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**PHD THESIS SUMMARY**

**AFFILIATIVE ETHNICITY, TRANSNATIONAL HABITUS, AND SOCIAL  
CHANGE IN MULTIETHNIC TRANSYLVANIA**

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## SUMMARY

The present research explores the effects of migration in one of the most important migrant source countries in Europe. It seeks to understand how migration has affected the multiethnic communities in Southern Transylvania and whether there are other angles to analyze and study the effects of migration in Romania besides the economic and development perspective. In a context where migration has altered and changed many of the underlying institutions and structures of society, reshaping family relations, changing expectations, modifying values, and enabling people to assume new identities and positions, the migration has remained overwhelmingly focused on the economic and development dimension while missing out other transformations. Romanian migration has been studied mainly from an economic and demographic point of view while other aspects engendered by migration remained less researched. The effects of social remittances and systems of practice and values brought back by migrants remain rather poorly covered and migration studies often failed to capture the whole range of changes that mobility and migratory flows and migrant remittances have produced and engender at a more granular societal level. In this vein, the current undertaking seeks to shed light on the social changes that emerged in the aftermath of one of the most important Romanian migratory flows. It aims to unveil and understand the consequences of the ethnic German migration, which started during the World War II and continued during communism, accelerating with full force after the revolution and depleting entire ethnic German communities, reducing otherwise thriving and tight knit communities to mere symbolic presences. The research explores the changes taking place at the micro and meso levels of society seeking to understand the interplay between migration, ethnic change and ethnic German minority revival that takes place in several multiethnic locales in Southern Transylvania. The thesis aims to understand why in a context where there are fewer ethnic Germans than ever migration has increased the number of German speakers and fueled the leverage of the German minority and culture instead of simply withering the German community away. It draws on fieldwork and qualitative interviews with locals and migrants from these communities and extended participation observation within German minority organizations and German speaking groups. By unveiling the processes of ethnic change and political and cultural revival of the German minority the thesis also uncovers another development, that links migration and mobility with the transmission of participative and democratic practices. The study of migratory flows in Southern Transylvania

informs us about larger processes that emerged in the region in the past three decades, illustrating how the growing ethnic affinity for the German community ensures a smooth absorption of remittances and systems of practice that ethnic German return migrants bring back to their country of origin which are further institutionalized by ethnic German minority organizations and grass root civil society formations. In line with other recent works on migration and ethnic and social change the research outlines how migration and mobility and the resources and capital that Romanian migrants gain through migration are employed to assert Romania's European position and identity and its capacity of becoming a modern and democratic European society. However, in relation to other studies which outline the symbolic instrumentalization of these resources, the present research outlines the interplay of both symbolic and practical resources that migrants and local communities acquire, illustrating how the resources account for the emergence of participative practices and a more vibrant and inclusive local civil society. Other than being read as a migration study, the thesis can be also read as a work that explains the differences in which democracy and participative behavior play out at the local level, and how democratic development is impacted by migration and mobility and remittances and systems of practice that migrants bring back home. Read from the perspective of ethnic diversity and minority politics in the context of the complicated ethnic landscape of Central and Eastern Europe, where ethnic diversity and minority politics have been associated with ethnic competition and nationalist claims over the ownership of state institutions, this research outlines how in some contexts ethnic diversity is not necessarily detrimental to democratization but rather a driving factor of democratization, civil society building and appeasement of ethnic conflict.

These developments and interplay of factors are structured as follows:

In the Introduction part I introduce the rationale and the objectives of this research and some of the theoretical framings that I will use to investigate the processes of ethnic renewal and transnational return that take place in the multiethnic locales of Transylvania.

In Chapter 2 I outline the main theoretical underpinnings and the methodology of this research endeavor. I firstly discuss the concepts of ethnic affinity and ethnic affiliation. Secondly, I position my research endeavor within the literature of migration and social change, while in the third section

I outline the data collection methods and provide more information about my fieldwork as well about stringent issues encountered during fieldwork such as ethics, reflexivity and intersubjectivity. The theoretical framework of this paper dwelling on ethnic affinity and ethnic affiliation have been previously developed in an article written together with Remus G. Anghel, which was submitted to the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies with the title “Creating Ethnic Affinity in Transnational Settings. Social Remittances at Work between Romania and Germany”.

