CHAPTER 8

Quiet Aid

Barbara Schöfnagel's Private Humanitarianism in the Socialist Gray Area (and What Else the Global East Can Teach Us)

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In March 1988, a letter from West Germany reached Barbara Schöfnagel's home in Vienna. The sender, a medical student from Munich, Siegfried Gassner, wrote with an ambitious proposition: responding to the severe material shortages that had been reported from Romania under its socialist leader Nicolae Ceauşescu, Gassner and two colleagues intended to charter a vehicle and deliver baby food and other scarce essentials of daily living to families across the Iron Curtain. Unfamiliar with facilitating such an unlikely aid campaign into the socialist bloc, Gassner contacted Schöfnagel, the foremost authority on delivering aid to Romania at the time. Gassner hoped to learn from Schöfnagel about Romanian border policies, lodging, gas supply, and local contacts—"to keep it simple, everything one would need to know to organize such a trip," as he put it.[1] Such inquiries were not uncommon in Schöfnagel's buzzing mailbox, where nearly daily correspondences arrived through her far-flung network of private donors, émigré associations, church groups, and volunteers in Eastern Europe. Schöfnagel was a self-described folklore dancer, mother of four, community organizer, and, after 1989, a Viennese politician and social attaché of the Austrian government to Bulgaria and Romania. In the 1980s she was also a pioneering "private humanitarian" in a field that bore unique challenges, dangers, and risks in one of the lesser-known parts of the humanitarian world.

When Gassner sought Schöfnagel's advice in spring 1988, organizing humanitarian assistance to one of the socialist bloc's most authoritarian states was no small feat. The defining question determining the success and failure of any such campaign: Could any aid be delivered to a repressive political regime such as Romania, and if so, how? Behind the Iron Curtain, distinct challenges confronted private humanitarians like Schöfnagel (and aspiring ones like Gassner) that were unlike what aid workers encountered in the southern hemisphere. In such crisis zones, civil wars, military conflicts, and natural disasters set off large-scale displacements and caused immense loss of human life and material devastation. However, such cataclysmic events led less often to permanent embargoes or the removal of humanitarian organizations by local governments. In contrast, socialist states like Ceauşescu's Romania prohibited aid organizations from entering their territory—not for months or years, but decades. Such entry bans became indefinite barriers depriving humanitarian organizations of an elemental foundation for their work: unfettered mobility across national borders and autonomy to operate independently from the state. What made conditions in the socialist bloc different from the global South was also the relative stability of statehood during states of emergency. Few countries in Eastern Europe after 1945 plunged into domestic disarray (except for Czechoslovakia in 1968) or slid to the brink of institutional collapse (before the tremors of 1989). Instead, Ceauşescu's Romania and other socialist regimes wielded the power of their brute security apparatuses, chief among them their fortified border regimes and secret police, to restrict passage into the country for undesired visitors. Representatives of humanitarian organizations who managed, against all odds, to slip through border controls had only cleared the first stage of their dangerous journeys. Behind the Iron Curtain, the threat of running afoul of a massive surveillance machinery capable of tracing and persecuting them internally was constantly looming over them. In short, in the socialist bloc, there was no escaping the state.

Private humanitarians like Schöfnagel adapted to these political conditions by disassociating themselves from the field of international humanitarianism. During her remarkable forty-eight-year career as a private humanitarian, Schöfnagel was not affiliated with a Western aid organization or trained in what increasingly became a professionalized humanitarian field. Avoiding the cachet of a professional humanitarian was, in fact, one of Schöfnagel's recipes for success. In this, her work also differed operationally from prominent aid organizations in the global North that focused on building capacity, scaling up assistance, and mobilizing government and public support to fund their campaigns. Schöfnagel developed instead a wide array of community-based strategies and informal repertoires to make aid runs across Romania's heavily surveilled borders. Significantly, her activities remained no secret to the socialist state. Schöfnagel's campaigns often occurred in plain sight with detailed

knowledge of socialist officials and the secret police or *Securitate*. Schöfnagel's informal aid work thus offers insights into a peculiar form of informality that allowed her to evade capture by the Romanian authorities, not through techniques of deception and clandestine trafficking but through a practice of "graying." In Schöfnagel's aid giving, graying referred to the process of reworking a Western humanitarian format to the specific social norms governing socialism's societal structure, notably its "gray area." To ensure her assistance reached recipients across the Iron Curtain, the circumstances and organization of her aid work had to remain "quiet," as Schöfnagel put it.

