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Wandering lives: a case study of ethnic and cultural self-identification discourses of two adult cross-cultural kids from a family of Transylvanian Saxons

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a case study of two adult cross-cultural kids (ACCK's) from a family of Saxons that emigrated from Romania during communist period. They had what we call a wandering life before resettling as adults in Romania. The objective of the paper is to present and analyse how the ethnic and cultural self-identification discourse of the two is constructed and its modulations between a primordial stance and a contextual one.

Introduction

Transylvanian Saxons are one of the German-speaking ethnic groups living in Romania. They were, for about 8 centuries, one of the four (Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons and Szeklers) main ethnic groups living in Transylvania, having, for most of the period, a privileged status. Their decline as a

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community most likely started at the end of the XIXth century and reached its heights at the end of XXth century (see Verdery 1985; Cercel 2011; Korany and Wittlinger 2011). Our paper comes to add to the current body of research about this community, describing the status of the Saxon identity from a very special perspective. It is addressing the ethnic and cultural self-identification process of two 'return' migrants born in a Saxon family that emigrated from Romania during the communist period. They have experienced migration, with their family, at very early stages in their life (4 months respectively 3 years) and during their childhood to adulthood transition have gained an extensive international migration experience. We frame this experience as a wandering life because each of them moved and lived successively, for longer or shorter periods, in more than four countries.

Even though we start by introducing some preliminary notions about Saxons and their identity as an ethnic group in Romania, we are not primarily concerned in the empirical part of the paper with the collective levels a priori defined as such. Instead our focus is the narrative of the cultural, ethnic and national self-identifications of two returned migrants from a Saxon family. We seek to find out how ethnic identifications and cultural boundaries come to existence and are considered relevant by the two ACCKs (adult cross-cultural kids) while paying attention to the modulations they make between primordial sentiments and contextualized perspectives.

The paper is structured as such: a short story of the construction of an ethnic identity of the Saxon communities in Transylvania at a collective level, succeeded by a section dedicated to their downsizing and quasi-dissolution. We consider that section necessary for a reader to understand the context of the return migration process of the cases we discuss. It follows a part introducing the theoretical and methodological approach and the presentation of the cases. The paper ends with some conclusions and implications for future research.

Identity of Transylvanian Saxons: the sources of a collective identity and community building processes

Transylvanian Saxons are a German speaking population, invited by the Hungarian Kings, to colonize parts of Transylvania (designated as Crown Lands) starting with the twelfth century. In exchange they were granted with individual and collective political, administrative, juridical, religious autonomy, in addition to economic freedom and commercial and trading privileges (Nägler 2003). However, the colonists did not arrive in large numbers and their ethnic, cultural-linguistic and geographic origin was rather scattered (Gündisch 1998). Among the first settlers there were not only Saxons but also Flanders, Latins, Walloons and Teutons. The term "Saxons", designating in fact various groups of colonists, started to be used in official documents of the Hungarian court at the beginning of the thirteenth century and, by the end of the fifteenth century, became a generalized ethnonym for the descendants of these settlers (see Philippi 1995, 131). According to Gündisch (1998), the term was rather used in Medieval Hungary to denote a legal, privileged status that was initially obtained by the Saxon miners and that all colonists across the kingdom could pursue. Therefore, in the beginnings, the term was rather used to designate a social class but not a specific ethnic group.

From the beginning of the fifteenth century (i.e. when a mutual aid pact, known as *Fraterna Unio*, was established with the Hungarian nobility and Szeklers) the Saxons living on the Crown Lands were recognized as one of the three "nations" from Transylvania. Nevertheless, term Saxon still did not designate an ethnic nation, but a corporative "nation", a privileged class, mostly living in towns, adhering to a set of specific social and cultural values (Gündisch 1998). However, this recognition constituted a significant aspect of the Saxon's collective identity building process since the agreement laid an important foundation for the institutional, religious and legal framework of the autonomous Principality of Transylvania (Nägler 2003).

By the end of the fifteenth century another important progress has been marked by the privileged class of Saxons: a political, judicial and

administrative body of the Transylvanian Saxons communities settled on the Crown Lands, *Universitas Saxonum,* was established and officially recognized. For the next four centuries, this institution became the main instrument of social, political, religious and cultural integration of the otherwise geographically disconnected 'Saxon towns' from Transylvania. It successfully implemented, following the model of the German cities, similar civic and corporate norms and practices, fostering a sense of community and German belongingness. The guilds and historical commerce connections with German towns also played an important role to this. By the end of the sixteenth century German was used in churches and schools and youths were sent to study in Protestant universities in Germany (Gündisch 1998) or for apprenticeship in German towns. Besides the *Universitas Saxonum*, the church played an important role in building a common Transylvanian Saxon's identity. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Evangelic-Lutheran confession and associated religious norms were imposed, with the full support of *Universitas Saxonum* and the civic self-governing bodies, in the 'Saxons towns' and communities. Progressively, religious belonging and 'nationality' became synonyms (Gündisch 1998). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while Transylvania was a quasi-autonomous Principality, the Saxon "nation" consolidated its position. Both the *Universitas Saxonum* and Lutheran Church had decisive contributions to the creation, and extension over a broader community, of a Transylvanian Saxon's self-consciousness and a remote German identification.

The *Universitas Saxonum* and the privileged status of the Saxons in Transylvania lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century, despite the geopolitical changes (e.g. the Wallachian and Moldavian rule 1599-1600; incorporation of Transylvania into the Habsburg empire in 1691) that occurred until then (see Nägler 1979; Gündisch 1998; Philippi 2008; Nägler 2003). However, the Josephinian reforms, taken at the end of the eighteenth century, weakened the status of the Saxons and gradually the corporative meaning of the term "nation" was enriched with ethnic significance.

