until 1989.[30] According to this decree, the highest government agency dealing with the issue of passports was the Commission for Passports and Visas within the Council of Ministers.[31] Its main attributions were the coordination and guidance of the activity of all institutions with competencies in this area within the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the resolution of complaints against decisions taken by these institutions, and the review of requests from Romanian citizens to move abroad. However, the commission was a higher government agency, and the institution with which ordinary citizens interacted was the Passport and Visa Services within the County Inspectorates of the Ministry of the Interior, where they submitted their requests.[32] Unlike in Western countries, in communist Romania and in other countries of the Eastern bloc, holding a valid

passport did not automatically guarantee the freedom to exit the country at any time. To cross the border, citizens had to have the so-called Romanian visa that was issued for a single or multiple travels over a certain period. There were diplomatic, business, simple or tourist visas, the latter being inaccessible to those living in Romania.

In relation to the aforementioned institutions, Romanian citizens who wished to leave the country for good used two tactics:[33] they either requested a business or a simple visa with the intention of staying abroad illegally, or they requested approval for emigration for the purpose of family reunification, as was the case of most Romanian Germans. Concerning the last tactic, in time, the applicants learned what the state institutions wanted to hear—namely, that family reunification was the only reason they wanted to leave their "socialist paradise," and other cliches found in the official discourse. As the interviews I have conducted with Romanian Germans highlighted, the emigration applicants used to exaggerate their degree of relatedness to certain relatives from the FRG to increase their chances of obtaining official approval.[34] Normally, the application for emigration began with a request for the issue of the official forms at the local Passport and Visa Service. These requests were then submitted to the competent local party commission for consideration. After an assessment period, the latter forwarded the approved requests to the Government Commission for Visas and Passports and to the Central Party Committee for the official forms. Upon sanction from these institutions, applicants were issued the forms that they had to fill out and submit to the local Passport and Visa Service. Based on these official forms, applicants requested the emigration approval from both the Government Commission and the Central Party Commission. However, the legal provisions published in the Official Bulletin make no mention of the other actor that played a decisive role within the mechanism of passport and visa issuance—the Securitate—which, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, gradually took over the entire institutional apparatus dedicated to this issue.

The Securitate and the Trafficking of Exit Visas in Communist Romania

THE FIRST channels through which state authorities and private entities from the West could purchase exit visas for Romanian citizens were created in the 1950s. Two networks distinguished themselves due to their intense activity at the end of the 1950s and in the first half of the 1960s. The first was established by the London-based Jewish businessman Henry Jakober, while the second was created by the lawyer Ewald Garlepp in Stuttgart, and dealt mostly with the emigration of Romanian Germans.

Jakober mediated the issuance of exit visas for Romanian citizens and the payment by their relatives living abroad. These sums varied from $4,000 to $6,000 per person.[35] As early as 1958, Jakober's network specialized in obtaining exit visas for Romanian Jews. That year, the Romanian communist leadership sanctioned the initiative the Securitate's Foreign Intelligence Directorate (*Direcția a I-a de Informații Externe*, DIE) to acquire, via Jakober, a series of necessary economic goods in exchange for exit visas to Israel for a

number of Romanian Jews.[36] In the period from 1958 to 1962, Jakober's network purchased exit visas mainly by providing certain products, while between 1962 and 1968 it mainly paid sums of money in US dollars.[37] From 1968 to 1989, the mass emigration of Romanian Jews occurred following agreements between the Romanian and Israeli secret services.[38] These financial operations regarding the emigration of Romanian Jews represented a precedent that shaped the expectations and strategies of the Romanian communist authorities when dealing with the issue of the emigration of the German minority.

In the beginning, Garlepp based his network on his contacts with Romanian lawyer Crăciun Șerbănescu who, in the early 1950s, mediated the release from prison and the emigration of several Romanian Germans.[39] Garlepp alleged that Șerbănescu had contacts among the Romanian communist elite that helped him get people out of prison and the country.[40] The former's most intense activity occurred between 1962 and 1964 when, together with Securitate intermediaries, he set up a "channel" that helped hundreds of Romanian Germans to emigrate from Romania each year. The money mainly came from the West German authorities, which secretly charged Garlepp to negotiate with representatives of the Romanian state. Payments were made for individual persons, families or larger groups, depending on the negotiations.[41]

1962 was a turning point in the evolution of the Securitate practices of trafficking exit visas for Romanian Germans. A DIE report dated 13 July 1962 proposed the approval of A. H.'s (a Romanian German's) emigration application in exchange for 30,000 DM (deutsche marks) as well as "the continuation of this practice in the case of other persons" with the purpose of obtaining Western currency.[42] The Minister of the Interior, Alexandru Drăghici, approved it. Consequently, on 9 August 1962, the Directorate submitted another report to the Ministry of the Interior requesting the Securitate's monopoly over the review of emigration requests from Romanian citizens of German descent:

> *Following measures taken by our institution, we have created a covert channel for taking persons who have relatives in the F[ederal] R[epublic] of Germany out of the country, a channel that can be used in the future not only for our covert operations abroad, but also for bringing significant amounts of foreign currency into the country.*[43]

