

REMEMBERING *NACHBARSCHAFT*: NARRATIVES OF SOCIAL
ORGANIZATION AND CULTURAL MEMORY
AMONG SAXONS IN MICHELSBERG AND HELTAU
(SOUTHERN TRANSYLVANIA)*

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ABSTRACT

My article is written in accordance with the narratives of contemporary Saxon inhabitants of Michelsberg and Heltau in Southern Transylvania, who emphasize their *Nachbarschaft* institution as a continuously-referential folk heritage in post 1989 Romania. As a recurrent discursive theme, *Nachbarschaft* is particularly significant among Saxons to the extent they use to frame it within broader evocations about their collective identity and tradition. Based on recent ethnographic accounts, I argue that remembering *Nachbarschaft* could be seen as a persistent performative memory of Transylvanian Saxons, echoing as such their needs of cultural survival as a decreasing ethnicity in the 2000s Romania.

Keywords: *Nachbarschaft*, Saxons, Southern Transylvania, performative memory.

INTRODUCTION

In the 2000s Romania, major demographic changes occurred in the ethno-linguistic configuration of national minorities. Indeed, according to the local census data in 2002 and 2011, within the overall Romania's population decrease (from 21 680 974 to 20 121 641), most of the ethnic groups are reported to have diminished in their number (including, for example, the Hungarians: from 1 431 807 to 1 227 623, the Ukrainians: from 61 098 to 50 920, the Lipovan Russians: from 35 791 to 23 487, the Turks: from 32 098 to 27 698, and the Tatars: from 23 935 to 20 282.

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The only exception here is the Roma: from 535 140 to 621 573)¹. With Romania's 2007 accession to the European Union, the decline in the natural growth of ethnic groups is to be related to the consequences of labor force migration and generally of the larger flows of social (including ethnic) mobility abroad (see, for instance, the sociological analyses of Sandu [2000] and Șerban & Grigoraș [2000]).

In Romania, the German-speaking population undergoes the same process of demographic involution from a number of 59 764 in 2002 to 36 042 in 2011. Due to their very administrative methodology and purposes, the official census data are to be read as an exogenous categorization that brings under a generic ethnic name (in this case, the "Germans") various groups of different historical origins and ethnographic developments (such as the *Landlers*, the *Saxons*, and the *Swabians*)².

In what follows, the traditional institution of *Nachbarschaft* "neighborhood" will be approached among Saxons from two localities in the surroundings of Sibiu town (Southern Transylvania), namely the village of Michelsberg (in Romanian: Cislădioara) and the town of Heltau (in Romanian: Cislădie). My text is written in accordance with the narratives of contemporary German-speaking inhabitants of Michelsberg and Heltau, which, as will be seen, emphasize the local *Nachbarschaften* as a continuously-referential folk heritage in times of lessening of the numbers of this ethnic minority of Romania. Before discussing the *Nachbarschaft* in terms of social organization and cultural memory, I will shortly review the main historical co-ordinates of the Saxon presence in Transylvania.

**SOUTH-TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS:
FROM A PRIVILEGED NATIO OF MIDDLE-AGES SIEBENBURGEN
TO AN EVANESCENT MINORITY OF CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA**

The German-speaking group of Saxons (*die Sachsen*) is present in Southern Transylvania since the late twelfth century, with their settlement as a result of the Kingdom of Hungary's politics of developing mining and commerce, in conjunction with the same state's defence strategy against Turkic incursions in the

¹ The statistical data are cited from Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul populației și al locuințelor: 20 Octombrie 2011. Vol. II: Populație stabilă (rezidentă). Structura etnică și confesională* [The National Institute of Statistics in Romania, *Romania's Census of Population and Houses: The 20th of October, 2011. Vol. II: The Resident Population. The Ethnic and Confessional Structure*], 2013, p. 2.