The upturns of history in the revolutionary nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century contributed further to the conversion of the Saxons as "political nation" (Brubaker et al. 2006) to an ethnic nation. After the creation of the Hungarian kingdom (1867) and the final dissolution of the Universitas Saxonum (1876), the Lutheran Church played the main role in the construction and preservation of a collective Transylvanian Saxon's identity and German belongingness. (Philippi 1995, 147-148). The Magyarization efforts amplified the connections Saxons already had with Germany and the Germanness feelings (Philippi 1995, 147). Between the moment of incorporation of Transylvania in Romania (1918) and the end of the 1920s and early 1930s, the Lutheran Church maintained its central position within the Saxon community contributing to the development of an idealist German cultural and religious appurtenance (Philippi 1995, 148). The role of the Church started to fade away in the 1930s when political groups outside it were formed. They promoted the nationalist-socialist ideals of the German state and a pan-German identification, became central (Philippi 1995; Cercel 2011).

German speaking populations in Romania: downsizing and community dissolution in the XXth century

At the beginning of the XXth century, in Transylvania and the surrounding districts (Banat - Crişana, Maramureş, Bukovina) were living not only Saxons but also other German speaking populations (e.g. Schwabs, Landlers, Zipsers). Official statistics report them all together under the label of German ethnics. The label show on one hand the awareness of the identity building processes and the central identifications of these communities. On the other hand, both the Hungarian and the new Romanian state prove an integrative approach most likely generated by both internal (e.g. state building processes) and external drivers (e.g. geopolitical relevance of Germany)

Records ascribe German ethnicity to 565.116 people in 1910 and to 544.278 people in 1930. Numbers represent, in each year, about 10% of the population of Transylvania (Livezeanu 1995, 135). That suggest the

unification from 1918 with the Old Kingdom of Romania, Bessarabia and Bukovina did not have a major consequence on the size of the German speaking populations living in Transylvania. In the same year (1930), the number of German ethnics living in Greater Romania was 633.488 (4,4% of the population) according to Romanian Census data (INS 2011).

The first abrupt downsizing of the German ethnic populations occurred during the WWII. While in January 1940, the number of German ethnics living in Romania is estimated to 782.283 people (Traşcă 2019, 114), in 1945 only 400.000 are still reported (Baier 2019, 151). From the end of the WWII until 1989, the decrease continued but at a slower pace. While in 1956 the number of German ethnics living in Romania was 384.708 (INS, 2011), in 1989 estimations speak about a figure between 200.000 - 220.000 people (Ingenhoven 2003, 16 apud Munz and Ohlinger, 1997; Wolff and Cordell 2003, 111; Ursprung 2015, 13). For the whole period between 1950 and 1989, Worbs et al. (2013: 31) report a total number of 242.322 immigrants of German origin from Romania. The figures they report are, however, different from those reported by the Romanian authorities, the latter being systematically lower (see Anghel and Gheorghiu 2019, 333). Therefore, both should be treated with caution. On the one hand data reported by Worbs et al. (2013) include both ascribed and achieved German ethnicity. They include, for example, members of German immigrants' families having a different ethnicity but that were considered German ethnics by provision of the German immigration laws. On the other hand, unregistered emigration and policies of the communist regime might be other reasons of different data.

A second steep decrease happened between 1990 and 1992, when 159.488 immigrants of German origin are registered in Germany. To this number, another 23.229 are added by 1997, according to Worbs et al. (2013, 32). For the entire period between 1950 and 1997 Münz and Ohliger (2000, 320) estimate about 472.000 immigrants of German origin from Romania. On the other hand, Romanian Census data show a decrease of 348.666 persons between 1956 and 2011 (INS 2011).

The figures reported above, even disputable, clearly illustrate the process of downsizing of the German speaking population in Transylvania and Romania, during the 20th century. They point out by themselves towards a quasi-disappearance of the once highly relevant German ethnic populations' communities from Romania.

Apart from them at least two important and interesting processes pointing towards the dissolution of communities worth to be mentioned. The first one refers to the immediate period after the WWII. The second one refers to gradual changes of family composition.

Studies point out that, in addition to the population decrease, the Communist Agrarian Reform of March 1945 brought an important adjustment of the socio-economic status of the German speaking populations living in Transylvania. An estimated number of 154.500 households (out of which 34.500 Saxons' households) – homes, farms - were nationalized. The expropriation of the households accompanied by the capital confiscation, businesses and private/confessional education system nationalization that took place in the next years, hugely impacted the welfare of the German ethnics and their social and cultural independence (Poledna 2019, 255-25; Gheorghiu 2019). These policies implemented at the end of the WW2, by the communist regime, conducted to gradual disintegration of the economic, educational, civic and cultural systems constructed during the centuries by the German speaking populations and generated, according to Gheorghiu (2019, 198), a "collective trauma" that played a major role in the subsequent emigration decisions.

In what concerns the ethnic composition of the families, Poledna (2019) observes an important change taking place in time. He observes that German ethnic communities, that were traditionally endogamous, increasingly accepted mixed marriages. Thus, in the 80s the share of mixed marriages is estimated at about 50%. Immediately after 1989, official data (Romanian Census from 1992), point out that the majority of German families (about 55%) were in fact mixed ethnically and confessional (Poledna 2019, 267-268), in most of these cases one of the husbands being either Romanian or Hungarian.

That brings about the issue of children's identification which are raised in multilinguistic and multicultural families and that most likely develop different social and cultural identities than their German ethnic parent.

Referring to the situation of the German communities during socialism, Verdery (1985) speaks about a phenomenon of ethnic demobilisation. In her opinion, the German identification became less public, less visible and more individualised. From a different perspective, analysing the Transylvanian Saxon symbolic geographies in post-1918 literary products, Cercel (2012) asserts that the discourses of identification moved from a western centred content to a more nuanced one, where West meets East and belongingness to both spaces is acknowledged.