Thus, in 1962, the Securitate managed to take over a channel initially created by lawyers, through which informal networks in Bucharest obtained substantial sums of money in Western currency, and which could not have operated without support from the party leadership. The aforementioned report notes that the Romanian state had thus lost "an important opportunity to obtain foreign currency, while certain persons from the F[ederal] R[epublic] of Germany, various crooks, made profits by handling emigration cases through the regular channels."[44] It concludes with the proposition to divert the handling of these cases toward the Securitate, thus limiting the "regular" emigration channel.[45] Therefore, from the Securitate's perspective, securing this monopoly meant not only eliminating the competition, but also preventing situations in which the responsible institutions issued emigration visas to ethnic Germans based on humanitarian reasons, such as family reunification, without requesting material benefits in exchange.

This could not be achieved unless the Securitate had total control over the institutional apparatus responsible for issuing passports and visas.

The Securitate's plans were, however, hindered by exposés published in the Western press, which presented the Romanian authorities' emigration policies as human trafficking. This scandal put a temporary stop to these practices because the communist regime was increasingly interested in maintaining a positive image in the West given its distancing from Moscow. Nonetheless, in 1968, negotiations were restarted by the lawyer and Christian-democrat politician Heinz-Günther Hüsch, who had a mandate in this respect from the Federal Ministry for Displaced Persons, Refugees and War Victims in Bonn.[46] Between 1968 and 1989, Hüsch held 313 rounds of negotiations with representatives of the Romanian state concerning the emigration of ethnic Germans.[47] During the aforementioned period, over 210,000 ethnic Germans emigrated from Romania to West Germany. For each of them, the West German government paid sums of money ranging from 1,700 DM to 11,000 DM, depending on each emigrant's education level.[48]

The Securitate's plan to take total control of the institutional apparatus that issued passports and visas was carried out steadily between 1968 and 1972. In 1968, the Securitate officer Eugen Luchian was appointed secretary of the Commission for Passports and Visas. Additionally, in 1972, the Directorate for Passports, Emigration and Border Control within the Ministry of the Interior was turned into an operational directorate of the Securitate.[49] In the early 1960s, the key Securitate department that carried out the visa selling operation was called Special Foreign Currency Operations (*Operațiuni Valutare Speciale*, OVS). It was later renamed Special Foreign Currency Supply (*Aport Valutar Special*, AVS). This department was part of the DIE which, following successive reorganizations of the Romanian secret services, operated under different names: General Directorate for Foreign Intelligence (*Direcția Generală de Informații Externe*, DGIE) in 1963, Foreign Intelligence Directorate (*Direcția de Informații Externe*, DIE) in 1972, and Foreign Intelligence Center (*Centrul de Informații Externe*, CIE) in 1978. As the name suggests, the OVS was tasked with acquiring Western currency for the regime by employing various methods, like international trade, the trafficking of exit visas, etc. Undercover DGIE/DIE operatives would hold negotiations with West German representatives, and collect the latter's payments in cash or by check at various locations in Europe, such as Vienna, Stockholm, Paris, etc.[50] These funds were then used by the regime mainly to pay off Romania's external debt.[51] Apart from the sums in Western currency, the agreements also stipulated the West German government's commitment to supply certain products and partially cover the interest on certain loans taken by the Romanian state.[52] In the late 1970s, the foreign intelligence service's operation to secure foreign currency and other material benefits from the FRG received the name Operation Recovery (*Acțiunea Recuperarea*), which in the early 1980s was renamed Operation Recovery I (*Acțiunea Recuperarea I*).[53]

In 1970, the DGIE also added Operation Travelers (*Operațiunea Peregrinii*), whose aim was to secure Western currency from the relatives and acquaintances of all those who requested emigration visas. Thus, this operation targeted not only ethnic Germans, but any Romanian citizen whose departure was not considered harmful to national interests and for whom they could secure considerable sums in Western currency. However, from a

numerical standpoint, most of those included in this operation were Romanian Germans and Jews, because most often they had relatives abroad who were willing to pay good money for their exit visas. The fact that those allowed to emigrate were mostly members of ethnic minorities is also connected with Ceaușescu's policies of forging "an ethnically homogeneous nation."[54] It is likely that certain persons included in this operation had already been included on the lists negotiated with the West German government, which meant that these cases actually warranted two payments, one by the German authorities and one by the applicant's relatives. In 1973, they put an end to Operation Travelers for fear of negatively impacting the image of the communist regime.[55]

While the operation may have been shut down officially, the Securitate had not given up completely on this source of income. They simply got creative. The minutes from Hüsch's negotiations with the DGIE/DIE during the 1980s reveal the abusive methods employed to obtain significant funds from applicants' relatives in exchange for the acceleration of procedures. The phenomenon was so widespread that Hüsch complained to Securitate officers, demanding it stopped. These practices are also reflected in the interviews I have conducted.[56] For example, E. G., a Transylvanian Saxon born in 1954, recounted how in the late 1980s he had to bring money from the FRG twice to pay for the expedition of emigration procedures for the families of certain Transylvanian Saxons. He claims that after paying 20,000 DM per family, the procedures "were considerably accelerated," but he described the exchange itself like a scene from a gangster movie:

> *I did not even know who I gave the money to . . . I was told "Go to a certain boulevard, wait at a certain tree where a car would stop, get in and go [with them]." We drove outside the city; they stopped in some place, took the money, counted it... they did not say a word.*[57]

Both Hüsch and the interviewees argue that these mafia-style encounters could not occur without protection or consent from certain individuals at the top of the Romanian secret services.[58] These practices, prevalent in the 1980s, are clarified in the so-called Operation Recovery III (*Operațiunea Recuperarea III*) which is mentioned in a series of documents issued by the CIE (a.k.a. DGIE and DIE) in the period 1981–1986. A document issued by the Special Foreign Currency Supply Department (AVS) of the CIE in 1984 reveals that Operation Recovery III included several secondary operations code-named "Banatul," "Aradul," "Tâmpa," and "Paltiniş," which were carried out at county level.[59] The sums collected during this operation amounted to hundreds of thousands or even millions of DM per year. A report by the head of the AVS, dated June 1981 and addressed to the leadership of the Securitate, partially clarifies the mystery around this operation. As a reaction to Hüsch's complaints, the report recommended "the initiation and implementation of a misinformation campaign that will provide a better cover for operations such as 'Banatul' and 'Aradul,'" which were components of Operation Recovery III.[60] The Securitate's main method of disguising these actions was by mimicking a mafia-style behavior which gave the payer the impression that they were not dealing with the secret police, but with a criminal network. In spite of this, the West German authorities suspected that the Securitate was behind this scheme.

The Securitate's attempts to conceal its practices as mafia-style actions also suggest its ambiguous relationship with the criminal environment. In the aforementioned 1962 document, the Securitate noted the existence of cross-border criminal networks that received commission fees in foreign currency in exchange for taking Romanian citizens out of the country.[61] The leadership of the institution took a page out the criminal book and created similar networks. Subsequently, the Securitate constantly acted either to capture or integrate these transnational networks and their methods, or to eliminate them if they posed a risk of competition.[62] Thus, by imitating criminals, the Securitate managed to kill two birds with one stone: it created new "opportunities" to obtain Western currency, and simultaneously managed to conceal them from the Western mass media.

The leadership of the Romanian Communist Party sanctioned these practices at the risk of damaging the country's image in the West. This decision could partially be explained by Ceaușescu's economic policies of the late 1960s and 1970s. In the context of the country's gradual distancing from Moscow in 1964–1968, Romania started to diversify its sources for technologies needed in the industrialization process by increasing imports from the West. For the purchase of said technologies, the Romanian government resorted to loans from Western banks and states. Repaying these debts proved difficult given that Romanian industrial products were non-competitive on the Western market. Thus, in the 1970s, the country's external debts grew steadily not only because of Ceaușescu's ambitions, but also in the context of the oil crisis. Between 1976 and 1981, the external debt increased from $0.5 billion to $10.4 billion.[63] The country's external debt put extra pressure on the Securitate to increase its reserve of foreign currency. Thus, a 1980 AVS report mentions that the projected annual collection increased from $26 million to $76 million.[64] The new Securitate operations in the period 1979–1981, such as Operation Recovery III, were partly prompted by Ceaușescu's aforementioned pressure to increase the amount of foreign currency in the state budget.

Narratives of those Involved in the Emigration Process of Romanian Germans

SINCE THE 1960s, when the mass sale of emigration visas started, until the present day, the public space has witnessed the emergence of competing narratives on the emigration of Romanian Germans and its financial ins and outs. There have been two turning points that left a strong mark on the evolution of these narratives. The first was the collapse of the communist regime in December 1989. The second was the transfer of the former Securitate archives from the Romanian Intelligence Service to the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives in 2006, which made them accessible. This decision proved crucial in clarifying numerous aspects of the phenomenon under analysis. After many years of silence, West German representatives involved in the agreements, such as Hüsch, started to provide details of their role in the events. On the other side, in the 2000s, former Securitate officers directly involved in the negotiations also provided their insider perspectives.[65] In their public discourse, both parties tried to

legitimize their involvement in this phenomenon, which the media sensationally labelled "human trafficking."

In this last part of the study, I will analyze the narratives of the actors involved in the emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania, firstly of those directly involved, such as German negotiators, Romanian decision-makers and the institution tasked with mediating this affair—the Securitate, as well as Romanian Germans who went through the emigration process in the 1970s and 1980s. There are two types of narratives: those from the time of or shortly after emigration, and recollections from interviews I and others have conducted over the last decade. The first category of narratives was issued under the specific constraints of the period, such as the need to conceal the financial arrangements, either in order to protect their image, or to protect the relatives left at home.