² Both the *Swabians* and the *Landlers* descend from German groups that settled in the areas of Banat and Southern Transylvania, respectively, during the eighteenth century, as a result of the Habsburg Empire's colonizing policy in the context of warfare between the Austrian Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. The two groups, however, differ by their origin in Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, Thuringia, Westfalia, Württemberg (the *Swabians*) and Upper Austria (the *Landlers*, as well as by religion (Catholic Swabians and Protestant Landlers). For recent ethnographic outlines on the two German-speaking communities in Romania, see Chelcea, Lățea (2000) (with regard to the *Swabians*), and Sedler (2005) (as concerns the *Landlers*).

area. As souzereign of the Transylvanian Principality (*Voievodat*, in Romanian) until 1541, the Hungarian Kings offered special privileges for their Saxon colonists, such as incentives in land taxes, exemption from serfdom, and no extra market tariffs; the Saxons were only expected to pay an annual tribute from their community to the Hungarian treasury. While the ethnonym of “Saxons” is mainly referred to the newcomers’ legal and economic status of mining industry specialization, the German settlers actually originated into several Western regions including (among others) Bavaria, Moselle, Rhineland, Southern Low Countries, Thuringia, and Württemberg. The Saxons were to rapidly get integrated into the social, economic, and cultural life of Transylvania, which they named *Siebenburgen* to account for seven important towns they are recognized to have found within the intra-Carpathian province, namely Bistritz (Bistrița), Hermannstadt (Sibiu), Kronstadt (Brașov), Mediasch (Mediaș), Mühlbach (Sebeș), Schässburg (Sighișoara), and Sächsisch Regen (Reghin).

In 1437, together with the Hungarian nobility and the Szekler landed gentry, the Saxon representatives will settle the so-called *Unio Trium Nationum*, in fact a rank-and-religion alliance that, while excluding Romanians from its membership, was mainly meant to preserve – up to the late eighteenth century – each constituent’s political privileges. A few decades later (in 1483), the Transylvanian Saxons were granted autonomous administration and own jurisdiction within their Saxon Community – *Universitas Saxorum* – which, as a distinct entity within the Transylvanian Voievodat and its political assembly – the *Diet* –, will be maintained until 1876. Along with their Universitas, since the sixteenth century, the Saxons will reinforce their ethno-cultural awareness once they adhered to the Lutheran Church – practically their *Volkskirche* in Transylvania.

It was in the medieval context of Lutheran (Evangelic) Protestant ethics and the guilds (regularly benefiting from trading routes to Wallachia and Moldavia) that the *Nachbarschaft* (“neighborhood”) will be historically recognized as a traditional community organization among urban and rural Saxon communities in Transylvania (Pozsony 2003)³.

Indeed, a series of ethnographic accounts indicate the *Nachbarschaft* as „ethnically representative” for Saxons and Landls, describing the acculturation it produced within the social organization of other Transylvanian ethnic groups, such as the Szeklers, the Romanians, and the Gypsy/Roma (Pozsony 2003; Șoflău 2003; Coman 2003)⁴. According to historical records, the *Nachbarschaft* would provide

³ With the Saxon Neighborhoods in the sixteenth-century Sibiu town seen as part of the larger apparatus of *Sozialdisziplinierung* implemented and maintained by the local city council, the Lutheran Church, and the guilds, Mária Pakucs hypothesizes that “[...] the town ordinances, which were intended to discipline and educate the *entire community* of citizens, together with guild and neighborhood articles that regulated the life [in] smaller groups of individuals, can be seen as a coherent and convergent effort by all these institutions to create an ideal society” (Pakucs 2004: 176).

⁴ Vintilă Mihăilescu distinguishes (2003) the main traits of the Saxon *Nachbarschaften* in Southern Transylvania in terms of “associative esprit and strategy” relying on the “territorial”

an Eastern European counterpart for the communal traditional organization that, in the case of Switzerland, has been described in Kippel (Friedl 1974) and in Törbel (Netting 1981). Similarly, Middle-Age *Nachbarschaften* have been documented in German regions like Münsterland, around the city of Essen, and in cities on the Rhine Valley (Münch 1992 *apud* Pakucs 2004: 197).

