Emigration and the care of older people 'left behind':
The changing role of neighbourhood networks, ethnicity and civil society

Elisabeth Schröder-Butterfill, University of Southampton

Abstract

Rapid population ageing and international migration are demographic trends which intersect and contribute to far-reaching transformations of local networks and communities. Academic literature has often focused on the impact of migration on *receiving* communities or narrowly on 'left behind' individuals and households. Less consideration has been given to impacts on wider neighbourhood networks and social relationships in sending countries, or the agency of non-migrants in transforming and re-creating networks disrupted by emigration. This article draws on qualitative interviews among a German-speaking minority in Romania which experienced dramatic outmigration to Germany in 1990. The evidence shows that local networks adjusted to outmigration by bringing in new actors previously not involved in support provision; in this case, neighbours belonging to different ethnic groups with whom relations were previously distant. In addition, existing civil society institutions, such as the church, intensified and extended their role to offer practical support and physical care. By examining these transformations through the prism of care in later life, the depth of social transformations ensuant on migration can be brought into sharp relief.

Introduction

This article examines the impacts of large-scale emigration on social organisation and social support in communities of origin. Most research on the impacts of migration on sending communities has foregrounded the role of remittances and transnational family ties in facilitating support. This risks overlooking two important aspects: first, the enduring role of *local* networks of support; and second, the ways in which transnational support flows are mediated by actors in the communities of origin. That these local networks are often profoundly transformed by emigration seems likely but is rarely the object of academic scrutiny.

The article focuses on the Transylvanian Saxons, one of many German minorities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia who witnessed mass emigration to Germany following socialism's collapse (cf. Peleikis, 2009; Sanders, 2016; Sienkiewicz *et al.*, 2015). The Transylvanian Saxons are an interesting case because they have, on one hand, long maintained close-knit neighbourhood structures and distinct ethnic and religious institutions in a multi-ethnic region of Romania. On the other hand, they have experienced such extensive emigration to affect not just individual families but whole communities and ethnic infrastructure. The remaining German population has an advanced age profile and family networks which are predominantly located in Germany. This nexus of ageing and extreme emigration might suggest widespread vulnerability among the older German population in Romania (King *et al.*, 2017). Yet, they are well-supported. The reasons need to be sought in transnational family ties with Germany (considered elsewhere, Schröder-Butterfill and Schonheinz, 2017) and the transformation of *local* networks of support in Romania, which is the focus here. Drawing on qualitative interviews with older Germans and key informants among the German minority in Romania, this article seeks to address the following questions: How do local networks of sociality and support adjust to significant emigration? Who steps in to fill

gaps left by departing members? What do new care and welfare configurations reveal about wider transformations of communities, institutions, relationships and identity? I argue that to understand the impacts of emigration on welfare and support in sending communities, it is necessary to consider not only *transnational* ties but also *local* networks. These networks do not remain static but are transformed in the wake of emigration, with older non-migrants agents in this transformation. The evidence shows that local networks adjust by bringing in actors that were previously not involved in support provision. In addition, existing ties are intensified and extended to encompass welfare. By examining these transformations through the prism of care in later life—an intimate practice tightly circumscribed by norms and preferences—the depth of social transformations ensuant on migration can be brought into sharp relief.

Literature review

Three bodies of literature are relevant to this article: The first concerns transformations of sending communities in the wake of emigration; the second, transnational support flows and their dependence on local networks; the third, neighbourhood and civil-society welfare provision and its role in migration contexts.

Transformations of sending communities

Studies of the impacts of migration on social organisation, relationships and support have tended to focus on host societies, e.g., around integration. Impacts on communities of origin due to gaps left by migrants have received less attention. There remains a dearth of literature on social transformations of sending communities following outmigration (Castles, 2010). A 2010 special issue of this journal on migration and social change posited that "migration-induced social change in sending countries and regions tends to be more far-reaching than in receiving societies" (Portes, 2010: 1555; also Van Hear, 2010). Portes theorised that sending-community transformations will be deepest in contexts where outmigration is permanent and numerically significant (cf. King and Vullnetari, 2006). For changes to penetrate the surface, they need to alter social institutions and values in the sending society. Portes' paper draws on limited empirical material and prioritises *transnational* impacts (e.g., remittances) rather than *local* socio-structural adaptations. Such local-level changes are captured by Anghel's (2016) research on ethnic relationships following labour migration from a multi-ethnic Romanian village. Anghel shows that for some ethnicities, migration results in both higher economic *and* social status in the sending community, for others improved economic conditions fail to overcome century-long ethnic barriers to interaction and prestige. In the context studied by Anghel, migration is temporary, with altered social relations triggered by returning migrants. The present study, located in the same multi-ethnic region of Romania, involves *permanent* emigration by one ethnicity, with lasting effects on interethnic relationships thanks to shifting balances of demographic weight.

This study uses the provision of care as a lens for understanding how social relationships are reconfigured by migration. This approach draws on theorising by anthropologist Tatjana Thelen (2015a; b), who identified the central role of care practices and relationships in social organisation:

> Rather than resulting from existing relationships, care practices need to be seen as vital for both constituting and dissolving significant relations …. On an aggregated level these practices feed into the (re)making of social order as well as the shaping of social change (2015a: 498).