Theoretical understandings of collective identities and identity formation at cross-cultural kids

It is generally accepted that ethnic, national or cultural identities are defined in a greater or lesser extent in primordial (perennial) or contextual (situational; processual; instrumental) terms. A primordial understanding would consider ethnic belonging as unique, natural, innate, and immutable (see Bălăşoiu and Rusu 2003). From such a perspective, ethnicity is a form of "extended kinship" (van den Berghe 1995), "the assumed 'givens' - of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givens that stem from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices" (Geertz 1973, 259), a "ready - made set of endowments and identifications which every individual shares with others from the moment of birth by the chance of the family into which he is born at that given time in that given place" (Isaac 1975, 31).. That stance implies, on one hand, that the term ethnicity bears, to some extent, an implicit partial equivalence with the notion of cultural identity. That is specific cultural traits (e.g. language, religion, habits) are an expression of ones (assumed) appurtenance to a specific ethnic group. On the other hand, it implies a partial

equivalence with the idea of kinship. That is ethnic appurtenance is "given", in the most radical theorization, by the virtue of birth (in a specific place) or kin, or, in a looser perspective, by the virtue of belief, attachment (emotion) or significance attributed to a common ancestry (Shils 1957, 142; Geertz 1973, 259; Grosby 1994; Connor 2004).

A contextual definition of ethnicity would conceive it as negotiable, flexible, multiple, fluid or invented (see Rusu 2009). Described in contextual terms, ethnic groups and ethnic identities are a matter of boundaries, a product of self and others categorization: "ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves" (Barth 1969, 10). According to Barth (1969) since the cultural traits in general (e.g. language, dress, lifestyle) are subject to historical change and ecological influence, socially relevant factors that define the boundaries of groups matter most. These are those cultural features that are relevant for interaction in a specific context, based on shared or different understandings, standards of judgement of values and performance (Barth 1969, 11-16). Jenkins (1994), nuancing the perspective, argues for understanding ethnic identity as "practical accomplishments" and for integrating ethnicity conceptions into social identity theory. He points out the forms and processes of social identity, discussing the continuous interactions between the levels of identification (individual and collective), the internal external dialectic of identification (self-identification, i.e. group identification versus hetero-identification, i.e. social categorization) and the contexts of categorization (informal and formal). In the same vein, for Hall cultural identities are "a matter of becoming as well as of being" (1998, 225) and should always be contextualized since they are "'a production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1998, 222).

Obviously, there is much more variation within these standpoints as there are many zones of conflation and disagreement between the analytical models they could include (see Grosby 1994; Bacová 1998; Ozkirimli 2000; Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov 2004; Chandra 2012). However, it is not the object of our interest to thoroughly present them here. In this paper, we

approach the ethnic and cultural identities following a micro-macro route. For the purpose of this paper, a collective national, ethnic or cultural identity is real and relevant if it is acknowledged, produced or reproduced at an individual level (see also Rusu 2008, 118). Thus, drawing on the ideas above we consider the key aspect for understanding a collective belonging (i.e. ethnic, cultural) the process of discursive identification.

At individual level, identity emerges from the identifications people make. It "develops out of a gradual integration of all identifications" but "the whole has a different quality from the sum of its parts" (Erikson 1965, 217). For a child these identifications are incorporations of significant other's traits, habits, ideas, norms and values, available to them during the historical era in which they live (Erikson 1965, 214-217). In other words, the institutionalized world children find at birth is internalized during the primary socialization process (Berger and Luckmann 1967) and, as Jenkins (1994, 204) points out, this process "is likely to include an ethnic component". Nevertheless, the formation of identity is a process that continues during one's life course (Smith 1991; Weinreich 2009). People continually combine (select and assimilate) old (childhood) identifications and new identifications while aiming to maintain a sense of personal sameness with the past and consider future aspirations, and a sense of uniqueness for themselves and for those they interact with (Erikson 1968; Cote 2000; Weinreich 2009). Thus, what we call the ethnic and cultural components of one's identity emerge out of various identifications people make during their life course. A substantive expression of these identifications are people's self-descriptions. Therefore, an analysis of self-identifications in a narrative form, will enable us to analyse how ethnic identifications and cultural boundaries come to existence and the swaying people make between primordialist sentiments and processual stances. We consider these aspects become even more obvious when the narratives belong to some CCK (cross-cultural kids) or ACCK (adult cross-cultural kids). They are persons that have spent a significant part of their life (as a child) in two or more cultural settings (Pollock and Van Reken 2009; Van Reken 2011).

Methodological approach and participants

The data were collected in the project "Migrants' life courses: dealing with uncertain, highly de-standardized biographies in Romania". The method used was narrative, life story type interview. Narrative interview is „rooted in an epistemology in which meaning is discursively and socially constructed and the truth is multiple" (Toolis and Hammack 2015, 53). Therefore, we believe that this method best serves our purpose to discover and understand ethnic identity both in its „social reality" and „the subject´s experiential world" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998, 8; Rosenthal 1993, 1).