The post–2006 discourse of the former representatives of the West German authorities involved in the emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania underlines mainly the humanitarian character of the action. In Hüsch's opinion, it "was a vast humanitarian action, not to purchase people—into whose property?—but to give freedom to those who lived in servitude, given the existing conditions in the Eastern bloc and especially in Romania."66 As the minutes of the negotiations drafted by the Securitate reveal, he built his position around this argument during the direct negotiations with the undercover DIE/CIE agents. Both in the post–1989 interviews and during the negotiations from 1968–1989, Hüsch highlighted the humanitarian motivation, and underplayed the economic considerations. Without contesting the humanitarian aspect, one must note that these negotiations started at the end of the 1960s, when there was increasing demand for workers in the West German economy. Had Hüsch admitted the economic advantages of these deals to the West German economy, he would have provided the Romanian side a valid argument to increase the payable amount for each person. Even before 1989, but certainly after, emphasizing the humanitarian aspects at the expense of financial considerations was a strategy to legitimize involvement in what the press labelled "human trafficking" (*Menschenhandel* in German).

Romanian communist authorities were faced with a number of dilemmas while dealing with the emigration of Romanian Germans. On the one hand, the communist leadership was fully aware of how important the German minority was to the Romanian economy, as Ceauşescu's stance during a meeting with the president of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Helmut Kohl, in Romania on 8 June 1976 reveals.67 Numerous Romanian Germans were working in some of the most important industrial centers around the country. On the other hand, Romania's ever-increasing need for foreign currency in the 1960s and 1970s made the practice of issuing emigration visas in exchange for sums in Western currency become common. At the same time, the communist regime attempted to shroud these practices in a veil of secrecy, aware that their potential exposure could harm its legitimacy both in the country and abroad. By following such divergent goals, the narratives of communist authorities regarding the emigration of Romanian Germans came to be dominated by contradictions.

For instance, while he sanctioned the Securitate's practices through which the state acquired millions of DM each year, Ceauşescu took an anti-emigration stance whenever he held talks with West German leaders. He demanded of Kohl that West German au-

thorities refrained from "encouraging" the emigration of Romanian Germans.[68] Beginning with the 1970s, the party leadership intensified its efforts to prevent emigration among Romanian Germans, and from the 1980s, it started to impose coercive measures against those who submitted emigration requests, such as exclusion from the Party and the sacking of those who worked in the education system or in the press.[69] The Securitate's county structures had to regularly report on the concrete measures they took to prevent the emigration of Romanian Germans.[70] On the other hand, the same structures had to contact those who potentially wanted to emigrate, and direct them toward the networks operated by them in order to achieve the goals of Recovery I and III. Due to ideological imperatives, the real reasons for emigration, such as the country's low living standards and restrictions on the freedom of movement, could not be mentioned. That is why the Securitate used the same old clichés of its institutional discourse from the 1950s, such as "West German capitalist propaganda" and "nationalist-fascist ideas," as motives for emigration.[71] An argument regularly invoked by the Securitate officers in its negotiations with Hüsch was that the claimed payments were the equivalent of the Romanian studies of those who emigrated.

As for the people who had to go through the bureaucratic odyssey of emigration, the twelve interviews that I had in 2013–2017 with Transylvanian Saxons (five women and seven men aged between 31 and 87) reveal a wealth of memories of this process and a diversity of reasons to emigrate. The most significant factors that influenced their way of remembering things are age, social status and education level at the date of emigration. Those who emigrated as adults had a tendency to point out the difficulties they encountered in the relationship with the state institutions, and the injustices they had to endure due to the decision to emigrate.[72] Those who were children tend to remember their parents' adventures from a perspective that focuses less on the difficulties, and more on anecdotal aspects.[73] Additionally, while adults underline the difficulties they encountered in their integration into the West German society, this aspect is normally less present in the recollections of those who emigrated at an early age.

The interview with K. S.[74] reveals how in 1983 he was fired from his teaching position at the school for having submitted an emigration request. As a result, he was unemployed and unemployable for over a year. He remembers how "everyone [who applied for an exit visa] was summoned to the inspectorate, reprimanded, kicked around, given a signed paper that they were no longer compatible with socialist education." He made the decision to emigrate because his daughter had emigrated earlier, and the authorities would repeatedly reject his requests to visit her in the FRG telling him: "If you want to see your daughter, leave for good!"[75] He also talked about the interest the Securitate officers had in the houses of Transylvanian Saxons from Sibiu and mentioned that those with houses in the city center were even encouraged by the Securitate employees to apply for emigration approval. Those who received the emigration approval had to sell their houses to the state at fixed low prices.[76] Afterwards, Securitate officers and Party bureaucrats had priority in obtaining those houses from state institutions. Besides the interest of the Securitate in their houses, many Romanian Germans talked about "gifts" that the state employees used to take in exchange for promises that their cases would be expedited.[77]