The Saxon minority constantly preserved its political, civil, and commercial rights in Transylvania, within different polities such as the autonomous Principality of Transylvania (1541–1691), the Habsburg Empire (1698–1867), and the dualist regime – the *Ausgleich* – of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1667–1918). While in 1918, the Saxons and the rest of Germans in Transylvania, Bukovine, Bessarabia, and Dobroudja brought their adhesion to the integration of their province to the Greater Romania, their linguistic and religious autonomy was maintained within the Romanian state during the interwar period. After the World War II, the German minority of socialist Romania, with its subgroups of Saxons, Landlers, and Swabians, was not applied the notion of collective ethnic responsibility for what the Soviet authorities and the Red Army found to have been culpable for those allies of the Nazi Germany who, in other Eastern-European countries, were deported to the U.S.S.R. However, the politics of national assimilation of minorities in the 1970–1980s Romania, also aggravated by the plan of land and property confiscation, led many Germans including Saxons to return to Germany as their “ancestral” homeland. This ethnical exodus will culminate after 1990, when more than 300 000 Germans left Romania.

NARRATIVE LANDMARKS OF CULTURAL MEMORY AMONG SAXONS IN CISNĂDIOARA-MICHELSBERG AND CISNĂDIE-HELTAU

In the village of Michelsberg, in 2010, the number of Saxons was estimated to about 100 – “105”, to cite AF – people, which accounts for the dramatic diminution of the local German population from more than 1 000 inhabitants (before 1989). As a matter of fact, Michelsberg copes with the same involution of German population as in the rest of post-1990 Transylvania. With the intent of understanding the ways in which the remaining Saxons remember nowadays the recent history of their local community, in the summer of 2010 I conducted an oral-history investigation in Michelsberg as well as in the small town of Heltau (in a four-kilometers proximity to Michelsberg), where Saxons of today are estimated as many as “345” (KF).

criterion of social congregation. As such, the *Nachbarschaft* is presented as the organizational result of the “ethics of contract”, unlike “the ethics of gift exchange” that prevails in kinship-based forms of traditional societies (including the Romanian peasant communities described in their historical evolution from the late Middle-Ages by Henri H. Stahl [1958, 1959, 1964]).

When interviewed today about their own past, the Saxons in Michelsberg and Heltau evoke the “eight-century existence” of German ethnics in Southern Transylvania (MH, TB), as a *longue durée* collectively thought to confer historical legitimacy for what originally was a settling community and permanently remained a minority group in the area. A referential theme dealing with the origin of Michelsberg does outline the role of the *Cistercienser Ritterorden* in building up the local medieval fortress (including a Romanic-style church), within the Kingdom of Hungary’s *fundus regius* in Southern Transylvania (TB):

Cisnădioara is particular among communities in our area in that it wasn't a freemen's locality but a village of serfs that belonged to a Ritterorden. That's why they also belonged to a Cistercienser [Knights Order], which initially was a horsemen's organization of warriors who settled in Transylvania, with Cârța-Kerz as one of their [residency] centers (while their main centre was somewhere in France). In fact, they were the founders of Kerz citadel. Cisnădioara citadel, too, is built by the Order of Cisterciensers, so isn't local... Usually, such churches and citadels were in the custody of local towns like Cisnădie and Sibiu, while Cisnădioara citadel was held by that Order. Well, I call it an “order”, but I'm not sure this expression is correct. It was a warrior community, with several properties in the Braşov hinterland. Since that order began doing also its own politics, apart from religion, they were to be banished from [The Kingdom of] Hungary. That's why I'm telling you that Cisnădioara was associated with “horsemen”. In the past, there were two sorts of lands in Transylvania, first of which the royal domain (where also Saxons lived), and the lands of Hungarian noblemen [...]. Generally, the Saxons were given some privileges in the course of their history [in Transylvania], which wasn't the case of [Saxon] serfs... That's why I'm saying that Cisnădioara was a kind of enclave in comparison with the rest of German localities – including those from the surroundings of Sibiu town. Horsemen [“Ritters”] in Cisnădioara have probably this origin, but they can also be found in other areas, however.