Within the project, were collected 40 life stories of Romanian migrants, five of them, of German ethnicity. Of the five, only two fall into the category of ACCKs: Nicklas (33 years) and Erika (37 years). The two are brother and sister. In our view, these cases illustrate the way ethnicity and cultural identities are both ascribed and achieved by a second generation of Transylvanian Saxons migrants, returned to Romania after a complex process of migration. The family goes to Germany, Canada and, after the fall of the communism in Eastern Europe, back to Germany. That makes them, at least for a period, a third culture family in terms of Cottrell (2007, 56). Nicklas and Erika, as early adolescents migrate for studies or for professional purposes in various other countries, where they have spent longer or shorter periods and now, as young adults, live in Transylvania the family's place of origin. The childhood they had, made them even more special. By the fact that they have spent and meaningfully interacted with so many cultural settings for a significant period of time during their childhood, they may be called, according to the literature, ACCK (adult cross-cultural kids) (Pollock and Van Reken 2009; Van Reken 2011). The whole process of moving from one place to another and living in such diverse social and cultural settings is what we call a wandering life. That is because, both as adolescents and young adults, they do not travel around the world to find a place, but rather wander seeking a social and cultural space to resemble their imagined roots.

Interviews were conducted within a time frame and location agreed by interviewees. They were interviewed separately. The data was audio

recorded, with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim by the project team members and verified, for accuracy, by the interviewer. The richness of their narratives (about 4 hours of recording) gave us a deeper understanding of the topic we studied.

Data analysis

Narrative-based analysis was used to capture how ethnic identity is constructed "at the intersection of personal, interpersonal and cultural narratives" (Stephens and Breheny 2013, 15). Narrative analysis is the procedure through which the data elements are draws together and integrated into a coherent developmental account or what is called "a thematic plot" (Polkinghorne 1995). The process of emplotment (see Polkinghorne 1995, 5) and the construction of a coherent account was not an easy process. It involved the successive reading of the transcript, extracting critical data to set up a coherent explanation of how the ethnic and cultural identities of our informants emerged. The story we present below embodies ideological aspects, shared public narratives about ethnicity, and the position of the interviewees towards them, but also personal experiences, perceptions and feelings, which have influenced the development of identities of the interviewed persons. The result is in fact an interpretation of the authors of the narrative co-construction generated in an interview-specific situation as a result of the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee. Therefore, the narrative integrates several levels of analysis: the personal level, the interpersonal level and the ideological or the public narrative level (see also: Murray 2000; Stephens and Breheny 2013).

The following section contains our reading of the interviews with Nicklas and Erika. We start by showing how a Saxon identity is ascribed through family socialization during childhood and then we discuss elements of multiple identifications. We pay attention to the elements of the discourses that are indicia of a modulation between a primordialist discourse of identity and constructivist one.

Results and discussions

Wandering lives: the context

Erika was born in 1980 and his brother Niklas three years later, in a small urban settlement in Transylvania. Both their parents are Saxons. They are intellectuals: the father, an evangelical priest, and the mother an English and German professor.

Their departure to Germany is taking place in 1984. It was facilitated by an agreement between Romania and the Federal Republic of Germany, once the diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established in 1967. As in many other cases of Saxon migrants it is described as a family reunification process. Erika said:

> *All our family left after a while. In the 1980s, grandparents, all the family, actually slowly, slowly, one after another. And we had a very close relationship with the family (...) that we took with us.*

However, family reunion was just an official motivation. In fact, reasons for migration seems to be rather economic. The austerity policy of the communist regime has considerably reduced the standard of living of the entire Romanian population (Best and Wenninger 2010). Erika recalls from her parents' accounts that, in the year of departure:

> *There were already major problems of daily life. It was difficult to handle flour, butter, etc... But surely, he left because ... he wanted a better life for both children. And for them [parents] of course.*

Due to a bilateral agreement between Germany and Romania, aiming to prevent the evangelic church dissolution in Romania, the father was unable to practice as a priest in Germany. That caused him several grievances and lead the family to decide to migrate again, this time to Canada. The new migration space seemed to satisfy both the professional and the ethnic commitments of the father, because they settled in the area of an evangelical congregation of Saxons from Transylvania. Furthermore, mother deepens her

studies, being able to practice as a language teacher. However, as Erika says, staying in Canada has been planned from the outset as temporary. After spending seven years in this country, in another favourable professional circumstance for the father, the family returned to Germany, where decided to establish definitively. Even so, Erika and Niklas continue to wander in their adolescence and youth. This time, travel and migration decisions belong to each of them.

Erika leaves with a scholarship in Ecuador during her high school, and then, in 2004, after completing her studies in tourism, she goes for a year to Argentina, a country that she likes. Due to an unexpected pregnancy, she decides to return to Germany to benefit from the support of the family. In 1996 she returns for the first time to Transylvania. Her contacts with Romania have become more frequent from 2006 when she starts visiting the country once or twice a year. In 2013 she finds out about an open position at an organization that promotes tourism in Transylvania and decides to move "back" here together with her little girl.

At the age of 17, **Niklas** leaves for Ecuador as an exchange student. Here he spends a year. He says the experience of Ecuador has changed his life. He has gained a new perspective of the world. Placed in a large, warm, welcoming family, he learned how important roots are in a person's life. He has found a new lifestyle, living and comfort. He managed to discover himself, comparing to others. Upon returning to Germany, he realizes he has progressed, compared to his friends who have not benefited from such an experience. After completing the high school, he decides to hire as a steward for an airline company for a short period of time, thus having the opportunity to visit over 60 countries. Subsequently, he enrolled in a college in Germany that he quits shortly to go to Spain and attend a BA program in tourism. The choice of Spain is justified both by his attraction to the Latin culture (due his previous stay in Ecuador) and as a result of a romantic relationship. After graduating the faculty, he follows a master program in the same country. There he is taking a job in tourism that brings him to burnout in a few months. He quits at work and decides to pursue doctoral studies, still in Spain,

aspiring to a university career. He soon realizes that it is not, in fact, what he expected. He did not feel useful and valuable for the field of research. At the same time, he had a difficult personal relationship. He decides to pursue with a sabbatical year for reflection and refocus. Thus, he comes to Romania, where his family owns some properties. Now he is living in Romania and runs a family business.