Based on personal materials, memories, letters, and interviews with Schöfnagel, this chapter presents a rare view of an alternative humanitarianism in the socialist bloc. The discussion first elucidates what is meant by the socialist gray area and explains how Schöfnagel's practice of graying fit in. It then examines Schöfnagel's various tactics and assistance vehicles that combined cultural and material forms of care. Finally, the focus turns to Schöfnagel's campaigns under conditions of state surveillance and ends with the eventual collapse of her work shortly before the end of state socialism in the summer of 1989.

Above all, Schöfnagel's story demonstrates that "graying" was not a form of acquiescence to the restrictive policies of the Ceauşescu regime banning humanitarian organizations from operating in Romania. Graying her aid required Schöfnagel instead to preserve the appearance of compliance with socialism's social codes and render her campaigns legible to what state authorities deemed acceptable while pursuing her true agenda cautiously and deliberately. In this region of the world—the Second World as it was referred to until the end of the Cold War—where aid often occurred in such "quiet" ways, Schöfnagel's private humanitarianism transpired not as part of liberation struggles and postcolonial development as was common in the global South. It also did not occur within the framework of Western humanitarian organizations. Schöfnagel's was instead a humanitarianism sui generis at the margins of the international humanitarian regime. Her work straddled authoritarianism, Cold War geopolitics, and rusty Marxist welfare utopias in that liminal (yet vast) geographic region that, given its distinct characteristics, should be treated as a region in its own right, as the "Global East" of humanitarianism.[2]

Humanitarianism in the Gray Area

In the late 1980s, Gassner's exchange with Schöfnagel came on the heels of years of draconian austerity measures the Ceauşescu regime implemented to shore up the country's external loan repayments.[3] Trapped in an escalating debt spiral in the early 1980s, the Romanian state introduced bread rationing, sharply reducing the population's access to butter, corn, flour, milk, sugar, and

a lengthy list of essential consumer goods. Likewise, electricity, warm water, and gas were shut off without warning, sometimes twice daily. Medical supplies became sparse, and millions of apartments remained dark and unheated in the winter. In the words of Romanian historian Vlad Georgescu, the dire conditions of life amounted to a "bizarre process of demodernization . . . in a state that produced cars but banned driving, built housing developments but withheld heat and running water, announced that it had harvested the biggest grain crop in history but put its people on meager bread rations."[4]

Responding to Gassner's plan of delivering aid to Romania, Schöfnagel cautioned that border controls would thwart any attempt to transport aid into the country without careful preparation. Schöfnagel warned Gassner, "An aid trip is doomed to fail if it is recognized as such by border officials. It is possible that you will not be granted passage and will be banned from visiting in the future. I am familiar with such cases."[5] These obstacles notwithstanding, Schöfnagel offered some encouragement, adding that there existed viable methods of crossing borders. But, she insisted, Gassner had to follow the script that she would lay out for him. Schöfnagel instructed:

> If you want to help, you need to find the middle ground (that indefinite gray area in Romania) between the legal and illegal. You should travel as a "tourist." Should you carry a few extra items with you, such as foodstuffs, clothes, medicine, and travel literature, you can declare them for personal use. Of course, everything would have to be packed accordingly. You will be permitted to bring about 300 Deutsche Mark in gifts to Romania, but foodstuffs, medicine, and used clothes are prohibited from being given as gifts! Nobody will ask questions if you happen to "forget" some of your belongings in the country.[6]

Schöfnagel's reference to a gray area alluded to the sphere of informality in socialist societies, where citizens exchanged, traded, and obtained goods, favors, and services otherwise unavailable or hard to come by. The socialist gray area was not akin to a "black market" (in the Western sense), where citizens (or members of a mafia) would engage in smuggling and corrupt dealings to evade the law. Instead, it was part and parcel of the economic and social fabric of the system. Moreover, there was not just one gray-colored area but many areas in different shades of gray, stretching along and across society in varying tones and intensities. In a sense, everyone lived in the gray area, navigating it daily and in the full knowledge that the boundaries between "official" and "unofficial," "legal" and "illegal," were blurry and negotiable. Socialist state institutions, too, shaped and formed the gray area; they were built on a symbiotic web of informal exchanges and relationships that sustained state activity and economic life.[7]

Schöfnagel was cognizant that humanitarian campaigns had to adhere to the same logic of grayness. Western donors like Gassner, who wished to avoid

running afoul of the state's prohibition of foreign aid, had to adopt the social codes of the border. Graying his activities meant for Gassner to employ a tactic of making himself legible to the state under a different visitor category ("travel as a tourist") and reappropriate a range of repertoires to make his activities less conspicuous ("pack accordingly and forget something when you leave"). However, successful passage across the border was only the first step. Inside Romania, Schöfnagel advised, Gassner had to heed additional precautions to ensure that his campaign would not "do more harm than good." Her supplementary instructions included:

> The gasoline supply is unpredictable. . . . As a foreigner, you can purchase gasoline vouchers at the hotel (in exchange for Deutsche Mark). Therefore, you will not have to wait for days in those long lines in front of gas stations. However, I always advise people to tank gas very frequently and never run the tank down to the last drop. Gasoline stations often do not work, sometimes, they are out of gasoline, and you might not find supplies in every city. As a foreigner, you will be required to buy hotel vouchers in the West and find lodging in state-run hotels. It is *PROHIBITED* to stay with friends or acquaintances! In Transylvania, Protestant pastors will serve as contact persons. . . . You may ask them to take your goods and distribute them. Given the difficulties of transporting large quantities of foodstuffs across the border, I recommend that you only bring items unavailable in Romania (baby food, baking powder, pepper, margarine, butter, etc.). Everything else (flour, sugar, coffee, cocoa, salami, cheese, canned sausage) can be currently purchased in the intershops for foreigners in exchange for valuta. Of course, all of this would have to be done quietly and without drawing attention.[8]

What Schöfnagel's lengthy list revealed was the extent to which private humanitarians maneuvered a landscape of contingencies and certainties. The former group of arrangements, such as gasoline supplies, were difficult to control, but the latter could be reasonably found (and leveraged) during an assistance trip with the help of trusted middlemen willing to distribute provisions (e.g., Protestant pastors). Interspersed throughout were fluid risk factors dependent on domestic supply chain conditions affecting the availability of foodstuffs and consumer items as well as shifting state regulations. Like Gassner, those aspiring to become private humanitarians had to acquire knowledge and expertise about navigating border passage and state laws under changing conditions. Graying one's work thus involved gaining deep familiarity with the prevailing social codes in Romania and learning how to tap local networks and middlemen. Graying also included knowledge of how to avoid drawing the attention of Romania's secret police, the *Securitate*, which employed one of the largest bodies of informants and spies in the socialist bloc. Schöfnagel's warning that Gassner could do "more harm than good" highlighted the possibility of drawing the *Securitate*'s attention, with the associated risks and dangers to one's safety and that of one's collaborators if identified as a "hostile element."

Armed with Schöfnagel's instructions, did Gassner succeed? In correspondence from 31 March 1988, Gassner agreed to reconnect with Schöfnagel once his plans matured to the point of readiness. After this last communication, Gassner's traces disappear in Schöfnagel's personal collection, leaving little indication of whether his operation was ultimately successful—or if it ever materialized. Despite its incompleteness, the Gassner-Schöfnagel exchange offers a glimpse into the cross-pollinating connections among private humanitarians. Experienced practitioners like Schöfnagel shared their lay expertise with novices like Gassner, and through such informal networks, a transnational landscape of loosely connected and decentralized private humanitarian campaigns spread in Cold War Europe. Importantly, this exchange also highlights how Schöfnagel's work hinged on her ability to gauge where the socialist gray area began—and where it ended. In regard to humanitarian assistance, this gray area had a threshold, a delimitating boundary within which it was possible to coordinate aid "quietly" and "from person to person," as Schöfnagel described it. Likewise, Schöfnagel's ability to move across the Iron Curtain depended on a range of tactics, such as Trojan horse maneuvers and a sprawling network of private donors that funded her aid campaigns over the years. For almost two decades, her aid activities operated in plain sight of the state yet below the official threshold of the socialist gray area that international organizations failed to clear as they continuously ran up against the Ceaușescu regime's prohibition of foreign aid.

Humanitarianism Disguised as Folklore and Cultural Tourism

How did the career of one of the Cold War's most remarkable private humanitarians begin? Barbara-Wiebke "Bärbel" Schöfnagel, was born to Walter and Luise-Margarete Mückstein in Vienna in 1948. After completing her school education, Schöfnagel joined her parents' family business and worked as a dental assistant from 1967 to 1973. In this period, Schöfnagel also married her husband Dieter, with whom she had four children. Alongside managing her growing family, Schöfnagel followed her vocational interests in accounting, dance instruction, and tourism, and she stoked a keen interest in the associational life of folklore and youth gymnastics groups in Vienna. In the summer of 1970, Schöfnagel was suddenly thrust into the humanitarian arena. During a massive flooding event in Romania, a third of the nation's territory was inundated by waves of excess water and deadly mud cascading from the Carpathian Mountains into the Romanian lowlands. Large-scale destruction followed, and hundreds of thousands of residents lost their homes in the floods. At the margins of a burgeoning international relief campaign, a wave of private solidarity initiatives appeared across Central Europe. In Austria and West Germany, private citizens supported the relief efforts through donations, care packages, and

volunteer expeditions into the afflicted areas.[9] Schöfnagel joined in, inspired by her aunt's initiative to send packages from West Germany to Transylvania, a historical region in Central Romania. Like many other volunteers, Schöfnagel mobilized her local network of friends and acquaintances, and through a concerted effort, ten truckloads worth of clothes, foodstuffs, and household goods were collected for Transylvania. After the flood of 1970, Schöfnagel was spurred back into action on two more occasions. In 1975, a second flood hit Romania, and in 1977, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the Romanian capital city of Bucharest, prompting Schöfnagel again to fundraise on behalf of the country's disaster victims.