Possibly as a folk reminiscence of those remote times, if not as a pure “fantasy” (to cite MH, a ceramist himself), the pottery craft of making the *kacheln* (terracota plaques used in the making of traditional stoves) continues to represent the image of a *Kreutzritter* locally associated with the Second crusade which the “Saxon forebears” would have taken part to, by their knights... Similarly, Saxon heraldic insignias during Middle-Ages are still echoed in the embroidery motifs of the weaving artifacts in Heltau town (MS).

With his prestige of “the first [Saxon] landowner” (due to the services he paid to Hungarian royalty), the founding figure of *Magister Gozelinus* is still present as a toponym bearing the name of the Michelsberg central square. In 1223, Gozelinus – actually, a priest from Wallonia – is mentioned with regard to the

church of Michelsberg, together with the local citadel, which he donated to the Abbey of Kerz (in Braşov County). For more than 200 years, until 1474 (according to the historical information provided by the current municipal administration in Michelsberg), the village population was imposed a serfdom from the part of Kerz Monastery.

As built (to the end of the 1100s) upon a high hill in the middle of what Cisnădioara village nowadays is, the eight-century old Michelsberg church is claimed to bear a resemblance to the ecclesial architecture from the original German regions of the first Saxon settlers in Southern Transylvania (MH). Closely related to the name of the village – *Michelsberg* – the ancient church, with its location known as *Mons Sancti Michaelis*, was dedicated to St Michael, while, similarly (to cite MH again), each first male newborn in the local Saxon families was to be named *Michael* for the next centuries...

After the adoption of Lutheranism in the sixteenth century, the Church will be defined as “the first structure” in the Saxon community, with the priest playing a central role in the school training of the new generations (TB). With its Biblical fundamentals, Lutheranism is described today as “the essence of Christianity”, within an eucharist in which the bread, the wine and the spiritual sunlight are core values (MH). The recent depart of a Michelsberg priest to Germany is lived as indicative for the present-day dissolution of the Saxon collective identity in the area (AF).

The aforementioned elements of the ancient past of the South-Transylvanian Saxons in Michelsberg are these days ethno-historically evoked by means of local folklore, crafts, and scholarly-based data publicly promoted for tourists. Such information is to be further referred to the Saxon recent history including, for instance, the use of folk blankets (woven by local looms) for the German Army during the WW II (MS), the burial of WW II German soldiers in the Chapel Michaelis (thus turned into a local memorial), the postwar mass-deportation of adult members of this minority to the Soviet Union (KF), the replacement of Saxon folk traditions with the “making of socialism” in Romania (MH), and the assistance from Saxons emigrated to Austria for their kin who remained in socialist Romania (EH)...

At present, ex-Transylvanian Saxons who left for Germany in the 1980s are said to still recognize local ethnographic artifacts, during their touring visits (MS). Otherwise, a general expectancy for the few Saxons who chose to stay and live on in Michelsberg, as they belong now (since 2007) to the European Union (MH), is to keep on the memory of their “roots”, but to no longer take care of their multicentennial minority status, all the more they intermarry with Romanians, Austrians, Germans, or Frenchmen...