Discursive modulations: Primordial and Contextual identifications

Ethnic socialisation and primordialist stances. Niklas' speech is imbued with narratives that point to his inherited ethnic origins. The family represented a consistent environment of ethnic socialization and gave the children opportunities to know their roots. Language, traditions and a strong conceptually (but vague geographically) territorial identification are passed on from father to children. For example, no matter where they were, they continued to speak the dialect specific to the Transylvanian Saxons. It is the language that is still spoken "home," as Niklas reports. At the same time, Niklas talks about the positive attitude their father has towards the Saxon identity which is trying to pass on to his children. Being a Saxon is "a given" one must be proud of. Niklas remembers his father's words, as follows:

> *" ≪You are a Saxon, (...) you must be proud≫ (...) In any conversation with anyone, it did not take two minutes and he had to say that we are from Transylvania and that we are Saxons."*

Even though they moved and lived in various places around the world, the fathers' discourse about a Saxon territory had a long-lasting effect on children. Erika says:

> *"From my childhood, my entire life, I had a connection with Transylvania".*

The commitment of the parents to the Saxon ethnic identity is obvious. Wanderers as they are in the first period of their emigration experience in Germany or Canada, they always seek to stay closely connected to the Saxons' communities and culture. In Canada, they become part of a congregation of Saxons (from Transylvania but from different region that the one they lived

in) that respected and manifested the cultural traditions specific to them. In that context Niklas becomes familiar and engages with Saxons' music, dances and traditional costumes. He talks about the migrants' need to manifest their group identity and be connected to their ethnic origins. He observes that the farther away one feels from his home, the higher the need to exhibit his origin.

> "*... when you are away from home (...) makes you identify more with your origins. They had Transylvania Club, they went there, they were all dressed in traditional costumes, dancing Saxon dances. The farther you are from the roots, the more you need to express these cultural needs. The self-presentation implied much more Saxonness than in Transylvania.*"

After the fall of the communist regime, when Niklas is 12, he accompanies his father on a tour of Romania. The visit allows him to geographically locate Transylvania and learn more about his roots. It is for the first time when personal experiences confront with family and groups' narratives about Transylvania and Romania giving him the opportunity to reflect on the boundaries between his ethnic and national identity. The child needed the visit. Until then, he was talking about Transylvania, a kind of mythical space connected with the public narratives of Dracula's land, but not about Romania. The father was proud of his Saxon identity but avoided to include in his self-presentation the national one. Personal experiences as an evangelic priest during the communist regime and the entire context of Saxon community dissolution, conducted to a clear delineation of the ethnic and national identities of the father. Niklas recalls that he was "forbidden" to say that he was from Romania.

> Niklas - *My father has always forbidden us to say that we are from Romania.*
>
> Operator – *Then, to your mind, where was Transylvania located?*
>
> Niklas - *In Dracula's country, I don't know ... it was really abstract. I didn't know where it was, I really didn't know it (...). The first contact with Romania was when I was 12 years old. I went on holiday with my dad. Only the two of us. For a whole week, we went and walked all over Romania. I enjoyed it.*

> Operator - *And then you learned that Transylvania is in Romania ....*
>
> Niklas - *Exactly. Then I became aware and I was able to see it physically. I was able to see where I came from. That really opened my eyes a little and guided me a little bit to know how to put things in my head a little bit clearer.*

Starting with 2003, he travelled to Romania almost every year. Not an obvious territorial identification but rather economic reasons trigger his resettlement in Transylvania. The Romanian proprieties restitution law gives the family the opportunity to regain real estates in Transylvania. The main reasons invoked for his return are both of professional and affective type. A „professional burn-out" in Spain and a failed romantic relationship gave him the urge to self-discovery. The whole context stimulated his ethnic identifications thus regarding Romania as the right place for him. Although his father's speech about Romania remains negative, he came in this country without prejudices.

> *"... I came without prejudice. My parents had many prejudices. You know, for my dad, the Romanians are liars, snipers, they are thieves ... gypsies ... like that. He kept talking about that. With my experience of life, with my travels and everything, I haven't kept these ideas in my head. I have come to Romania to make my opinions based on my experiences."*

Erika was older than Niklas, but still a child of kindergarten age, when the family left Romania. She starts her story mentioning her family ethnic origin and proving awareness of the surname's connections with a specific ethnic background:

> *"… my parents are Saxons, both from Saxon families… My father also has… I believe… a Hungarian grandfather, thus his surname…".*

Like Niklas, she knows she is from Transylvania, but the geographic and toponymic connections with Romania are vague to absent. She does not have clear memories about the country and her ethnic and national belongings are set-apart:

> *"... I have never felt I was from Romania. It was always Transylvania. …. I didn't even know…. but I was aware it was written in the passport…. the name of the place I was born is written in German…. I didn't even know until '96 that a Romanian name exists"*

Even when she describes the emigration process, she is not speaking about Romania but about *"leaving from Transylvania to Germany"*. The relocation to Transylvania, is, at least in a part of her speech, a coming back. A decision hard to understand for a series of significant others:

> *"I came back here and many Saxons, friends or family from Germany, cannot understand why"*

Erika's discourse makes of the Saxon dialect a very clear element of delineation, an ethnic boundary. She feels the need to underline that even though their parents had very good command of Romanian language or even though the family was in an English-speaking environment, they have always used at home the Saxon dialect.

> *"... We have never spoke Romanian in fact, because in our home we were using the Saxon dialect. I still speak today Saxon with my parents…. Even in Canada or wherever we were we were speaking Saxon. But never Romanian."*

Moreover, when she compares the Saxon dialect with the German language, she expresses an ambivalent attitude transmitting the idea that the Saxon ethnicity by means of the Saxon dialect is embedded in a German identity but still, a different one.