Conversely, E. G., who was a child in the 1960s, remembers the long queues in front of the county passport offices where children were often asked by their parents to hold their place while they were away, which always proved to be a good opportunity for them to socialize.[78] Although the historiography of this issue has pointed out the economic reasons for emigration, especially the temptation of the consumer society for the inhabitants of a country that in the 1980s experienced the rationing of most basic food items as well as of petrol, electricity, and heating, most interviewees did not mention economic hardship as the main reason. There is, however, one notable exception. P. V., a woman born in 1974, highlights the difficult living conditions in the country in the 1980s, and the significant role that this aspect played in her mother's decision to emigrate.[79] Paradoxically, although they received parcels from West Germany, these only increased the level of frustration. Unlike their Romanian neighbors, who did not receive such parcels, they understood much more concretely the great gap between the possibilities of the 1980s Romanian and West German consumer. As an irony of food rationing in communist Romania, P. V. remembers how a parcel sent from the FRG contained the so-called Sibiu salami, a traditional Transylvanian product, which was almost impossible to find in the town of Sibiu where it was actually produced and where, incidentally, P. V. also lived.

Undoubtedly, by receiving such parcels and by having the possibility to emigrate, Romanian Germans with relatives abroad held an advantage over other Romanian citizens. Apart from access to Western products, however sporadic it might have been, in the context of severe shortages a bag of coffee or a cosmetic product could open many doors within a bureaucracy where the giving of presents became an unwritten rule. One should also note that the interviewees seem to be unaware of the fact that, in the 1980s, having relatives abroad usually meant access to resources that most Romanian citizens could only dream of.

Finally, the day of leaving the country and the cultural shock of landing in a completely different society did not allow them to enjoy for long the much-anticipated exit visa. In the documentary *Pașaport pentru Germania* (Passport to Germany, 2014), directed by Răzvan Georgescu, an interviewee (a Swabian from Banat) describes in detail the day of leaving the country. In the evening, they were supposed to go to the railway station in Timișoara and bid farewell to the relatives and friends they were leaving behind. He recounts how at midnight they were separated from each other, and then had to wait until 5 o'clock in the morning when the special coaches arrived. On the platform, those who had an exit visa were "guarded by soldiers armed with automatic weapons, and sometimes by dogs." The interviewee points out how "they made you feel like a traitor to your country."[80] The pressure, stress, and humiliation they had to endure until they left the country can be explained by the political dimension that the regime gave to this process. In its view, the desire to emigrate meant an act of opposition and implicit criticism of socialist society, something which could not be overlooked or left unpunished. Tolerating this attitude would have meant encouraging other Romanian citizens to emigrate.

Ironically, similarly to the narratives of institutional actors, namely the Securitate, certain interviewees' narratives also contain contradictions and attempts to legitimize

their involvement in what they also labelled "human trafficking." W. S. argued that, although it might seem "cynical," these practices ultimately allowed him, his mother and brothers to emigrate to the FRG, where his father had stayed illegally, in the 1970s.[81] In addition, E. G. recounts that, although he came in the 1980s to Romania with sums in foreign currency to take out two families, he was still asking himself about the morality of his actions, which supported a "dirty business."[82] In the aforementioned documentary film, this is how one of the interviewees tackles this issue: "We were commodities; we were the object of an accounting transaction. It is needless to say that I did not feel at all good in this situation."[83]

Conclusions

THE EMIGRATION of Romanian Germans to the FRG was one of the most complex transnational phenomena of the Cold War period. The first channels that allowed this emigration were created by Western entities at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of 1960s when the borders were, for the most part, closed. At that time, the Romanian communist authorities allowed some of their citizens to leave the country in exchange for informal payments in Western currency. During the 1960s, these channels were captured and put under strict control by the Securitate. The latter transformed them into a significant source of Western currency in the context of the increasing need to purchase Western technology and pay Romania's mounting external debt. This instrumentalist approach concerning the issuance of emigration visas was an effect of the Securitate's reaction to the increase in the flow of people between communist Romania and Western countries. This flow was perceived as a source of security risks for the regime, but also as a source of opportunities, such as developing the intelligence activity in Western Europe or obtaining foreign currency. Consequently, the Securitate took over the entire institutional system in charge of issuing exit visas. In this period, the Securitate developed two main sources of obtaining Western currency for the emigration approvals of Romanian Germans. The first was "official"—the money came from the West German authorities. The second source was created by capturing transnational networks involved in obtaining informal payments from private sources in exchange for expediting the resolution of individual applications for exit visas. This second source allowed the Securitate to receive a second payment in Western currency from relatives or friends of thousands of Romanian Germans applying for exit visas. To cover the second source, the Securitate officers and their local collaborators mimicked criminal activities. Thus, the Securitate blurred the lines between licit and illicit.

These practices of trafficking exit visas were like a two-edged sword for Ceaușescu's regime. On the one hand, the regime obtained significant amounts of Western currency, much needed to pay the foreign debt. On the other side, it proved impossible for the communist regime to perfectly cover the visa trafficking and prevent the occasional leak to the Western media, thus negatively affecting the image of the regime. The situation also produced inner contradictions within state policies and discourse about the emigra-

tion of Romanian Germans. While the communist state institutions launched national policies of discouraging emigration, the Securitate officers and their collaborators encouraged people to apply for emigration visas and convinced them to pay a small fortune to expedite their request.