In the late 1970s, Schöfnagel's work pivoted toward cultural tourism and assistance in Transylvania at the community level, which would later transform into her signature assistance campaign "Stille Hilfe nach Siebenbürgen" (quiet aid to Transylvania). Early activities were organized through the Volkstanzkreis Schönbrunn, a folklore ensemble for traditional Austrian music, dance, and singing. Formed in 1974 by the Schöfnagels to cultivate Austrian folklore at home and abroad, the Volkstanzkreis staged performances in Vienna, and soon, trips followed to the Eastern bloc countries of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. In Transylvania, the Schöfnagels focused their efforts on introducing Austrian folklore to the community of Romania's German minority of Transylvanian Saxons.[10] This cultural exchange program occurred against the backdrop of deteriorating conditions for Romania's ethnic Germans (as well as the Hungarian and Jewish minorities) under the weight of the regime's Romanization efforts in the 1970s. Schöfnagel's visits thus coincided with an emergent wave of advocacy of Western émigré and refugee groups rallying around the threatened minority status of Romania's German community. Unlike many such groups, Schöfnagel's work did not pursue a revisionist or ethno-nationalist mission but sought to preserve Transylvanian heritage through material support and cultural exchange.

In 1978 and 1979, two visits with her Volkstanzkreis culminated in well-received performances in the Transylvanian city of Sibiu. Schöfnagel wrote of the first tour, "Our goal was to visit the country and understand the people and their problems. We organized a night of folklore (*Volkstumsabend*), where we performed folk songs, dances, and music. Through our dancing and singing, we forged a bond with the locals and began understanding the problems of the German population."[11] Above all, these personal encounters in Sibiu left a lasting impression on Schöfnagel. "I developed a deep fascination for the country and its traditional way of life, while the plight of its people touched me deeply," she recalled. "Since that time, it became impossible to tear myself away from this country."[12]

Upon her return from Sibiu in July 1978, Schöfnagel resolved to help the Transylvanian Saxons, many of whom, she worried, could not sustain their cul-

tural heritage amid growing ethnic discrimination and economic hardship. As a result, Schöfnagel collected books and materials on German folklore as well as empty cassettes to record lectures on Austrian folklore dances for instructional use in Transylvania. To accomplish the twin task of cultural and material support, Schöfnagel organized a fundraiser among friends and members of her Volkstanzkreis. Donations received through this initiative included books, clothes, household goods, music tapes, and shoes, which Schöfnagel sold in a flea market in Vienna to support the campaign financially. She said, "With the money, we bought embroidery material, music sheets for brass bands, baby food, medicine, Kent cigarettes (for bribing), and everything difficult to get or unavailable."[13] In Schöfnagel's campaign, concerns over the cultural preservation of Germaneness (*Deutschtum*) in the East mingled with material provisioning to help sustain ethnic life in Transylvania. This dual effort was tailored to the needs of Romania's German minority, becoming the modus operandi of Schöfnagel's work henceforth.

Interfering in Romania's fraught minority politics was not without risks, and Schöfnagel recognized that the regime had little appetite to allow organized transfers of foreign aid in support of the ethnic Germans—or the population as a whole. In a communiqué to donors and supporters, Schöfnagel noted, "[The] Romanian state rejects any official/organized aid. The explanation is that everything is available in Romania, and no foreign aid is needed. Therefore, any support must give the impression that it is between private citizens in Austria on behalf of private citizens in Romania."[14] As a result, Schöfnagel's campaigns were tethered to person-to-person exchanges, and they had to be done "quietly." The implications of this form of gray-area maneuvering were clear, as Schöfnagel pointed out to her donors in Vienna: "My activities are not supported by an association or official organization, for I worry that should my work come to the attention of Romanian authorities, they will not permit this kind of aid."[15] Thus, Stille Hilfe was born. The general premise of Schöfnagel's "quiet" work in the socialist gray area—mobilize private donors in Austria and funnel aid through informal channels in Transylvania—went nearly unchanged for the remainder of the socialist period.