**NACHBARSCHAFT IN THE RECENT PAST OF THE SAXON COMMUNITIES
FROM MICHELSBERG AND HELTAU**

As a recurrent discursive theme, the *Nachbarschaft* is one of the most familiar notions among the Saxon people, to the extent that they use to frame it within broader accounts about their community and tradition. According to AF, in postwar Michelsberg, there were several *Nachbarschaften*, each of which bearing names in association with the village streets where such “neighborhoods” were located, among which *Akernachbarschaft* (masons’ “neighborhood”), *Bachnachbarschaft* (village-creek “neighborhood”), and *Obernachbarschaft* (upper-village “neighborhood”). Among villagers, their *Nachbarschaften* also reflected the local topography as a social symbolism including the village-centre “neighborhood” as well as the “neighborhood” from beyond the village church (MH)⁵. In Heltau town, while the *Nachbarschaften* preserved their street mark of belongingness, their structuring is also reported to have followed the age-grouping criterion, as consisting of three elders’ “neighborhoods” and one youth’s “neighborhood” (KF). The membership of a *Nachbarschaft* generally ranged around a few dozens of “neighbors” (for example, 70 in the *Akernachbarschaft* [AF], 120 in another Michelsberg *Nachbarschaft* [MD], and 40–60 in Heltau [TB]). Joining a *Nachbarschaft* was normally conditioned by the marital status of the members (MD, KF). The Saxon ethnic mark of *Nachbarschaften* is clearly outlined by KF:

Sometimes, on condition they had been married, people from other ethnic groups or churches were also allowed to attend [the Nachbarschaften]. However, as a rule, there were “Saxon neighbors”. Until 1945, or only up to 1938–1940, about 4 500 inhabitants lived in Cislădie, they being in majority Saxons. A few Romanians lived among them, but with no participation in those matters [“neighborhoods”]. Actually, in Cislădie, the “neighborhood” [organization] was a Saxon thing, but such “Saxon neighborhoods” also existed in villages, with ceremonies included.

⁵ Territoriality is the basic criterion of associativity in the Saxon *Nachbarschaften*, which culturally differ from the kinship relatedness of the Romanian traditional village organization. In Henri H. Stahl’s words (2003: 175), “Typologically, there are two clearly-different social morphologies: on the one hand, Romanian villages are ‘genealogical’, divided as such into a number of kindred groups, each of which having or not its own settlement places; on the other hand, Saxon villages are split into several geographic areas, including [distinct] groups of neighbors, irrespective of being or not akin with each other.” However, in describing the Romanian organization of *Vecinătăți* in Drăguș village (Brașov County), in 1936, H.H. Stahl pointed out the same “purely spatial principle of the neighbors’ settlement with regard to each other”, in terms of the street location of the twelve local Neighborhoods (Stahl 2003: 158), eleven of which will be also identified 70 years later by Vasile Șoflău (2003: 72). In Drăguș, the social status of Romanian neighbors (particularly reflected in the local exchange of *plocoane*, gifts during baptism, wedding, and burial ceremonies) is shown to determine their vicinal condition, unlike the *Nachbarschaften* with their membership also defining the community status of Saxon neighbors (Șoflău 2000: 85–93).

Even when married, men and women had their own gendered *Nachbarschaften* (AF, MH). Alongside the *Nachbarschaften*, gender-based youth associations of *Bruderschaft* and *Schwesterschaft* also existed in Michelsberg, in connection with the Christian rite of Confirmation (among local Evangelical Saxons), when the village teenagers marked their fourteenth anniversary; the *Bruderschaft* and *Schwesterschaft* included the Michelsberg youth until their marriage (MH)⁶.

In Michelsberg and Heltau as well, the *Nachbarschaften* were internally structured, with the specialized roles of their members proving the institutional and customary character of such vicinal grouping. The leader of a *Nachbarschaft* was called *Nachbarsvater* in Michelsberg (AF, MH) and *Haan/Nachbarhaan/Oberhaan*, in Heltau (KF, TB). The *Nachbarsvater* (along with the *Nachbarschaftmutter*⁷) was a transmissible function – and exerted for two or four years (AF) – among the neighbors, in accordance with the moment in which they joined their Neighborhood (MH). In Heltau, the *Nachbarhaan* – “a kind of mayor” (TB) – was yearly elected “by rotation” from among the “respected persons” (KF); once elected, he was seconded by the *Oberalt* (that is, “the oldest neighbor”), which was rather an honorific title (TB). The *Nachbarsvater*’s “job description” consisted of many prerogatives and tasks among which convening the neighbors and communicating with the local priest on behalf of his *Nachbarschaft* (KF), collecting the neighbors’ cash contributions to their *Nachbarschaft* (AF). When being appointed his *Nachbarschaft*’s “father”, the *Nachbarsvater*’s responsibility was to give a communal party for all the neighbors from his organization (MH):