Out-migration impacts directly on care because it removes from local networks actors who would normally provide care. It thus prompts the need for "renegotiation of cultures and practices of care" (Vullnetari and King, 2016:210), especially where migration affects large

proportions of younger cohorts (King and Vullnetari, 2006). Because care is an intimate practice, involving proximity, touch, human waste, and death (Twigg, 2006:122), examination of who is 'allowed' to care reveals group boundaries and how these change (Schröder-Butterfill and Fithry, 2014; Thelen, 2015a). When migration-induced shifts in individual care practices manifest in aggregate changes of values and practices, transformations at the meso-level of sending communities emerge. These transformations typically build on pre-existing structures and values, rather than presenting a radical break (Portes, 2010).

The nexus of transnational and local support

The influence of transnational ties and remittances on sending communities is well documented, and recent volumes underline transnational families' capacity to provide 'care from a distance' (e.g.,Hromadžić and Palmberger, 2018; Torres and Karl, 2016). The mediating role of *local* networks in sending communities has received less attention. These translate migrants' resource flows into delegated practices of care (Baldassar, 2007:279). Baldassar *et al.*'s (2006) seminal study on transnational care for older parents emphasises the role of non-migrants informing absent siblings of parents' needs and using remittances to meet those needs. Migrant children may also arrange and remunerate local carers to look after parents (Vullnetari and King, 2016:209). Schaab and Wagner conclude, "mobilizing, motivating, and/or producing care transnationally requires both mobile and immobile interconnected people" (2019: 195). Yet *how* the 'immobile' network members mobilise and sustain care is rarely examined, nor how local networks are transformed in the process.

Two mutually reinforcing trends consequent on migration support the emergence or strengthening of local networks of support (Peleikis, 2009). On one hand, inflows of practical, monetary or informational support can stimulate local initiatives of support. On the other hand, the significance of local networks can be a reaction to gaps left by emigration, rather than incidental to these. Local networks in turn facilitate future *transnational* support by encouraging institutionalised linkages between sending and receiving communities. For example, Peleikis (2009:183) documents how a small German-speaking minority in Lithuania has maintained diaspora links, attracting donations and volunteers from Germany and using these to restore church and graveyard. This has kindled 'roots tourism', benefitting the wider community.

Local networks also gain importance where transnational relationships weaken over time. Sanders (2016) revealed waning of transnational links between Germans in Kazakhstan and émigrés in Germany; the former are turning towards other ethnicities in Kazakhstan for social interactions and support (cf. also Sienkiewicz *et al.*, 2015). Both patterns resonate in the present study, where weakening transnational family support is driving inter-ethnic rapprochement and the institutionalisation of novel local arrangements. To understand these, the literature on neighbours and civil society is helpful.

Neighbourhood and civil-society support

Even in welfare states, reliance on a social security mix of state provision, support from family, friends, neighbours, and civil-society sources is common. In developing and ex-socialist societies, where formal social protection is limited or retreating, the welfare space 'between kinship and the state' is populated by a variety of actors and practices (Benda-Beckmann *et al.*, 1988; Bilecen and Barglowski, 2015; Read and Thelen, 2007). Support may derive from relationships, institutions or practices whose primary purpose is not support, but which nonetheless provide security by strengthening ties, creating reciprocities and building social capital. Neighbourhood relationships which unite people in lifecycle or religious

festivities and stimulate spontaneous support in calamity are a case in point. The social dimension can be critical: "often it is not simply access to material resources that makes people feel secure, but a network of social relations to which they can appeal in times of crisis and need" (Read and Thelen, 2007: 6). An advantage of neighbourhood support sources is their rootedness in local communities and traditions, their consequent knowledge of circumstances and preferences, and their ability to react swiftly (Nocon and Pearson, 2000). However, in people's hierarchies of care preferences, neighbours typically rank below family for fear of overstepping boundaries or unbalancing reciprocities (Barker and Mitteness, 1990; Litwak and Szelenyi, 1969). A further disadvantage is that neighbourhood networks mirror local cleavages along ethnic, religious or class lines, which can make them exclusionary. Research is needed on how migration impacts neighbourhood support by changing the composition and demographic weight of subpopulations constituting the solidarity community (Kreager et al., 2015).

Where informal neighbourhood support is weak, civil-society institutions may gain traction: religious networks are a good example. Like neighbourhood networks, religious networks operate locally but also sustain translocal and transnational links (Kreager, 2009). Their base in shared, often altruistic, values can foster concern for human welfare (Krause, 2014). Moreover, because members of religious congregations often interact over decades, they nurture social capital (Lewis et al., 2013; Smidt, 2003). This may translate into support to vulnerable members, including older people (Leutloff-Grandits et al., 2009). While the significance of civil-society organisations in old-age support has been noted, little is known about how their role changes in response to migration. Contexts like post-socialist Romania manifest dual impacts of state retreat from monopolistic welfare provision and emigration weakening family and neighbourhood support (Read and Thelen, 2007). This raises important questions: Do existing actors take on novel roles? How are new actors mobilised to fill gaps in local support? As I argue, in the case of the elderly German minority in Transylvania, neighbourly ties become extended across ethnic boundaries, while the church, previously providing spiritual care, has become a welfare institution. In both processes, migration provided the impetus while also facilitating transnational support of these local developments.

Context and methodology

The Transylvania region of modern-day Romania has long been multi-ethnic, inhabited by Romanians, Hungarians, Roma, Germans and others (Anghel, 2016; Verdery, 1983). The Transylvanian Saxons are the region's main German-speaking ethnicity, who arrived from the 12th century onwards from modern-day Germany and Luxemburg. Factors contributing to the preservation of German identity include privileges of self-government until the 19th century, occupation of economic niches, conversion to Lutheranism, emphasis on German language education and a collective sense of discrimination under socialism (Verdery, 1985). In 1939, they numbered more than a quarter million and constituted 5% of the total Transylvanian population and the majority in certain localities (Weber et al., 2003:461).