> *" ... officially it is a dialect. But it is very different…. it is only a spoken language… even though people are trying to write it down there are no rules, no grammar……. and clearly to me it was easier to accommodate with the German system and language because it is a dialect" …. "for children is easier to adjust. Yes. Because it is super-similar, definitely."*

The interview fragments we presented above are saturated with elements of a primordialist language. The Transylvanian landscapes, the Saxon dialect, the much-invoked roots and the memories of Transylvanian

ancestors are all criteria of ethnicity and denote strong identifications with elements of some reified collective identity of the Transylvanian Saxons.

Wandering lives and the construction of identities. Niklas' discourse reflects a sustained effort of family socialization through exposure to cultural and ethnic values and behaviours. He grows "knowing" that he is Saxon, and the close connection with the Canadian congregation makes him identify and to self-categorizes as Saxon. However, his discourse is lacking commitment and strong attachment to a primordial ethnicity and personal investment in the ethnic group. Returning to Romania in 2011, Niklas does not seek to integrate into the Saxon community that still exist. His case supports the idea of Umaña-Taylor, Zeiders, and Updegraff (2013), according to which ethnic socialization does not automatically lead to the development of a primordialist perspective of the ethnic identity. Rather, he modulates his identity according to the ethnic and cultural context in which he „wanders" in different stages of his life.

Canadian experience. As we have seen above, Niklas migration trajectory starts when he was an infant. He spends his childhood period, up to 4 years, in Germany. It is a period that he says, "*it did not have a special significance*" for himself, then to come back saying "*or perhaps have had, but unconsciously*." His first significant experience of ethnicity construction is the Canadian one, which lasts from the age of 4 to the age of 10. It is the period of time that he associates with his childhood.

He learns English quickly, and "*absorbs Canadian culture*". Successful integration in this context is due, as he thinks, to the Canadian policy of promoting multi-culturalism, equality and tolerance. He makes friends from different races and ethnic backgrounds and appreciates this opportunity. That makes him say he felt Canadian at that time. But, the direct interaction with the Saxon congregation and the ethnic socialization of the family background we talked about earlier, made him feel Saxon as well. When recalling this period of his childhood, discursively Niklas does not express any dissonance about his ethnic identity.

"*I was part of the society we were in. I felt Canadian, but at the same time I felt Saxon.*"

German experience. At the age when he would have had to consolidate his identity, Niklas returns with his parents to Germany. His return to the German society, less diversified from a cultural and ethnic point of view, makes him feel as he said, "*thrown into cold water*". Berry (1997, 13) calls those difficulties a person feels when entering a new culture as „acculturative stress". He remembers that in a very short time he had to assimilate "*a lot of new stuff*", including the literary German language. The Saxon dialect spoken at home allowed him to communicate with others, but he had spelling and grammar difficulties in writing. He found inner resources, more or less conscious, and developed coping strategies to adapt. He was proud to come from Canada, to know other languages, to have friends from different parts of the world.

N: There was a lot of new stuff to learn, in a very little time. (…) A new language, a new culture. Thrown into cold water, that's how I felt. But at 10, you adapt automatically. Instinctively. You make friends, you play football, you do it somehow. It's a must! (…)
I: Was there a hard change, moving from Canada to Germany?
N: No. My luck ... not hard. I felt a pride for living in Canada. I know then that I felt like a Canadian.
I: Did you feel superior to children in Germany?
N: If I felt superior? Actually no. Because ... I did not know how to write for example. On a German-language test, all of the paper was red. I will never forget my first writing exam. All the red sheet. And these didn't help me to self-esteem... And from this perspective, it was not easy for me to know that something ... I'm not from there. That I come from somewhere else. And maybe that's why I was motivated to emphasize this. That: ≪I'm from Canada. I don't know how to write, I don't know that, but I'm from Canada. I have friends in Canada, you don't. I know English, you don't≫. And it was ... and interesting for them: ≪yeah ... you ... what do you know? ≫.

> *And I liked it. I like to say I'm from Canada. Because I was feeling good. Because it was interesting. I was somebody interesting.*

During the first period of residence in Germany, he inclined to declare himself as a Canadian, but as time passes, he felt increasingly German and less Canadian.

The contact with the Latin culture. Niklas identity is questioned again with the year spent in Ecuador, at the age of 17. He is placed in a family, to which he creates a strong attachment. Through contact with this „*second family*" as he describes it, and with people of different ethnicities and races, he succeeds in discovering other perspectives of life and at the same time manages to understand himself better.

> *" [I learned] that the family is on the first place. That's what I didn't know before. I learned a lot from my mother in Ecuador. We still keep in touch. She is a very, very empathic person. She taught me Spanish. In the early years, I had many conversations with her until late at night. (...) I have learned about tolerance. I understood that what I thought was natural, normal, actually was not. I mean, you can live differently. For example, not everyone is eating with forks like us (...). Not everyone lives in homes like us. I saw how people live in the jungle, in the Amazon land, and they are happy. Unconsciously then, now consciously, I realize that a new horizon has opened for me."*

Although at this age he feels "*truly German*," as he said, the Ecuador people's attachment to their own ethnic origins, "*stirred his curiosity*" about his own roots and gave him the feeling that he lacks these roots.

> *" And when I got back from Ecuador, I was already 18 years old, I felt German, I felt really German, but the Ecuador stirred my curiosity ... that I saw how others live, and how much they have their roots in their place. And that's what I missed. And I wanted to look for it. I wanted to have this, because I have seen ... that makes me happy."*

Passionate about Latin culture in Ecuador, once returned to Germany, he continues to cultivate this hobby by attending dance classes and searching for ethnic Latin companions. He decides to continue his studies in Spain for

the same reason, the Latin cultural context. He attends a Master's program and, afterwards, he starts a PhD in Spain.