The “neighbors” from a given street came to organize themselves into a “neighborhood”, led by a two or four years-mandated Chief (depending on the size of that “neighborhood”). Everyone in the “neighborhood” had his turn in being elected as a chief, or Nachbarshaftsvater. Such “race” in transmitting a “neighborhood” chieftainship was lived as a great feast, with all members wearing their [Saxon] folk costumes, then carrying a wooden chest with their “statutes” (representing the laws of that Neighborhood), and electing their

⁶ For a description of the *Bruderschaft* and *Schwesterschaft* associations of youth among German-speaking *Landlers* in Southern Transylvania, see Sedler, *op. cit.*. The author defines such “youngsters’ brotherhoods” in terms of “ethnic social unions” set up according to “the criterion of age” and marked, among others, by a “festive wardrobe” especially woven for, and worn during, the ritual of Confirmation (Sedler 2005: 184).

⁷ Women’s *Nachbarschaften* have been reported in the town of Sighișoara (The Mureș County, also in Southern Transylvania), with their internal structure including the main roles of *Nachbarschaftmutter* (“The Mother of Neighborhood”), *Zehntfrauen* (the collector of taxes), and *Schriftführerin* (the secretary); such “Neighborhoods” are said to partially reproduce the men’s *Nachbarschaft* model, with a focus on the “Neighbors” “conviviality” and “moral accountability”, instead of the men’s system of penalties and fines inflicted to those Neighbors who contravened their organization rules (Schiltz 2003).

new chief... All that was necessary in order to show everyone who the new chief ["nachbarsvater"] was! As far as I can remember it since the 1970s and 1980s, the Nachbarsvater was offering a great party at our village's hostel. It was the culmination of a "neighborhood" life!

In exerting his temporary headship, the *Nachbarsvater/Nachbarhaan* were assisted by a *Nachbarschaft's* council (including among others a secretary and a cashier [KF]). While the secretary was writing the *Nachbarschaft* current reports, the cashier kept the record of the neighbors' membership payments (which were used for mutual help, such as in the cases of someone's illness or burial, as well as in the sponsorship for the reconstruction of a neighbor's burned house). Each *Nachbarschaft* had its *statute* in which the social rights and obligations of all neighbors were ascribed. Together with his council, the *Nachbarsvater/Nachbarhaan* kept the custody of their *Nachbarschaft's* "chest" – actually, a storage coffer with that Neighborhood's documents and money resources (MH, TB).

Within this framework, sanctions were decided to be inflicted upon those neighbors who had been proven guilty against one another (MH). For example, a neighbor had to pay a fine because of his/her absence from the funeral of a co-villager from his/her *Nachbarschaft*. The transgressors of the public norms from one or another *Nachbarschaft* were also expected to ask for clemency from that "neighborhood's" leading board (MD), which was sometimes associated to a customary court (TB). One's refuse to comply with the rules of a *Nachbarschaft* could cause his/her excommunication or even expelling from the village (MH, TB)! However, it was the joint efforts and solidarity among the members of a *Nachbarschaft* that essentially counted for their community consciousness. According to one of my interlocutors in Michelsberg (MH),

It was from such collective subscription that they ["the neighbors"] helped each other in case of calamities, as when a house burned and all the "neighbors" went to help in rebuilding it. From what my father told me, I know that in 1972, when my parents rebuilt their house, there were so many people coming to help [...]. And, once a "neighbor" helped you in rebuilding your house, in your turn you were obliged to go helping all your "neighbors" ... In the 1970s, when more Saxons than ever lived in Cisnădioara, before their 1980s emigration, there were few new houses needing to be built... My parents also told me that, when they asked three of their Neighbors to help as cart owners in the carrying of bricks from the town of Cisnădie, no less than 15 carts [of the rest of the "neighbors"] came to do it! So, that "neighborhood" really worked!