At the end of World War Two, during which Saxons had supported National Socialism (Szelényi, 2007), most working-age Saxons were deported to Russia as reparation for Nazi damages. Many deportees were later released to Germany, rather than returning to Romania. This triggered decades of emigration from Transylvania for family reunification, a process actively supported by Germany (Weber et al., 2003). Rural Saxon communities were also eroded by urban migration, as Saxons, dispossessed of agricultural land after 1945, sought work in new industries (Verdery, 1985). The toppling of Ceausescu and opening of borders in

1989 triggered mass exodus to Germany. In 1989 there were still nearly 100,000 Germans in Transylvania, today just 14,000 (Weber *et al.*, 2003 and expert interviews). The German population in Transylvania is concentrated in several towns, where they make up 1-2% of the population.

My interest in this small minority was prompted by the question of how the care and support of the remaining older Saxon population was being sustained following outmigration, and the role of ethnic identity and infrastructure in this. Research involved semi-structured interviews and participant observation over four periods of fieldwork (2008-2016).[i] My research assistant and I, both with part-German ethnic backgrounds, conducted interviews in German with older people and key informants in two cities (Hermannstadt/Sibiu and Mediaş/Mediasch) and five villages. The focus was exclusively on the German-speaking minority. The perspective of the Romanian majority is therefore lacking or mediated via our German interviewees. We interviewed 54 older Saxons, of whom 24 lived in a residential home (some in an urban, others a rural home). Older participants were recruited by joining meals-on-wheels delivery and home visits, attending church and cultural events and personal recommendations. We also interviewed 20 German key informants for their views on the older Saxons' situation and role of local institutions in support provision. This included leaders in the Lutheran church, journalists, academics, politicians, residential-home staff and individuals active in welfare services; five of these were themselves elderly. Interviews were complemented by participant observation. For example, we attended church services, craft circles, concerts, and Saxon reunions. The observational data yielded insights into the nature of older people's interactions, networks, culture and identity. Most interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, the remainder noted and typed-up. The data were coded in NVivo using pre-determined and emerging themes. This article draws on interviews with 20 key informants and 30 community-dwelling older people.

The article first describes the nature of Transylvanian Saxons' social organisation and community structure pre-1990 and the informal social security flowing from these. This is followed by examination of the impacts of emigration on Saxon neighbourhoods, which left these incapable of sustaining significant support to vulnerable members. The focus then shifts to inter-ethnic rapprochement and the roles assumed by Romanian and Roma neighbours, before examining the emergence of church-based welfare in the wake of emigration.

'Separate worlds': Transylvanian Saxon communities in the past

Thanks to their historic settlement pattern, Saxons represented the majority in certain Transylvanian villages and towns until the Second World War (Verdery, 1985). Post-war, many villages remained predominantly Saxon, with interethnic relations chiefly occurring in the workplace. As a Lutheran vicar growing up in a Saxon village in the 1980s explained:

> That only came after 1990, this rapprochement. Until then it really was separate worlds. In practice you had only your professional life partly in common.

In urban areas residential segregation was less pronounced, although even here particular quarters housed mainly Saxons. For centuries, *intra*-ethnic social networks and marriages were the norm, with segregation only gradually weakening during the 20th century. Patterns of social interaction were bolstered by distinctive German institutions, chiefly German schools, the Lutheran church and community organisation. The Saxons traditionally lived in tight neighbourhood structures. Villages were divided into neighbourhoods (*Nachbarschaften*), led by a neighbourhood 'father' (*Nachbarschaftsvater*). Neighbourhoods were responsible for mutual assistance, preservation of traditions and monitoring of behaviour (Stein, 2003). Although this entailed considerable social control (e.g., recording

church attendance), many respondents recalled fondly the socialising and festivities in their neighbourhoods.

A key role of neighbourhoods was to offer rapid, predictable assistance. For example, men were expected to help a neighbour build a house, make repairs to local roads or bring in the harvest of a household lacking adult males. As an older man growing up in a Saxon village recalled,

> When I was in primary school my parents built a new house, previously we had lived with the grandmother, but then they bought land from the state to build a house. The vicar learnt of this and said: 'Herr Widmann needs help!' And within no time it was organised, up to 30 people helped.

The neighbourhood women took it in turns to bring food to households experiencing childbirth or illness. On occasion of a death, 'first aid' in the form of money was collected from neighbourhood members and given to the grieving family. Funeral arrangements were also a neighbourhood affair. Villages lacked an undertaker; instead, young men dug the grave and carried the coffin. The immediacy of neighbourly help is captured in the Saxon saying, 'the neighbour is closer to you than the brother'.

The 'devastation' of Saxon communities

The second half of the 20th century saw first gradual, then dramatic reductions in Saxon numbers. Most former Saxon strongholds today have fewer than 100 people who identify as German. This is captured by an older widow living in Sibiu/Hermannstadt:

> I grew up in this street. … In this street only Saxons used to live, ... there wasn't a single Romanian family. … We are [now] in this street the only Germans, with the vicar. The vicar and I.

Most of the Germans we interviewed had made a positive choice to remain in Transylvania. Nonetheless, a sense of loss was commonly expressed: following the post-1989 emigration, people's familiar communities and social networks have become eroded.