Schöfnagel's Stille Hilfe encompassed various forms of assistance, and over time, her campaigns adapted to evolving local needs. Against the backdrop of continued austerity measures that had battered the population since the early 1980s, her assistance turned to the most elementary needs of daily living. Schöfnagel explained, "At the beginning, our focus was more on cultural aid. Since 1981, food provisioning has moved to the center of our work because the country's economic supply chains have broken down. For instance, at the moment, milk, milk powder, or baby food for newborns are unavailable."[16] One of Schöfnagel's assistance vehicles consisted of gift packages that provisioned recipients directly with a wide assortment of essential goods. Schöfnagel also

frequently mobilized her Austrian donor community to send packages to acquaintances, friends, and anonymous recipients in Transylvania. Over the years, her Viennese home served as a transit point from where volunteers helped send tens of thousands of aid packages to Romania. To disguise these exchanges, Schöfnagel developed the following tactics:

> I bought groceries with our family bus. In my living room, older women gathered and filled out the consignment notes in different fonts and for the different groups of recipients. The recipients were local persons of trust, and the senders were the respective donors [in Austria]. Younger volunteers packed the food parcels. Every package contained different packaging (for instance, we did not use the same kind of margarine). We used different package boxes, different colors for the wrapping paper, and different cords that we tied differently every time. This way, the parcels did not immediately stand out as "organized" packages. In the beginning, I brought about 10–12 parcels (always only 2 per district) to the post office every day to ensure they did not arrive at the same time.[17]

However, Schöfnagel was keenly aware that aid through packages alone would yield unsatisfactory results. High postal and customs fees, lengthy delivery times, loss, theft, and arbitrary handling by Romanian officials introduced many uncertainties. Thus, in the early 1980s, cultural tourism became Schöfnagel's primary vehicle for assistance. Educational travel excursions, or *Studienreisen*, brought groups of Austrian and West German tourists to select destinations in Transylvania several times per year. Schöfnagel's visits focused on historical sites where remnants of German culture were still visible and alive, as in the cities of Braşov, Mediaş, Sibiu, Sighişoara, and other destinations. There, members of Schöfnagel's travel groups discovered and experienced Transylvanian history, art, folklore, and cuisine in intimate new ways.[18] Alongside visits to picturesque Transylvanian towns, the contacts forged between Schöfnagel's Western travel groups and the local German community bore distinctly preservationist aspects. Through these encounters, friendly relationships were created, which transformed, in some cases, into enduring friendships that, over the years, became new conduits for person-to-person assistance across the Iron Curtain and served to maintain German cultural heritage, *Deutschtum*, in the East.[19]

In a period of restricted mobility and geopolitical division, Schöfnagel's *Studienreisen* (averaging seventeen tours annually between 1979 and 1989) offered a welcome opportunity for cultural contact, but they also served an alternate purpose. Notably, under the veneer of *Studienreisen*, a second layer of activities—a system of private assistance—lurked. Schöfnagel developed and refined her methods over the years, resulting in Trojan horse tactics that mingled her preservationist vision of cultural support for the Transylvanian Saxons with her strategic, if "quiet," campaigns of bringing assistance into the country. To ensure that aid provisions were moved across borders without state inter-

ference, Schöfnagel oversaw all aspects of border crossings, including "packing supplies the right way," as she put it. Schöfnagel explained the procedure:

> In my private home in Vienna, we stockpiled everything people in Romania needed, including clothing, household goods, foodstuffs, medicine, light bulbs, tools, baby supplies, and much more. In addition, I collected old suitcases, where I neatly packed these items as part of our "holiday luggage." Tour members were only allowed to bring one piece of luggage and one personal bag for clothes and travel items. Everything else was stowed away in clever ways in the bus. We were able to load up to 70 suitcases (clothing, hygiene items, light bulbs, matches, candles, Kent cigarettes, medication, a Bible, shoes, and much more) inside the bus. Under each seat, we placed a box with foodstuffs—supposedly for personal use. We filled the nets in front of each seat with books—supposedly our travel literature. Coats, jackets, and rain gear were piled up on the hat rack. The 1/2 liter tetra pack milk was not only suitable for personal consumption, but I also hid Lei [Romania's foreign currency] in these packets in a laborious process.[20]

Romanian state borders were infamous for coercive controls and invasive scrutiny of visitors. Travelers often found themselves at the mercy of state officials, making improper gestures, misspoken words, or unsanctioned behavior grounds for expulsion, entry bans, or worse. State officials were notorious for searching for illegal goods, including bibles, drugs, weapons, and political material. However, carrying large quantities of licit items into the country could cause problems as well, since state authorities also persecuted individuals engaged in illegal trading schemes. As a result, Schöfnagel had to keep excessive quantities of scarce goods to a minimum to mask the true extent of her aid provisions. "Packing correctly," thus, required that supplies be dispersed into equal amounts among Schöfnagel's tour members.