> " *I was tied to Latin culture. It inspired me so much, I fell in love with music. I play music, play instruments and dance and I really like and is part of ... my life. And I fell in love with Latin music, salsa, bachata, these styles of music, on these rhythms and ... and I often went to salsa clubs, Latin dances in Frankfurt, I looked for Latin people from Ecuador, Colombia. I felt in love with a Colombian, and with her I had a four-year relationship (...) I liked she spoke Spanish, she was from Latino-America. I liked how she danced, how she moved, how she smiled, ... it awoke in me that feeling in Ecuador. (...) I graduated high school in Germany and I wanted to go. I felt ... free and I was not tied to any place. And I said, let's go to Spain.*"

He leaves Spain and comes to Romania, at the age of 28, at a time when, as we mentioned earlier, he felt unfulfilled both personally and professionally.

Defining ethnic identity in the context of return to his roots. Niklas is 33 years old now. Reflecting on his course, he thinks he has just become aware that he has "*led a migrant life*." To the question of who he is from and ethnic perspective, he says:

> "*In the course of life, the answer has changed. Until today. Today I answer you differently than three years ago.*"

However, he does not feel marginal (see Park 1928) or a cultural homelessness (see Vivero and Lenkins 1999) but he rather feels belonging to several cultures

> "*When someone asks me [about ethnicity], again, I do not know the answer. There are several valid answers. There is no 1 and 0. There is one comma, zero commas.*"

The ability to hold the characteristics of several cultures and to integrate them in a new culture, without any internal conflicts, is consistent with other studies (see Poston 1990) and the situational perspective on identity.

When asked where he is from, Niklas says

> *"I never felt connected to a place. I didn't feel I had roots here or there. But I always felt the family is my point of reference. (...) And our parents made us feel this and helped us. (...) I was able to feel at home anywhere (...) I always felt happy."*

These statements are consonant with the observations made by Pollock and Van Reken (2009), who considered that, in the case of children who spend their childhood in several cultural environments, not the geographic factor is determinant for what they consider to be at home, but rather the relationships. Niklas has a family that offers him an ethnic socialization, despite frequent movements. That socialization, as other studies show (Umaña-Taylor, Zeiders, and Updegraff 2013), allowed him to explore his own ethnic identity and solve any ethnic conflict or confusion. He has no doubts about the reality of the cultural features and ethnonyms he is using. He is a Saxon from Romania, German, etc. unproblematic.

Erika's identity discourse does not contain many contextual stances. A fluid perception of the self and multiple identifications exists but are much less discernible than in her brother's case. She does not speak as much about her international experiences but about the settling to Transylvania episode. That is the process that puts strains on her otherwise clear Saxon identifications and makes her express ambivalent views of her cultural and ethnic identity.

The local Saxon community context and Erika's relational identity. The interaction with the Romanian society and the Saxons community she finds in the village she settles first, make her express a slightly different relational identity than the Saxon one inherited from her family. The "resettling" experience marked Erika. That happens not as much due to the interactions she developed with the Romanians, which she is describing in positive terms, but with the members of the Saxon community. Surprisingly enough to her, the local Saxons treat her more as a stranger than a member of the ethnic group. A feeling of loneliness and a perceived latent hostility from the local community overwhelms her. There is no we-ness feeling in her discourse, both Romanians and Saxons are clearly "they":

> *" …I was welcomed by Romanians but horrible from the part of Saxons…. Totally interesting, I did not expect that. I do not know why… It is a Saxon village…there are about 100 Saxons or so. (…) and I lived there, and I felt like a parasite. I was totally ignored by the people from the village and I do not know why…. I wanted to be involved, I have asked how I can help. There were some events (….). And I wanted to help. We were living there, with my daughter, we wanted to integrate into the village, community. Impossible. …. And somebody told me that the Saxons that have never left Romania are mad on those who left…. Because they made money in Germany and now are coming here and …. stand out from the crowd and are saying ≪let's do… that≫. (…) In fact, I liked my residence there. The house is super, it has a big garden and… super, but I didn't feel very… I felt horrible. (…). And I felt like in a… prison there. Yes, seriously. And I have tried so… and the I moved out"*

Belongingness to family of Saxons does not seem to help her integrate into the local community. Therefore, her discourse changes and she is reframing her settling in Transylvania not as a "coming back" but as a totally new experience.

> *"I did not come with a lot of money and I didn't come back. To me it was completely new here. (…) I knew that you don't drive on the left side of the road. But I did not know anything (…) All the stuff was totally new here."*

Values achieved during her wandering childhood and young adulthood also make her feel she is different from the local Saxons community. Openness to new experiences and acceptance of various mentalities, ease of integration, fearless in front of changes are traits achieved during her childhood. These are perspectives she wants to transmit to her daughter.

> *"I moved to Canada with my family at the same age my daughter moved here. And for me it was… win, win, win situation because… language and the experience and... the courage to move from one place to another... that surely comes …. the fact that I moved to Latin*

> *America… and I have seen many places … That comes from my childhood, from the fact that we moved from Transylvania to Germany."*

These are part of a worldview clearly opposed to the ethos she finds characteristic for the Saxon community in Transylvania:

> "*maybe I will never understand what has happened, but I hope the community will open to the international world, other countries or cities."*

The relational identity in the context of the Romanian culture and society. Even though her knowledge about Romania is minimal, the contact with the culture and society makes her reconsidered some memories or reinterpret them. Thus, we might consider that the decision to move to Transylvania might have been influenced also by an ambivalent interpretation she gives to her cultural identity: a mix of inherited values of an undoubtful Saxon origin and values characteristic to the Romanian culture. Among the values she considered she inherits from her family, and are representative for the Saxon culture, are a sense of righteousness and the pursue of justice. Still, these are mixed with a sense of kindness and care for the others that she considers are rather specific to the Romanian culture and way of life. Nevertheless, ascriptions are made, the boundaries are blurred. Erika tries to integrate the latter traits into the primary socialization process. Romanians are warmer, more emotional than Germans, very attentive with children, but these characteristics are inherited on a maternal line:

> "*that for sure comes from my mother and my grandmother and is from this place. 100% I know it. That is the way people are here."*

Not only the recourse to the memory brings about sings of multiple identifications. The German self-identification is the third one mentioned. The whole context she puts herself in, makes her say she is a German.