> Now it's one big sorrow, now everyone is only [in] Germany, only [in] Germany! (Elderly widow, old-age home in Sibiu/Hermannstadt)

While close family members who emigrated have tended to keep in touch (Schröder-Butterfill and Schonheinz, 2017), the loss of former neighbours, school friends or fellow churchgoers is mourned. As one middle-aged vicar put it:

> The neighbours were all Saxon, now they are Romanians, and one has contact with them instead. But differently. Always a bit wistful about the sorrow that all are gone.

Notwithstanding demographic decline, German traditions, structures and networks have endured, albeit in altered form. Where significant Saxon minorities remain, Lutheran church services continue, and sometimes neighbourhood practices survive on a smaller scale. Towns like Sibiu/Hermannstadt and Mediaș/Mediasch support German choirs, bookshops, newspapers, and cafes. German schools remain important, even though most pupils and teachers are no longer German. These institutions are important for Transylvania's attractiveness as tourist destination and foreign-investment hub (Józsa, 2015). Politically, the German minority has become influential. Several Transylvanian towns have elected Saxon mayors, and the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania (DFDR) has won local election majorities. In 2014 a Saxon was elected president of Romania and re-elected in 2019. This illustrates far-reaching transformations in the acceptance of the German minority by Romanians (*ibid*.). As a German academic in Sibiu/Hermannstadt argued,

> If the majority population elects a Saxon as mayor, and then re-elects him, and has given the [DFDR] list so many votes that they have the absolute majority in the city council, then that's a sign that one makes no distinctions whether those are your 'own people' or others. One simply trusts these and that's it.

For older Saxons, the political influence of the DFRD matters as the party successfully instigated compensation for deportation and expropriation. Local Saxon neighbourhood networks remain important for emotional and practical support, especially for those who do not have close family nearby.[ii] In rural areas, for example, older respondents mentioned help from Saxon neighbours with cutting firewood or bringing in the harvest. In towns, assistance with shopping, minor house repairs or making electricity payments was commonly mentioned. However, small-scale neighbourly help by fellow-Saxons is no compensation for the massive gaps left by emigrating relatives. According to a 2003 estimate, around 40% of the Saxon population were aged over 60, and this is likely to have increased (Weber *et al.*, 2003: 637). Moreover, many of those who have remained are childless (see endnote 2). These twin trends of emigration and ageing had led me to expect considerable vulnerability among the Saxon older population. On the contrary, I found few instances of 'abandoned' or unsupported older people. The reasons for this must be sought in the far-reaching transformation of the Saxons' neighbourhood networks and the repurposing of traditional Saxon institutions. Let me first examine the transformation of local networks, which has brought new actors into play.

The transformation of local neighbourhoods

As we have seen, Saxons' social networks formerly tended to be oriented towards fellow Germans. This changed after the German exodus of 1990. Several expert respondents attested that interethnic neighbourly relations have become significant.

> Gradually a change of consciousness is occurring among the Saxons. Up until now one always heard: 'we alone have stayed, there is nobody here anymore.' And slowly they are noticing that the 'nobody' is the Romanian neighbours. (Academic, Sibiu/Hermannstadt)

> In the past the relations [with Romanians] were also good (well, not immediately after the war), but until [1989] the main contacts were always with other Germans. Now these contacts are missing, and therefore there is greater orientation towards Romanian neighbours. Look at my parents, they live in the same house as a Romanian family, and they help each other. It means I don't have to stop by so often. (Vicar, Sibiu/Hermannstadt)

This last quote captures both ambivalence and mutuality in the relationship with Romanian compatriots, while associating the former more with the past and the latter with contemporary conditions. Countless statements about interethnic relationships reveal that at a general level, these relationships were characterised by mutual prejudice which continues in weakened form today. Our German interviewees manifested stereotypes of Romanians as lazy and dishonest but also sociable and generous, while admitting that in their Romanian neighbours' perceptions Germans are stingy, arrogant and tainted by their fascist past, yet also competent and reliable (cf. Verdery 1983, 1985). Despite the historic depth of prejudice, even in the past, concrete relationships with neighbours were often marked by respect and reciprocity, and the data suggest that this positive evaluation is becoming pervasive.

> About the Romanians in general the old Saxons rant time and again. Because they behave like this, and they took this and that from us 60 years ago and so on. But the neighbour left and right, well that's the neighbour, that's a person they know face to face. With him one can get along or not, but that isn't generalised in the same way. (Editor of church newsletter, Sibiu)

As a result of German emigration, the ethnic composition of neighbourhoods has radically altered. Prior to 1989, a family emigrating to Germany had to sell its house to the Romanian state. The state then rented or sold the property to Romanians, thereby reducing residential segregation. Those who left after Ceausescu's fall, hastily sold their properties to neighbours. The resultant residential proximity is encouraging closer interactions and supportive ties on which older Saxons have come to rely.

> Where I live, previously there were only Saxons, now I only have Romanian neighbours, and we get on well. (Married elderly woman, Sibiu)

Romanian neighbours are taking on roles previously occupied by Saxon neighbours, for example checking on an older person, doing shopping, providing cooked food or garden produce, offering practical help around the house. Reciprocity is important in these relationships, but that was previously true among Saxon neighbours.