Elections for the *Nachbarschaft* leadership – especially, for the role of *Nachbarsvater/Nachbarhaan* – took place each February, in the ritual context of *Fasching*, that is, the Saxon Carnival, with all the *Nachbarschaften* celebrating their cohesion (KF), in the fanfare of the community (MH, EH), and in the

company of *Ritters* (young horsemen) wearing their folk costumes as “knights” (AF)... In such cases, music and dance were played according to Saxon traditions, while German was the only language in use (even in cases in which the Saxons were engaged in mixed marriages) (TB)⁸. A *Nachbarschaft* also worked as a social network in the ritual practice of local rites of passage, with the “*neighbors*” taking part in the cooking and commensality of *Hanklich*, the Saxon traditional pie (MH, EH)⁹.

As if mirroring the close interdependence between the *Nachbarschaften* and the Lutheran Church, the local priests were integrated in the Saxon institutionalized vicinities, and generally regarded as “neighbors” (AF). The *Nachbarschaften* membership usually reflected the Saxon affiliation with the Evangelical Church, while the villagers belonging to another Church did not attend the local “neighborhoods” (AF).

A *Nachbarschaft* regularly summoned its members once in two or three months (MH); except for the horsemen feast, when all the neighbors celebrated together the *Fasching*, men and women making their separate assemblies (AF). In Heltau (as probably in every Saxon community), the Neighborhoods were seen as an “equalizing” institution for the participants who, in the rest of the year, needed to accept subordinated roles in their socio-economic life (KF).

NACHBARSCHAFT AS A PERFORMATIVE MEMORY AMONG SOUTH-TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS

When asked about *Nachbarschaft*, the Saxon inhabitants from Cisnădioara-Michelsberg and Cisnădie-Heltau invariably situate their narratives in the past, more exactly in the postwar decades of their communities. As a result, all the aforementioned facts referring to the structure and function of the institution of *Nachbarschaft* are relevant for a retrospective inquiry of South-Transylvanian Saxons, rather than for their present-day social life. As one of my informants (KF) remarks it with regret.

⁸ During the late Middle Ages, up to the recent history of socialist Romania, the Transylvanian Neighborhoods are argued to have preserved their ethnic character among Saxons, Romanians, and Hungarians as well. With the Saxon opposition to accept in their *Nachbarschaften* members from other ethnic groups, Hungarians and Romanian vicinal associations were set up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In postwar Romania, the Saxon *Nachbarschaften* worked as “local institutions of the ethnic [Lutheran] Church [of German minority]”, while the “ethnic and symbolic functions” of the Hungarians associations for mutual help during funerals became “more prominent” in Southern Transylvania (Pozsony 2003). After 1989, Romanian Neighborhoods based on kinship as well as on “friendship and fellow-feeling” (rather than on traditional territoriality) took the place of the Saxon *Nachbarschaften* in rural localities from the counties of Sibiu (Cristian, Miercurea Sibiului, Turnișor) (Coman 2003), and Brașov (Drăguș) (Șoflău 2003).

⁹ For ethnographic accounts on the traditional cuisine of *Hanklich* among the Saxons in Southern Transylvania, see Roșca & Ștefan (2008: 34) and Constantin (2015).

Nachbarschaften ceased to exist and, anyway, that strong link between the people no longer is as in our childhood... In the past, everybody knew his neighbors, while people are now completely different, and everything has changed...

Similar overtones point to the lack of implication and interest of contemporary (Saxon) villagers (AF), or relate the *Nachbarschaften* to forms of community aid from an earlier period and sociality (TB). Some informants (AF, MD) find another explanation, taking into account the intergenerational chain in the young people's attending of *Bruderschaft* and *Schwesterschaft* associations, before joining – after marriage – an adult membership in the framework of a *Nachbarschaft*. In accordance with such viewpoints, the *Nachbarschaften* could not exist without the gradual passage of the youth to the “rank” of a Neighbor, nor could they properly work without the participation of the Neighbors – irrespective of their age – in the rituals officiated within the local Evangelical Church.