> *"My job is super. That is true because we are a team, only Germans we are. My colleague, my boss, lives in Germany and comes here once a month (…) He lived here. But now his family is in [*name of the city*] and he lives there. Another colleague lives in [name of the town], nearby Sighisoara, and he is also German, also from [*name of the

> city*], but he is for… I believe 16 years already here in the country. Yes. And we speak German…."*

Both herself and her daughter use primarily the German language. In fact, even though she studies in German she is enrolled in a Romanian school and even though she proves to understand Romanian, she does want to speak this language yet:

> *"(…) she is enrolled in a German language class, definitely, we started with that. We wanted to study in German. All her classes are in German but Romanian and English. And in Romanian she gets only very good grades for writing and dictation exercises and understanding but she does not speak. She does not speak. (…) I do not know why"*

That also makes her reflect over the utility and use of languages. All languages are important she considers, because "*a new language opens a new world…. I know that from my experience*". However, in the context of this reflections, the Saxon dialect is not mentioned as an important element of culture that has to be transmitted to her daughter.

While Niklas has a very good command of Romanian, is spite of being a baby when he left Romania, Erika instead is not so fluent. By itself that is an indicium of the differences of versatility in the identification process of the two.

Relational identifications bring up a different perspective than the one we have seen in the first part of the discussion. A strong Saxon identification exists but it has in its centre the family of origin and not a correspondence in the local reality. Here, now, in Transylvania Erika finds boundaries between the local Saxons and her Saxonness. To her, they are a strange, different, closed community. That makes her speak about Romanian cultural influences and her German identity. Niklas instead, apart from the familial identification, defines from the start his identity as a multiple, dynamic one. He belongs to many places and has a fluid perspective over the definitions he gives to his ethnic and cultural identity.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to present and analyse how the ethnic self-identification discourse of two Transylvanian Saxons ACCK's is constructed, by integrating elements of a primordial discourse with the contextual ones.

For this purpose, we described first the Transylvanian Saxons identity building process. The aim was to show how an ethnic belonging consciousness emerged after centuries long processes. Second, we pointed towards some of the strains that created the premises of the Transylvanian Saxon's community dissolution. Our results add up to the literature pointing toward an ethnic demobilization process. The people we interviewed discuss elements of a reified identity linked to an alleged past ethnic identity. However, in practice, multiple identifications are made and some obvious delineations from the locals' Saxon communities are present.

Our conclusions were reached after we analysed the narratives of two young adults, with a wandering life (as defined above) started in their early childhood and continuing into youth. We find in their discourses that the family's ethnic identity is a central point of reference. When family and Transylvania's territory is invoked, the discourse is constantly imbued with defining elements of a reified identity linked to an alleged past Saxon ethnicity, to which they belonged. Many elements of their speech demonstrate, that territorial identifications play an important role in defining ethnic and cultural boundaries. The two grew up "aware" that they were Saxons. That identification is clearly ascribed by their father in numerous situations.

However, their discourses do not show strong commitment or attachment to this ethnic identity. Their achieved identities are much more refined. In their childhood, and later in their youth, they take over and integrate elements of ethnic and cultural identities specific to each context in which they find themselves. They speak the languages of the countries in which they lived, internalize their values and acquire defining cultural elements. Moreover, their narratives suggest a feeling of belongingness to many places exists. Nicklas described himself as being Saxon, Romanian,

German, Latin etc. All these achieved identities coexist in an unproblematic way. They do not replace each other in space and time, they do not overlap to create conflicts, but rather they integrate to create a unique multi-ethnic, multi-cultural identity that gives him a high capacity to cope with various contexts. The adaptability, but also the ability of ACCKs to feel comfortable in different contexts and groups, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion etc., which we identified in both cases, are consistent with the results reported by the Cottrell (2007) based on a study of American ACCKs.

An interesting situation, which could be a new direction of research, was identified in the case of Erika. When she returned to Romania, she encountered difficulties in integrating into the Saxon ethnic community. This is also consistent with Cottrell's (2007) studies. A possible explanation that Erika formulates, but which also results from the studies of the aforementioned author, is that these ethnic communities are too narrow, closed, ethnocentric and biased. Cottrell, on the other hand, identifies another potential cause, namely, that ACCKs "do not fully understand the culture" as expected, and "furthermore, it is not uncommon to actually dislike it" (2007, 59).

Taking in consideration our results, we favour Weinreich's (2009) approach instead of Berry's (1997). Thus, we consider in case of ACCKs we rather speak of enculturation, as agentic individual incorporation of cultural elements during socialization (Weinreich 2009, 125), instead of acculturation, as integration assimilation, separation or marginalization in respect with a mainstream culture (see Barry 1997). As Weinreich (2009, 128) states one's ethnic identity "is made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's construal of past ancestry and one's future aspirations in relation to ethnicity". Therefore, we support the view that ethnic identification does not stop during the primary socialization, but is a lifelong process (Hall 1998, Smith 1991; Weinreich 2009), and ACCK experiences fully sustain it.

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