This tactic of diffusion notwithstanding, the passage at state borders remained difficult, and there Schöfnagel's Trojan horse had to do most of the work. As Schöfnagel frequently traveled to Romania, she began to adopt border tactics to build rapport with state officials. Before entering a border station with a tour bus, Schöfnagel would inform her travel group in detail about the border procedures. This occurred while the tour bus was still in Hungary. Once the tour had arrived at the Romanian border, Schöfnagel would instruct her travel group to put on a jovial and relaxed attitude, sing songs, and project cheerfulness. Schöfnagel also prepared small gift baskets for the commandants of border stations, insisting that her "small attentions" were not bribes and that they be given in "broad daylight" to ensure that all border personnel witnessed the procedure. Such ceremonious gift deliveries were part and parcel of a ritual dance between Schöfnagel and state officials, resembling, not incidentally, the decorum of diplomatic exchanges. Schöfnagel's border gifts were calculated gestures that established familiarity between her and border officials and honored the "good work relations" between both sides. Schöfnagel noted:

> Border controls were lengthy, complicated, and could only be managed through the cooperation of all travelers. . . . We never bribed customs officials. I always prepared a little attention with "Greetings from Vienna" that included a lipstick, a large bar of chocolate, tropical fruits, female tights, and other assortments. At the end of the year, I sometimes delivered a gift basket with tropical fruits to the entire border station—as an attention from our tourist bureau for the good cooperation. . . .[21]

Once the travel group had arrived at its destination in Transylvania, tour members were given the opportunity to meet with family and friends to exchange supplies. Those without personal contacts could leave consumer items behind or, as Schöfnagel put it, "forget" them with curators, pastors, and neighborhood elders who organized distribution in their communities. With the worsening supply situation in the late 1980s, Schöfnagel rounded out her assistance vehicles by purchasing large quantities of foodstuffs and consumer goods in Romania's "intershops" directly. Such consumer stores were common in the socialist bloc, offering the exceedingly few customers with access to foreign currency a wide assortment of scarce luxury goods. The ability to procure daily essentials locally (e.g., butter, cheese, flour, sugar, and coffee) became a cost-effective method for Schöfnagel to funnel aid to communities in need, but it also moved a significant part of her logistics directly under the nose of the Romanian authorities.

Below the Threshold: Humanitarianism under Conditions of State Surveillance

As her tactics grew more and more brazen, Schöfnagel was surprisingly able to continue her assistance campaigns. In fact, the *Securitate* recruited numerous informants over the years to obtain intelligence about Schöfnagel's activities, beginning with her visit to Sibiu with her Volkstanzkreis as early as 1978. Alarmed by the unannounced arrival of the Volkstanzkreis, the *Securitate* dispatched an informant with the codename "Mihai Boboc" to collect information about Schöfnagel.[22] His investigations revealed that Schöfnagel's entourage planned to perform a folklore program in Sibiu and visit the city and its surroundings. "Boboc's" information gathering painted a granular picture of Schöfnagel's private meetings, personal conversations, group activities, and a car accident with a pedestrian in which Schöfnagel was involved. Although, for the first time, a connection was established between Schöfnagel and her aunt's aid campaigns during the floods of 1970 and 1975, there was little indication that the regime considered these activities undesirable.[23]

Subsequent visits to Transylvania provided further opportunity for the *Securitate* to assemble a detailed profile of Schöfnagel. Some *Securitate* sources described her as a "very punctual, strict, and disciplined" person who did "not

tolerate discussions" in her travel group.[24] Other sources claimed that Schöfnagel was a "stingy woman" who seemed to engage in "cult-like" activities with her Austrian travel groups.[25] At the hotel "Bulevard" in Sibiu, where Schöfnagel regularly booked lodging, informant "Magda" gathered information for the *Securitate* for nearly seven years. About a visit at "Bulevard" in 1987, where Schöfnagel was accompanied by her husband Dieter, "Magda" communicated to Bucharest:

> Mr. Schöfnagel, a very quiet man, follows what he is asked to do regarding room selections. Because he works very well with the Romanian tour guide, the program follows Bucharest's suggestions. When Ms. Schöfnagel is in charge, things are different. She takes care of accommodations and meals, and she knows exactly what the group needs. She is a very authoritative woman with a strong personality, intelligent, and quick. When the reception assigns her a room, she will either not take it or take it and come back later to ask for a different room. She is very attentive and polite but remains distant. She does not cross boundaries and wastes no time in conversations with anyone.[26]