Both the representatives of the FRG and of communist Romania involved in the financial aspects of Romanian German emigration tried to legitimize their actions either by highlighting the humanitarian aspect (FRG), or by bringing to the fore what they considered the national interest (former Securitate officers). Romanian Germans who lived the bureaucratic odyssey of emigration under communism remember it in different ways depending on their age, education or social class. The experiences with the local networks that trafficked exit visas were some of the most difficult to cope with. Nowadays, these memories, which receive meaning within the larger narrative of the Romanian Germans' victimhood in the post-World War II period, are key components of their cultural identity.

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Notes

1. See, for example: Harald Bauder, *Migration Borders Freedom* (London–New York: Routledge, 2017); Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Roger Waldinger, *The Cross-Border Connection: Immigrants, Emigrants, and Their Homelands* (Cambridge–London: Harvard University Press, 2015); Leanne Weber, ed., *Rethinking Border Control for a Globalizing World: A Preferred Future* (London–New York: Routledge, 2015); Elisabeth Vallet, ed., *Border, Fences and Walls: State of Insecurity?* (Farnham, Surrey–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Andreas Müller, *Governing Mobility Beyond the State: Centre, Periphery and the EU's External Borders* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Ruben Zaiotti, *Cultures of Border Control: Schengen and the Evolution of European Frontiers* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
2. For the dilemma of communist regimes concerning the use of violent tools, see Pavel Kolář, *Der Poststalinismus: Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 122–142.
3. Paul Hollander, *The Many Faces of Socialism: Comparative Sociology and Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ–London: Transaction Books, 1983), 70–80.
4. Hollander, 96.
5. Hollander, 96–97.
6. Cristina Petrescu, "Entrepreneurial Tourism in Romania: A System-Stabilizing Factor?," in *"Schleichwege": Inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989*, edited by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Jerzy Kochanowski, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 125.
7. Botakoz Kassymbekova, "Leisure and Politics: Soviet Central Asian Tourists Across the Iron Curtain," in *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States: Societies on the Move*, edited by Kathy Burrell and Kathrin Hörschelmann (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 62.

8. Adelina Oana Stefan, "Between Limits, Lures and Excitement: Socialist Romanian Holidays Abroad during the 1960s–80s," in *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States*, 87–88.

9. Ciprian Cirniala, "Power and Mobilities in Socialist Romania 1964–89," in *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States*, 49.

10. Hollander, 90.

11. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 2, *Reformer (1945–1964)*, edited by Sergei Khrushchev, translated by George Shriver and Stephen Shenfield (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 232.

12. The GDR is not included here due to its special position in the Eastern bloc, although the GDR also practiced the issuance of exit visas in exchange of material benefits. See Stephan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998), 209–210.

13. According to Rogers Brubaker, "a state becomes an external national 'homeland' when cultural or political elites construe certain residents and citizens of other states as co-nationals, as fellow members of a single transborder nation, and when they assert that this shared nationhood makes the state responsible, in some sense, not only for its own citizens but also for ethnic co-nationals who live in other states and possess other citizenships." See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

14. For the Polish case see Klaus J. Bade, *Migration in European History*, translated by Allison Brown (Malden, MA–Oxford–Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 303.

15. Radu Ioanid, "Ceaușescu și Dej au vândut 250.000 de evrei," *Adevărul*, 12 October 2006, accessed 14 March 2017, http://adevarul.ro/sanatate/medicina/ceausescu-dej-vandut-250000-evrei-1_50abd0b67c42d5a663809470/index.html.

16. *Cumpărarea libertății: Dr. Heinz-Günther Hüsch in interviuri cu Hannelore Baier și Ernst Meinhardt*, translated by Nadia Badrus (Sibiu: Honterus, 2014), 7.

17. The Securitate had several official names during its existence. It was created in 1948 under the name The General Directorate for the People's Security (*Direcția Generala a Securității Poporului*) within the Ministry of the Interior. See Dennis Deletant, introduction to Marius Oprea, *Banalitatea răului: O istorie a Securității în documente 1949–1989* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 48–52.

18. They returned during late 1940s and the early 1950s.

19. James Koranyi and Ruth Wittlinger, "From Diaspora to Diaspora: The Case of Transylvanian Saxons in Romania and Germany," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 17, 1 (2011): 109.

20. Koranyi and Wittlinger, 104.

21. Among the most important contributions on the topic are: *Cumpărarea libertății*; Heinz Günther Hüsch, Peter-Dietmar Leber, and Hannelore Baier, *Wege in die Freiheit: Deutsch-rumänische Dokumente zur Familienzusammenführung und Aussiedlung 1968–1989* (Aachen: Husch & Husch, 2016); Florica Dobre, Florian Banu, Luminița Banu, and Laura Stancu, *Acțiunea 'Recuperarea': Securitatea și emigrarea germanilor din România 1962–1989* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2011); Cosmin Budeancă, "The Merchants of Human Beings: The Securitate's Role in the Emigration of Romania's Germans (1978–1989)," *Transylvanian Review* 24, 1 (2015): 59–78.