> Interviewer: Do you still sometimes have 'Kränzchen' [traditional Saxon get-togethers involving cake, coffee and gossip]?
>
> Older Saxon woman: Yes, but not Kränzchen, you can't call them that. With my neighbour, I go to her and she comes to me, she asks me for things if she needs, and I ask her. Because she is very decent. She is Romanian, but very decent. If I go to her on the first floor, she comes out and calls [in Romanian]: 'I know you don't cook!'
>
> And did she bring you food?
>
> No, I went and ate at hers.

This quote is revealing: First, it clarifies that the contemporary friendly relationship with Romanian neighbours is not directly equivalent to earlier, typically German forms of socialising. Second, the 'Romanian, but very decent' remark reflects the old prejudice vis-à-vis Romanian and Roma neighbours (cf. Verdery, 1983). Such asides were common in our interview data. Third, it reports mutual reliance and commensality, i.e., significant and intimate neighbourly support, which is remarkable given the backdrop of historical distrust. The emergence of interethnic neighbourly support was also noted by expert interviewees. As the editor of a church newsletter remarked,

> Again and again one hears about very good neighbours who phone if something is amiss or go shopping and help. ... Especially so with the Romanian neighbours, because they are very helpful. In the orthodox church there isn't such an organised system of diaconical [church] welfare but ... the neighbourliness goes without saying. They bring a bowlful of soup to an elderly neighbour or invite a lonely neighbour to join them for needlework. No-one talks of 'outpatient care for the elderly' or 'occupational therapy'. The people just do it, out of neighbourliness, out of humanity.

This quote, which humorously plays on the jargon of long-term care, suggests that neighbourly support is as much at the heart of Romanian as of Saxon culture, even if lacking in organisational bent. It captures how novel interethnic neighbourliness can address key practical and emotional needs in later life. But as people age, their needs may become more extensive. An unexpected finding was the extent to which even physical care was being arranged and provided by Romanian neighbours. Take Frau Klaus, an impoverished elderly widow, the last Saxon in her village. After her husband died, her neighbours had comforted her: 'Aunty, no more crying, we will help you!' When her health deteriorated, several Romanian and Roma women brought food, washed clothes and cleaned house. One neighbour found her after a fall and took her to hospital. Frau Klaus had repaid them with money, food and household goods. When her care needs expanded, she was initially cared for at home by a Romanian family, with the intention that they would inherit the house. Only when the husband of that family went for seasonal work in Germany did Frau Klaus seek nursing-home admission.

Thus, nowadays interethnic neighbourhood ties extend to caregiving. We encountered several cases where an older person was being cared for by a Romanian neighbour. One older widower had both his children living in Germany and rarely visiting. He considered himself lucky to have found a Romanian neighbour who cooks for him, looks after the garden, supervises his medication and accompanies him to hospital appointments in exchange for subsistence and money: "Without this woman, I would long be in the cemetery!"

It is not uncommon for such care arrangements to involve a formal or informal contract so that the neighbour later inherits the elderly Saxon's house. The specific term for such arrangements is 'to hand yourself over' (*sich übergeben*). This practice existed in the past, when it typically involved a childless older Saxon being cared for by a *Saxon* distant relative or neighbour. Instances of interethnic 'handing-yourself-over' seem to be new.

> Opposite us lived an older Saxon widower. He came to an arrangement with a Romanian family living in a village outside Sibiu/Hermannstadt. He invited the young Romanian family into his home. They took on the duty of caring for him until he died, and afterwards they inherited the house. (Academic, Sibiu/Hermannstadt)

Thus, Romanian neighbours, with whom until 1989 relations tended to be distant or distrustful, are taking on not only the role previously played by Saxon neighbours, but also by kin. Family members in Germany sometimes help organise these care arrangements for relatives in Transylvania, adding a transnational dimension to the negotiation of local support. Because such arrangements typically involve carers of lower socio-economic status and entail expectations of material compensation, they are akin to patron-client relationships. Yet it is the element of cross-ethnic provision, rather than the instrumental element, which is novel.

Significantly, interethnic care now also encompasses the intimate realm of funerals, which used to be the exclusive preserve of those sharing the same language, culture and religion. An older German woman reported her husband's death thus:

> He [the adult son of a Romanian neighbour] came willingly, when my husband died. I just phoned him: 'Dănuţ, my husband is dead.' 'Oh, I just thought of him. I'm coming!' He came willingly, we washed my husband and arranged everything around his coffin. And he also came to church, to the Saxon church.

The emphasis in this quote on non-coreligionists coming into a Lutheran church underlines the distance travelled between the ethnicities and religions. Throughout the socialist era, the Lutheran church had been the only space in which Saxons were free to congregate. That this space is now becoming more diverse and open is mainly evaluated positively, not least because it promises to preserve the Lutheran faith, Saxon traditions and German language in Romania (Oltean, 2019). In former Saxon villages Romanians are continuing traditions, such as bellringing, artisan processions and dance, and they are curating Saxon fortified churches. In the process these are being reimagined as part of *local* rather than *Saxon* heritage, which together with Orthodox monasteries and churches are contributing to the attraction of Transylvania as a tourist destination (*ibid.*). German-speaking schools only survive thanks to Romanian parents wanting their children to learn German, as this is seen to open possibilities of studying and working in Germany or being recruited by German firms in Transylvania (see also Józsa, 2015). In the process of ethnic integration, German institutions and practices are becoming transformed (e.g., greater reliance on Romanian language) and more inclusive (e.g., influx of younger members). The positive tension between past and future is captured well by a former Lutheran bishop:

> The future points to a Lutheran church enduring … perhaps predominantly in language Romanian, but with the tradition, the legacy, which we bring, which is also distinctive from the rest and of importance insofar as we, as Lutheran church, represent something that is not found in the other churches.