The suspicion in "Magda's" reports was not uncommon for informants and spies in the period. The institutional culture of the *Securitate* was driven by the directive to assess, anticipate, and uncover the "hidden agendas" and false identities of potential regime foes.[27] As a result, "Magda's" remarks about Schöfnagel were in line with the "truths" the *Securitate*'s surveillance apparatus was to unearth and indeed *produce*. In spite of her growing dossier, Schöfnagel's motivations remained elusive to the *Securitate*. Assessments of her persona shifted from observations alleging that Schöfnagel sought to forge connections to ethnic German intellectuals (most of whom were known regime critics) to favorable remarks about her cautious, law-abiding behavior that suggested she was careful to avoid conflicts with Romanian authorities.[28] The difficulty in pinning down what was behind Schöfnagel's continued interest in Transylvania eventually prompted the *Securitate* to extend its surveillance deeper into her private life. On several occasions, informant "Haralambie" reported visits of *Securitate* spies to Schöfnagel's home. In 1980, an informant observing Schöfnagel during a visit to Vienna noted Schöfnagel's disdain for domestic labor and the unorthodox gender regime in her family: "Although she is a housewife, her sense of running a household is very questionable. She said that she spent a lot of time building her new house. In the family, she makes the decisions. Her husband is very quiet."[29]

As part of the *Securitate*'s expanding surveillance of Schöfnagel, her assistance campaigns, too, moved increasingly into focus. During her visits in the early 1980s, informants observed that Schöfnagel donated clothes to the poor and brought foodstuffs into the country. Subsequent investigations revealed that she donated money to the elderly and compiled lists of people she prom-

ised to help.[30] Likewise, members of her travel groups were reported to the authorities for passing along packages with clothes, consumer items, and foodstuffs to acquaintances, relatives, and the needy.[31] In 1981, informant "Claudia Ştefanescu" noted that she had participated in one of Schöfnagel's tour programs and helped distribute assistance to large families in the cities of Sibiu and Mediaş. The "Ştefanescu" report provided the *Securitate* with private addresses and names of recipients, offering the most detailed insight into Schöfnagel's Stille Hilfe in the early 1980s.[32] In later years, informants confirmed that the main purpose of Schöfnagel's visits was to supply Protestant parishes with assistance for the needy. Yet, despite the mounting evidence about Schöfnagel's work, the regime did not intervene.

In a sudden change of events in June 1989, Schöfnagel's ability to keep her work "quiet" came to an end. During her summer tour to Transylvania, she was informed at the Romanian border that the state had declared her a persona non grata. What prompted the surprise indictment? The exact circumstances remain blurry, but to understand the change in state attitude, it is useful to recall the notion of threshold. Despite the often undefined and porous boundaries between legal and illegal in socialism's gray area, there existed a clear distinction between desired and undesired forms of foreign aid. While international organizations were prohibited from delivering assistance, the Romanian regime exempted small-scale assistance from person to person that remained free of Western government involvement. For nearly two decades, Schöfnagel followed these informal rules by "graying" her work. This threshold, however, was breached when the Austrian state extended its support to Schöfnagel in 1988. In light of dramatic economic hardship in Romania, the Transylvanian Saxon émigré association (*Landsmannschaft*) and members of the Freedom Party (FPÖ) successfully petitioned the government to match private donations supporting humanitarian initiatives for the German community. As a result, the working group of the *Landsmannschaft*, where Schöfnagel led and coordinated her campaigns to Transylvania, gained a new statute as a government-backed charitable organization, with Schöfnagel becoming its de facto director.[33]

The success of this initiative was resounding. In a donor communiqué in July 1989, Schöfnagel announced that the infusion of government funding had significantly expanded her campaign's financial clout and allowed her to help more recipients in Transylvania than ever before, a matter that grew increasingly urgent in the terminal days of the Ceauşescu regime. This accomplishment notwithstanding, the travel ban against her in the summer of 1989 demonstrated that to assist communities in need, the appearance of compliance with the socialist state's restrictions against organized foreign aid still had to be maintained. For those with the requisite expertise of how to gray their activities, possibilities abounded to move assistance "quietly" across borders,

as Schöfnagel's Stille Hilfe had for many years. For those who stepped outside the gray area by appearing to conspire with foreign governments, as Schöfnagel eventually did, the Iron Curtain came crashing down.