In the local argumentation (MH), one of the basic traits of the Saxon “neighborhoods” – that of a social guarantee for each of the accepted members – would have been replaced nowadays by the insurance agencies. Moreover, if following what could be called a “conceptual interpretation”, the evanescence of Saxon *Nachbarschaften* would have to do with the very loss of their social “functionality” and “authenticity” in the modern society (MH):

In German, “tradition” is translated by “Tradizion” or “Brauchtum”, as “brauchen” means “to need something”. The tradition [of Saxon Neighborhoods] was carried out as long as people needed it. Since it is no longer needed today, it doesn't work anymore... What of such type of organization is still kept is no longer authentic, as it is no longer in use...

My hypothesis is that, more than a nostalgic reminiscence about the youth's rituals or about the traditions of older and remaining German-speaking groups in Michelsberg and Heltau, remembering *Nachbarschaft* is mostly to be seen as a persistent *performative memory* among Saxons of today, echoing as such their needs of cultural survival as a decreasing ethnicity in the 2000s Romania. Indeed, while the *Nachbarschaften* are generally regarded as a Saxon “business” or folk characteristic (KF), they even happen to be associated with the “eight centuries of existence of Saxons in Transylvania”, as a means of “managing the [community's] needs”, as when “fighting the Turks and Tatars”, as well as the “plague and cholera” (MH).

What is particularly recurrent in the Saxons' narratives about their *Nachbarschaften* is the interweaving of the historical destiny of this ethnic group under Romanian socialism and the “vicinal consciousness” of German-speaking villagers such as those in Michelsberg and Heltau. Indeed, the neighbors' solidarity continued to be effective as soon as the Soviet troops arrived to Southern

Transylvania (in the autumn of 1944), when, in the context of war requisitions, the Saxon farmers lost their cattles (KF):

When Russians came, they were hosted in our house, which thus became a camp for prisoners. That camp didn't include our entire street, but it spread up to the house across the street, which – aside from our own house – was the last one. That lasted until December 1945, and afterwards we came back home (as previously everyone was forced to leave and find another living place). We moved to my grandparents, with a sister of my mother (who lived nearby) also relocating there. That was how everyone sought for a shelter...

My parents used to grow cattle (as they owned a stable of 18 milk cows), so they needed to move their cattle too. So where to relocate all that?! My father eventually found some stables of our “neighborhood”, at my grandmother's home, and he moved there all our animals, including the pigs and horses. In fact, the horses had already been taken for the frontline, so our traction animals were only the cattle... Everything was confiscated in 1945 and all what we were allowed to keep was a cow...

Later on, with the economic shortages in the 1980s Romania, the Saxon “*neighbors*” resorted to foodstuff barter (such as of butter, wheat, and sugar) which they needed for cooking their *Hanklich* (MH). According to AF, although the *Nachbarschaften* were allowed to function during the Communist regime, the convening of their members also depended on the approval from Romanian socialist authorities (AF).

Some of my interlocutors (KF, TB) uphold that the *Nachbarschaften* have not simply disappeared with the massive exodus of Germans from Romania, after 1990, since such “*neighborhoods*” are now organized in Germany (such as in the Sindelfingen [KF]), by ex-Transylvanian Saxons from Heltau who had emigrated there.

CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect, what *Nachbarschaften* tell the new generations of South-Transylvanian Saxons and, still, to Saxon emigrees who periodically return to their relatives from localities like Michelsberg and Heltau, is not so much an “once upon a time” ethno-history but rather a pattern of local sociality, able to revive together with the Saxon consciousness in Southern Transylvania – and in Germany as well. According to contemporary accounts from Michelsberg and Heltau, the *Nachbarschaft* is not only a matter of historical circumstances and ethnographic regional distinctiveness, but it would be proven to still accomplish in the Saxon diaspora its original mission of “public-needs management”.

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