The changing role of the Lutheran church in Transylvania, and the implications this has for older people's welfare, are discussed next.

The changing role of the Lutheran church

Due to the close overlap of German ethnicity and Lutheran faith in Transylvania, the Lutheran church has long been a central institution in the life of the Saxon community

(Weber and Weber, 2000). As one elderly Saxon put it: "Saxon solidarity – that has its basis in the church." Yet for centuries its role was predominantly spiritual and identity-generating, rather than a source of support (Verdery, 1985). This changed after mass emigration hollowed out traditional family and community networks. Overnight the church was confronted with novel demands for practical help, especially in old-age care and support. In some cases, these demands were made explicit by departing families. A Saxon vicar recalled:

> Some unashamedly said: Reverend, here are my parents, they don't want to come [to Germany]. You look after them, it's their problem if they don't want to come.

In interviews representatives of the Lutheran faith drew causal links between emigration and the church's new role, with church-provided welfare – called *Diakonie* (diaconical services) – emerging as a defining characteristic of the Lutheran church. This is captured well in this Saxon vicar's remarks:

> We never needed a *Diakonie* until 1990. Then communities were well structured into neighbourhoods, sisterhoods, brotherhoods, one used to help each other. … But after 1990, when all this collapsed, when these structures were no longer sustainable, i.e., one no longer had the people with whom one could do that, then the church took over.

A similar motivation is expressed by the person employed to organise the Lutheran diaconical provision in Sibiu/Hermannstadt:

> 1989 so many emigrated, and many of the older people didn't manage to integrate in Germany and came back. Here they were, without children and getting ever older. So, the church had to get involved. [Why?] Well because the church has always stood up for the disadvantaged. She tries to be some kind of support or help.

The role of the church as go-to for welfare was readily acknowledged by the older Saxons interviewed. Queried about how older people without local family cope, an older woman replied without hesitation:

> The church helps them. I have a friend who has a very small pension and who is also disabled, and they come from the diaconical services and take care of her. The church is doing it.

In terms of *what* the church is doing, visiting services, meals-on-wheels and care homes are most significant and will be briefly discussed.

Visiting services

Church-run visiting services to older Saxons were encountered in all urban and rural research locations. A common element is the reliance on German-speaking volunteers belonging to the congregation, many already older themselves, who visit a contingent of older parishioners on a regular basis.[iii] The visits' emphasis is companionship, occasionally the distribution of food or other donations and the ascertainment of need for further help. Vicars make birthday visits to older parishioners, which have spiritual and welfare purposes. As a Saxon vicar put it:

> You never know what kind of visit you'll have. Sometimes it's a pleasant *Kaffeestündchen* [chat over coffee and cake], sometimes you think: My goodness, I should help tidy up here, there's no heating on and she's in bed and is ill. What shall I do first?

Elders identified as requiring instrumental support are then referred to meals-on-wheels or receive regular visits for tasks like shopping, accompanying to the doctor's, or supervising medication. For these more targeted visits many churches employ a community nurse. In the past these were German speaking, more recently this requirement has had to be relaxed due to a shortage of personnel from the German minority. However, excellent knowledge of the local population remains a key criterion.

Many older Saxons live alone and don't have close family members nearby (see endnote 2). Therefore, noticing and intervening at the point when a person is no longer managing

independently is critical for their welfare and survival. Through the system of home visits, the church manages the referral of older Saxons to a care home:

> This difficult transition from home to care home – the church often has to get involved, and the vicar. The vicar has to talk to the people and explain the how and what, and often also make the formal application for the home when people can't do that and organise the transport. So there the church has to step in, because the people can't organise it themselves. (Editor of church newsletter, Sibiu/Hermannstadt)

In response to my question about which older Saxons 'fall through the net' of welfare provision, the lay pastor of a German old-age home mused that it was most likely the one or two remaining Saxons living in remote villages *not* covered by a visiting service.

Meals-on-wheels

The provision of regular hot meals for community-dwelling elders is an important element of church-based support. The Lutheran church in Mediaș/Mediasch established 'meals-on-wheels' in 1991. It delivers 100 inexpensive meals six days per week. The meal is subsidised through donations – many from Germany – and a contribution by the Romanian state; recipients' co-payments depend on their financial abilities. In Sibiu/Hermannstadt, the service reaches around 30 older people. As older Saxons have died or moved into a home, non-Saxon recipients have been added, such that today more than half the recipients are not German. We conducted brief interviews with 13 meals-on-wheels recipients in Mediaș/Mediasch. A common theme was that people started receiving the service after an illness or fall. One woman suffered a hernia:

> Since then I get meals-on-wheels. I continue taking it, because I don't know what could happen with me tomorrow or the day after. It's difficult for me to go shopping and lug everything home. It's no longer possible. I'm glad that I get it.

Another woman with a daughter living on the other side of town recalled being urged by her daughter to subscribe after being ill. "I can't come every day, or twice or thrice a week, in order to bring you food!" An older bachelor living alone enthused that it was cheap and meant he didn't have to light a fire for cooking. For many, receiving a daily meal allowed them to continue living at home.

Residential care

In the past there was no demand for institutional old-age care for Saxons. One widow explained:

> Back then most people, in the villages in general, had children; there were children and grandchildren everywhere. And there weren't any old people's homes here in Romania.