Epilogue

By dint of luck, Schöfnagel's travel ban ended with the regime's collapse only a few months later in December 1989. However, Schöfnagel's story and many other similar episodes of private humanitarianism in the socialist period were forgotten decades after the end of the Cold War. The reasons were manifold. New maps divided the post–Cold War world into "Global North" and "Global South," and with them, humanitarian practices in the Global East like Schöfnagel's, which had existed neither in the archetypical "Western" or "non-Western" contexts, disappeared from view. Ironically, despite its evident biases and flaws, the outdated earlier three-worlds model had recognized a degree of complexity that got lost after the end of the Cold War. Lost was the history of private humanitarians like Schöfnagel, who grayed their work to maneuver Cold War divisions and authoritarian state power in a region that belonged to neither North nor South. Lost also was that the socialist welfare utopia in some socialist states like Romania was an object of humanitarian intervention long before its collapse due to a relentless push for austerity. The main protagonists of these assistance networks were not Western governments and international relief agencies. They were instead ordinary people like Schöfnagel, who traversed the continent's geopolitical divides and moved aid across borders "quietly"—a difficult if not impossible task for humanitarian organizations after 1945. Finally, lost was a sense that under authoritarian rule keeping humanitarian campaigns informal was a necessary tactic for Schöfnagel and other private humanitarians, who leveraged their lay expertise to advance their work through culturally resonant forms of rapport building and an arsenal of evolving and layered assistance vehicles and Trojan horse tactics. By adopting a Western aid format to the social arrangements of the socialist bloc, Schöfnagel and many private humanitarians like her expanded the possibilities for transnational care in Cold War Eastern Europe.

What becomes evident from Schöfnagel's story is that reappraising humanitarianism beyond the West also requires thinking deeply about how much the standard North-South binary obscures our knowledge of humanitarian gray practices and the social worlds their practitioners inhabited that lay outside or in between these two spheres. In our current geopolitical moment with its resurgent authoritarian East, this consideration should prompt an ever more urgent search for new global maps where the staggering diversity of humanitarian practices is more fully recognized.

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Notes

1. Barbara Schöfnagel's correspondence with Siegfried Gassner, 11 March 1988, in Barbara-Wiebke Schöfnagel, private material collection, Vienna (hereafter referenced as *SPMC*).
2. The term "Global East" is borrowed from Martin Müller in "In Search of the Global East," 734–55.
3. Capotescu, Sanchez-Sibony, and Teixeira, "Austerity without Neoliberals."
4. Georgescu, *Romanians*, 272.
5. Schöfnagel's correspondence with Gassner, *SPMC*.
6. Schöfnagel's correspondence with Gassner, *SPMC*.
7. See Kochanowski, *Jenseits der Planwirtschaft*.
8. Schöfnagel's correspondence with Gassner, *SPMC*.
9. Capotescu, "Migrants into Humanitarians," 293–312.
10. Romania's German community consisted of several ethnic subgroups, with the Saxons representing the largest among them; see Koranyi and Wittlinger, "From Diaspora to Diaspora," 96–115.
11. Letter Schöfnagel (Juli 1978), *SPMC*.
12. Schöfnagel, "1970–2000—30 jähre Hilfstätigkeit" (Mai 2000), *SPMC*.
13. Unpublished memoir, "Meine Hilfsmaßnahmen Richtung Rumänien/Siebenbürgen aus dem Gedächtnis von Barbara (Bärbel) Schöfnagel in Stichworten von 1970 bis 1990" (16 May 2016), *SPMC*.
14. Letter Schöfnagel to Reinhard Rosenbusch (3 September 1988), *SPMC*.
15. Letter Schöfnagel (Juli 1978), *SPMC*.
16. Letter Schöfnagel to Reinhard Rosenbusch.
17. Schöfnagel, "Meine Hilfemaßnahmen," *SPMC*.
18. Schöfnagel, "Siebenbürgenreise 910," *SPMC*.
19. See Koranyi and Wittlinger, "From Diaspora to Diaspora," 96–115.
20. Schöfnagel, "Meine Hilfsmaßnahmen," *SPMC*.
21. Interview with Barbara Schöfnagel, Vienna, 13 May 2017.
22. Securitate file on Schöfnagel (3 July 1978), *SPMC*.
23. Securitate file on Schöfnagel (4 July and 6 July 1978), *SPMC*.
24. Securitate file on Schöfnagel (29 April 1985), *SPMC*.
25. Securitate file on Schöfnagel (2 May 1988), *SPMC*.
26. Securitate file on Schöfnagel (27 September 1987), *SPMC*.
27. Verdery, *My Life as a Spy*.
28. Securitate file on Schöfnagel. Report filed by officers Balici and Smaranda (undated), *SPMC*.
29. Ibid. (6 November 1980), *SPMC*.

30. Ibid. (5 February 1988), *SPMC*.
31. Ibid. (2 October 1980), *SPMC*.
32. Ibid. (5 March 1981), *SPMC*.
33. Schöfnagel, materials Transylvanian Saxon Working Group (*Arbeitskreis*) from December 1988 and July 1989, *SPMC*.

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