22. John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

23. Torpey, 3.

24. Constantin Gavrilescu, "Turismul internaţional—activitate economică de mare eficienţă," in *Turismul—Ramură a economiei naţionale: Studii*, edited by Gheorghe Barbu (Bucharest: Editura pentru Turism, 1973), 65.

25. Liviu Pleşa, "Contraspionajul în prima parte a regimului Ceauşescu (anii '60–'70): Organizare, atribuţii şi metode de acţiune," *Caietele CNSAS* 2, 2 (4) (2009): 52.

26. Such a privilege was usually reserved to persons that the regime deemed low defection risk, and it often involved a certain form of collaboration with the Securitate.

27. Dragoş Petrescu, "Closely Watched Tourism: The Securitate As Warden of Transnational Encounters, 1967–9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, 2 (2015): 337–353.

28. Petrescu, "Closely Watched Tourism," 337–342.

29. Corneliu Pintilescu, "Emigrarea etnicilor germani din România în anii '70–'80: O analiză a raporturilor stat–cetăţean create de practicile birocratice ale aprobării emigrării," in *Viaţa cotidiană in Sibiul secolelor XIX–XX*, edited by Mihaela Grancea and Ioan Popa (Sibiu: Astra Museum, 2015), 85.

30. Decree no. 156 of 12 April 1970 on passports, *Buletinul Oficial*, 12 April 1970.

31. The Council of Ministers (*Consiliul de Miniştri*) was the Executive in the Socialist Republic of Romania.

32. Pintilescu, 85–86.

33. According to Michel de Certeau, tactics "are the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices." See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1984), xviii.

34. According to W. S., his parents claimed that they were like children to their uncle in West Germany because he did not have descendants. Actually, the closest relatives of his parents were in Romania. Interview with W. S. (male, born in 1953) conducted by the author in Munich, 14 September 2011.

35. Dennis Deletant, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 208–209.

36. Mădălin Hodor, "Cum a început Securitatea să vândă oameni," *Revista 22*, accessed 14 March 2017, http://revista22online.ro/44557/cum-a-nceput-securitatea-s-vnd-oameni.html.

37. Radu Ioanid, ed., *Securitatea şi vânzarea evreilor: Istoria acordurilor secrete dintre România şi Israel*, foreword by Paul Shapiro (Iaşi: Polirom, 2016), 76.

38. Ioanid, 88–110.

39. *Cumpărarea libertăţii*, 26.

40. *Cumpărarea libertăţii*, 27–28.

41. *Cumpărarea libertăţii*, 31.

42. "Referat privind unele propuneri în cazul Garlepp, avocat din RFG" (Report concerning some proposals on the case of Garlepp, lawyer from the FRG), the Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (hereafter cited as ACNSAS), Documentary coll., file 3673, vol. 1, fol. 13, cited in Dobre et al., 41–43.

43. "Referat privind unele aspecte ale eliberării vizei de ieşire din ţară persoanelor de naţionalitate germană" (Report on some aspects of the process of issuing exit visas for the

persons of German descent), ACNSAS, Documentary coll., file 3673, vol. 1, fol. 23. See also fols. 46–47.

44. ACNSAS, Documentary coll., file 3673, vol. 1, fols. 23–24.

45. ACNSAS, Documentary coll., file 3673, vol. 1, fol. 24.

46. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 33.

47. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 57.

48. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 165–167.

49. Liviu Țăranu, "O figură din umbra politicii românești: generalul Eugen Luchian," *Caietele CNSAS* 3, 1 (5) (2010): 84; Nicolae Ioniță, "Fișe biografice ale șefilor direcțiilor regionale de Securitate din anii '60 (II)," *Caietele CNSAS* 6, 1–2 (11–12) (2013): 111.

50. Florian Banu and Florica Dobre, introduction to Dobre et al., xli–lvii.

51. Banu and Dobre, xli–lvii.

52. Budeancă, 65–70.

53. "Raport al șefului Compartimentului AVS, colonel Nicolae Arnăutu (Stelian Andronic), privind tratativele cu 'Edward,' desfășurate la Köln în perioada 13–14 ianuarie, în scopul încheierii acțiunii Recuperarea-I pe anul 1980"–16 ianuarie 1981 (Report of the chief of Special Foreign Currency Supply, Colonel Nicolae Arnăutu/Stelian Andronic, on the negotiations with 'Edward' to end Operation Recovery I for the year 1980, which took place in Cologne in 13–14 January–16 January 1981), in Dobre et al., 309.

54. Dragoș Petrescu, "Building the Nation, Instrumentalizing Nationalism: Revisiting Romanian National-Communism, 1956–1989," *Nationalities Papers* 37, 4 (2009): 534.

55. "Notă raport întocmită de general-maior Eugen Luchian privind închiderea acțiunii Peregrinii—14 decembrie 1973" (Major-General Eugen Luchian's report on the end of operation Traveler–14 December 1973); "Declarație a general-maior Eugen Luchian referitoare la modul de lucru în acțiunea 'Peregrinii'—28 august 1978" (Major-General Eugen Luchian's statement on the working methods within operation traveler—28 August 1978), in Dobre et al., 187–188, 227–229.

56. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 173–174.

57. Interview with E. G. (male, born in 1954) conducted by the author in Munich, 12 September 2011.

58. Interview with E. G.; interview with H. T. (male, born in 1980) conducted by the author in Munich, 14 September 2011.

59. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Hannelore Baier who gave me access to some documents issued by the Securitate concerning the action Recovery III. See ACNSAS, file OVS 31159, vol. 5, fol. 74.

60. "Raport al șefului Compartimentului AVS referitor la probleme rezolvate la întâlnirea cu 'Edward' care a avut loc la București în data de 28 mai–1 iunie 1981" (Report by the chief of the AVS on the issues solved at the meeting with "Edward" which took place in Bucharest on 28 May–1 June 1981), in Dobre et al., 319–320.

61. ACNSAS, Documentary coll., file 3673, vol. 1, fols. 23–24.

62. Even in 1984, the Securitate was striving to eliminate certain competing networks created by West German citizens to smuggle people out of Romania and into Austria via Hungary in exchange for sums of money. See "Notă transmisă Compartimentului AVS de U.M. 0199 privind un canal ilegal de scoatere de persoane din țara noastră–14 februarie

1984" (Note addressed to secs by Military Unit 0199 regarding an illegal network to smuggle people out of our country—14 February 1984), in F. Dobre et al., 492–493.

63. Cornel Ban, "Sovereign Debt, Austerity, and Regime Change: The Case of Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania," *East European Politics and Societies* 26, 4 (2012): 758.

64. "Raport al conducerii serviciului pentru operațiuni valutare privind executarea sarcinii pe anul 1980" (Report by the leadership of Foreign Currency Operations on the achievement of targets for 1980), acnsas, file ovs 31159, vol. 4, fols. 3–4.

65. Stelian Octavian Andronic, *36 de ani în serviciile secrete ale României: Din respect pentru adevăr: Memorii* (Bucharest: Compania, 2008).

66. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 72.

67. Hannelore Baier, "Ein humanitäres und finanzielles Problem: Die 'Familienzusammenführung' in offiziellen Gesprächen zwischen Nicolae Ceausescu und deutschen Spitzenpolitikern," *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde* 58 (2015): 182–185.

68. Baier, 184–187

69. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 160.

70. Dobre et al., 401–402.

71. "Concluziile unei sinteze privind problema 'Naționaliști Fasciști Germani' din 23 iunie 1988 întocmită de Inspectoratul Județean Timiș al mai" (Conclusions of a summary on the Issue "German Nationalist-Fascists" of 23 June 1988), acnsas, Documentary coll. (Timiș County), file 009 683, vol. 1, fols. 1–2.

72. K. S. (male, born in 1936), interview by author, Sibiu, 14 December 2011; M. P. (male, born in 1936), interview by author, Munich, 12 September 2011; K. R. (woman, born in 1953), interview by author, Munich, 15 September 2011. All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

73. H. T., interview by author; E. G., interview by author; V. G. (male, born in 1975), interview by author, Munich, 9 September 2011.

74. K. S., interview by author.

75. K. S., interview by author.

76. Budeancă, 73–76.

77. *Cumpărarea libertății*, 173–174; Budeancă, 74–76.

78. Interview with E. G.

79. Interview with P. V. (woman, born in 1971) conducted by the author in Munich, 21 September 2011.

80. *Pașaport pentru Germania* (Passport to Germany), directed by Răzvan Georgescu, Hi Film Productions, Romania/Germany, 2014, 89 min.

81. Interview with W. S.

82. Interview with E. G.

83. *Pașaport pentru Germania*.

Abstract
In Search of the Emigration Approval: Transnational and Local Networks Involved in the Emigration Process of Romanian Germans

In the context of the current debates on globalization, the limitation of people's right to free movement has become one of the main topics for interdisciplinary research. During the Cold War, the mirage of the West represented a great challenge to the communist authorities when dealing with its own citizens' desire to emigrate. The study deals with the interaction between the Romanian communist authorities, the foreign institutional actors involved, and the Romanian Germans as they sought to obtain approval for emigration in the period 1962–1989. The first part of the study investigates the functioning of the bureaucratic apparatus that controlled entrance and exit to and from Romania in the 1970s and 1980s, the transnational and local informal networks involved in this process in the case of the Romanian Germans, as well as its capturing by the Securitate, the secret police in communist Romania. The second part focuses on the narratives of the actors involved in these practices, especially on how Romanian Germans applying for emigration visas recall and perceive their experiences with Romanian state institutions, and the transnational and local networks. The study claims that, during the 1960s, the Romanian authorities adopted an instrumentalist approach to the process of issuing exit visas for Romanian citizens with German and Jewish nationality and transformed it into a source of Western currency. The informal practices of trafficking exit visas which involved local and transnational networks were adopted by the Securitate in its desperation to obtain Western currency to pay off the Romanian national debt.