Children were expected to care for older parents, and for those without children, relatives stepped in. It was common to tie familial care to economic rewards, especially in terms of an inheritance. Only following the mass exodus did a mismatch emerge between care demands and availability, prompting the development of institutions.

Most of the earliest initiatives were instigated by the Lutheran church or individuals within it. For example, confronted with older rural parishioners without local family, one diocese established a German-language residential home by buying two adjoining village properties. This home accommodates 30 older Saxons and employs 11 staff (not all of them German-speaking), paid for by the church. Residents are expected to help according to their abilities, for example by feeding animals, working in the vegetable garden or preserving produce, which allows the home to be partly self-reliant. This model meets the ethos of the older Saxon generation, which regards work and ability to contribute as key elements of a positive social identity. In similar vein, a Saxon vicar's wife, now in her 80s, established an

impromptu old-age home in 1990 to accommodate older childless women left behind by emigrating relatives. In total, she and her team of volunteers cared for seven older women until they died, including two who had been in a state psychiatric clinic under socialism.

The largest, regionally renowned German residential home also emerged out of Lutheran initiatives in the early 1990s. A journalist, who had covered the development of the home, explained its rationale:

> Because one noticed that there were practically no children left but very many old people … and in order to convey to these people a certain sense of security and to preserve their identity, this home was built.

The home has residential, nursing and palliative sections. Even today, it is significantly funded by the German government as part of their 'stabilisation aid' for ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Koranyi and Wittlinger, 2011). Latterly the Romanian state also contributes. Residents who own property are expected to bequeath it to the home unless relatives are willing to pay the monthly fee. To avoid accusations of exclusively benefitting the German minority, the home's mission is to serve the 'German population and its social environment'. Today around half of the 106 residents are ethnically German, and the home has a German 'feel', with traditional Saxon artefacts, Lutheran worship and the observance of German traditions (e.g., Saint Nikolaus), even though some residents do not speak German and are Orthodox.

Beyond financing, transnational links with Germany have had an influence on the development and running of the home. In the early years, vocational educators from Germany used to train carers working in the residential home. This required carers to have some knowledge of German. Nowadays few of the care-staff speak fluent German, but the home continues to attract volunteers and visitors from Germany, who stay in the home's guest wing and eat with residents. The several smaller homes and initiatives in Transylvania also maintain partnerships with parishes and organisations (e.g., Rotary Club) in Germany. These links still give rise to donations, volunteer help and expertise.

The impact of Lutheran church-based welfare for older Germans in Transylvania is undeniable. Some experts went as far as arguing that older Saxons are *more* secure than their Romanian peers, thanks to the strong institutional support from church and German Forum (DFDR), bolstered by links to the 'rich sister church' and diaspora organisations in Germany. Others caution that the church's involvement only arose because of the departure of children and kin and can never be a perfect substitute. The outlook for some of the services is in any case uncertain, thanks to their heavy reliance on German-speaking volunteers who are themselves ageing. The visiting service in Cisnădie/Heltau has already folded due to a shortage of volunteers, and the chair of a local DFDR branch worries over succession:

> Does it really have to rest on me now? I can still do it … but my head tells me that as a 75-year-old I've no business there. The younger ones have less time. It grieves me a little. I don't know what will happen.

Discussion and conclusion

Using the case of the Transylvanian Saxons, a German minority in Romania which witnessed large-scale outmigration to Germany after 1989, this article has examined the impacts of emigration on social organisation, local institutions and neighbourly networks of support in sending communities. The demographic weight of emigration rendered long-standing local welfare structures based on families and neighbourhoods unsustainable. Where in the past Saxon neighbours and co-religionists had provided support at times of need, post-1989 the Saxon populations had become eroded, resulting in the weakening or disappearance of ethnic-based support. This erosion was concerning because transnational family support from

Germany had also lessened over time (Schröder-Butterfill and Schonheinz, 2017), and many remaining older Saxons were childless or lacked close family nearby.

As the interview data showed, two key developments in local social organisation and interaction resulted in the older German-speaking population remaining relatively secure. *First*, local networks have adjusted to outmigration by bringing in new actors previously not involved in old-age support provision, namely Romanian and Roma neighbours. Not only are they engaging in activities previously done by Saxon neighbours, such as visiting, providing meals or practical assistance, but also taking on the role of family members by providing physical care. Relatives in Germany are sometimes involved in setting up care arrangements with Romanian neighbours. There is continuity with the past in that responsibility for old-age care entails legitimate expectations of inheritance. *Second*, existing ethnic-based institutions, notably the Lutheran church, have added and intensified roles. Previously the church provided spiritual care. Now it is central to the provision of practical assistance (via home-visits and meals-on-wheels) and physical care (through church-initiated care homes). The extended role of the church is supported by local volunteers–many of whom are elderly–and transnational links with Germany along which donations, volunteers and advice flow.

What broader lessons may be drawn from this case study for our understanding of community transformations, the relative role of local and transnational supportive ties and the significance of neighbours as sources of support in contexts of outmigration?

The findings support Portes' (2010) assertion that transformations of sending communities in the wake of emigration can be profound and lasting. Migration is rarely a uniform process. Instead, it disproportionately involves particular age groups, genders, socio-economic sub-groups or ethnicities. This can alter the demographic composition of sending communities and in turn impact social relationships, hierarchies and practices. In the present case, the ethnic composition of villages and urban neighbourhoods in Transylvania has shifted (Anghel, 2016), resulting in a reduction in ethnic residential and social segregation and closer inter-ethnic interactions (cf. Sanders, 2016). The extent of ethnic rapprochement can be inferred from various outcomes, including electoral success of German parties, curation of Saxon heritage by Romanians and the popularity of German schools. The fact that it finds expression in the intimate realm of physical care, commensality and funeral practices is an indication of the depth of change in ethnic relations. Despite centuries of mutual prejudice, Romanian and Roma neighbours are willing to extend care to older Germans, who in turn are willing to accept it. Study of care configurations thus provides a lens on social organisation, social relations and change. As Thelen has observed, "how we conceive of and practice care is central to our perceptions of ourselves and to how we perceive others" (2015b: 138). If new arrangements and sources of intimate care emerge and become acceptable, this is indicative of significant shifts in people's cultural values and sense of belonging (cf. Vullnetari and King, 2016).

Just as in migration research the role of non-migrants and local networks tends to be overlooked in favour of contributions from absent family members and remittances, in gerontological research an equivalent bias tends to neglect support and care from non-kin over support from family (but see Nocon and Pearson, 2000). The present evidence suggests that neighbours as a generalised network of supportive relations are an important source of practical and emotional support for older people. This was manifest in organised Saxon neighbourhood support of the past, as well as the small-scale assistance provided by Romanian neighbours today. A degree of reciprocity and a limit on expectations characterise such neighbourly relations (Litwak and Szelenyi, 1969). For support from neighbours to extend to the realm of caregiving, a more exclusive relationship must be negotiated

(Pleschberger and Wosko, 2017). This can take the form of fictive kinship, where a neighbour becomes 'like a daughter' (Barker, 2002: 166); or, as in the present evidence, can cross into patronage relations among individuals of different socio-economic status and with a contractual element underlying the provision of care (cf. Barker and Mitteness, 1990; Schröder-Butterfill, 2004).

As this article shows, the significance of neighbours is amplified in the wake of emigration, which removes normative sources of care and support–notably adult children–from local networks. Even where migrant family members continue to support kin in sending communities, this support depends on the existence of functioning *local* networks which translate transnational support into hands-on assistance. The novel supportive role of Romanian neighbours and emergence of care homes mean that absent family members in Germany can 'care about' elderly relatives from a distance (Tronto, 1993).

The synergy between local and transnational sources of support is also evident at institutional levels. Post-1989, churches and politicians in Transylvania were confronted with sudden demands for non-familial old-age support and care, out of which were born diaconical welfare services and care homes run or instigated by the church. They benefited from longstanding transnational ties between Lutheran churches in Germany and Romania, which provided volunteers, expertise and donations, and willingness of the German government to fund care-homes and welfare measures to stem inflows of ethnic German immigrants (*Spätaussiedler*). The existence of institutions with a shared language and ethos in the beneficiary country facilitates institutionalised transnational support (cf. Peleikis, 2009).

Aside from the degree of ethnic rapprochement, the strength of civil-society response stands out in the present case study. The Lutheran church in Transylvania is acknowledged as a key welfare provider, alongside organisations not discussed here (e.g., Rotary club, Saxonia). This is notable given that under socialism, civil-society engagement was repressed (Kligman, 1990), and religious and non-state institutions were prevented from providing welfare (Read and Thelen, 2007). The data point to several factors which facilitated the emergence and success of civil-society-based welfare, which will resonate in settings with similar conditions. *First*, the close overlap between ethnicity and religion resulted in the Lutheran church being a focus for identity and sociality. Peleikis (2009:173), observing this phenomenon in Lithuania, talks of the "'real' and symbolic convergence of local, religious and family networks" in the local church. This convergence promotes the social capital necessary to mobilise volunteers for welfare services. Conversely, in localities where insufficient numbers still identify with the religion and/or ethnicity, the church is unable to operate as welfare provider. *Second*, the excellent local knowledge of its constituency—characteristic of many religious congregations—is heightened by the overlap between ethnicity and religion and the operation of a membership principle. By maintaining up-to-date records of members and their condition, the church can identify the vulnerable and develop targeted support. *Third*, the fact that civil-society organisations can develop services which preserve valued elements of local culture and identity contributes to their acceptability and success. Thus, although the church has developed novel roles and institutions, these are embedded within a recognised cultural frame (e.g., German language, preservation of festivals and traditions, 'work ethic' in the care home). This allows the significant shifts in care practices which older Saxons have seen over the last 30 years not to be experienced as radical breaks in care culture. *Finally*, the reason why church-based welfare has survived while neighbourhood-based ethnic support networks have foundered may be because the former combines local rootedness with pan-local and transnational linkages. This makes the church less dependent on numbers at the local level and provides broader appeal for new members. Whether this appeal will be strong enough to

counter rapid ageing of the volunteer base—long instrumental for its success—remains to be seen.

ii   Among our sample of 54 older Saxons, exactly half were childless. Among these, only three had a spouse and seven a sibling, nephew or niece in Romania. This indicates far-reaching lack of family support among this sub-group. Among the 27 older parents, only 16 had at least one child remaining in Romania. Of our community-dwelling sample, three-quarters lived alone.

iii   The Lutheran church in Romania works on a membership principle, with baptised individuals automatically part of the church and paying small subscriptions. Volunteer visits rely on the resultant membership lists. In 2015, I met two German volunteers in Sibiu/Hermannstadt tasked with visiting and updating information on all 250 church members aged over 75 to determine what assistance they might need.

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