In Chapter 3 I focus on understanding the social and historical context that drove the ethnic Germans out of Romania and the factors that pushed them to reconsider their relation to Germany and consider a potential return to their regions of origin. I will review the literature that covers the transformations that ethnic German communities have seen in the past decades and link it to the more recent strands of scholarship that discuss the re-evaluation of their ties to Germany and their tentative and transnational return to Romania. This chapter also contains statistical information that illustrates the outmigration flows of Romanian Germans as well as figures that describe the demographic evolution of the German minority in Romania. The chapter is based on a research report documenting the migration of ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe which was published in 2013 with the title “From Privilege to Restrain: The Migration of Ethnic Germans from Romania and Poland” on the website of research project PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0602 Recasting Migrants Voices.

In Chapter 4 I tackle the impact of ethnic migration of Romanian Germans on their societies of origin and the development of a culture of migration in Transylvania. I build my analysis on semi-structured interviews, participant observation and statistical data and on my exposure in the field to the livelihoods and social life of many Romanian migrants and their families.

In Chapter 5 I explore the social dynamics that push non-ethnic Germans to appropriate the German language and culture and participate in this process of ethnic change and cultural revival. I draw my analysis on the semi-structured interviews and discussions conducted with the members of these social groups in Southern Transylvania and on my lengthy participation and participant observation in ethnic German organizations and institutions.

In Chapter 6 I look at the interplay between ethnic change and ethnic German cultural revival and economic development. I explore the link between the revival of the ethnic German material and immaterial heritage and the growing economic returns that this investment brings, as well as the growth of German investments in the region and the creation of a market where the German language is valued and highly sought after.

In Chapter 7 I document the various types of return that ethnic Germans employ in order to remake ties with their origin communities in Transylvania. The chapter is based on the analysis of interviews and discussions conducted with temporary and permanent returnees and the local German speakers from their surrounding communities. This chapter aims to understand their motivation to return and to map out the return practices and their mobility routes but also to uncover the impact of their return on the ongoing processes of ethnic renewal and German minority revival. The chapter is based on an article that has been previously published as an independent chapter with the title “Minority Institutions, German Transnational Return Migration and Social Change in Transylvania.” The chapter has appeared in the collective volume “Transnational Return and Social Change. Hierarchies, Identities, and Ideas,” edited by Remus G. Anghel, Margit Fauser and Paolo Boccagni, and published by Anthem Press, London (2019).

In Chapter 8 I analyze the impact of these processes on the institutional revival of German minority institutions and the interconnection of these processes on wider processes of social change that take place in the Romanian society. The chapter is based on the fieldwork conducted in the city of Sibiu and surrounding area in the past years. I draw my analysis on interviews with the active members of German minority institutions, with the graduates of the German schools, as well as with older ethnic Germans and locals living in these areas and on extensive participant observation conducted in German speaking groups and minority institutions. I will focus particularly on the youth organizations of the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, on the local congregations and youth associations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, on the German teaching schools and local folk dance groups. The chapter is based on three articles that I previously published under different forms in other publications. One has been published in the Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe, Vol. 39, Issue 7, Article 3, with the title “Transnational Migration and Ethnic and Religious Renewal amongst the Ethnic German Minority in Romania.” The second has been

published an independent chapter with the title “Mobilitate, împrumut cultural și rearticulare asociativă în rândul minorității germane din România” and appeared in the collective volume “Un veac frământat. Germanii din România după 1918”, edited by Ottmar Trașcă and Remus G. Anghel, and published by ISPMN Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca (2018). And to a certain extent some of the underlining ideas for this part have been published in the chapter “Reinventarea și apropierea germanității în Transilvania. Mobilități transnaționale și procese de recompunere etnică și social” which appeared in the collective volume “Reinventând Germanitatea. Etnicizare, mobilitate și împrumut cultural la marginea Europei”, edited by Ovidiu Oltean, Remus G. Anghel and Christian Schuster, and published by Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest (2017).

In Chapter 9 I explore some reflections coming from the Transylvanian Saxon community regarding their status and their prospects for the future. The chapter closes-up some of the discussions started in the paper and can be read as an opening to conclusion chapter that follows immediately afterwards.

In Chapter 10 I will put these processes into perspective, and I will explain the effects of this ethnic change and German minority revival on the local population and local social systems and hierarchies as well as their impact on the larger Romanian society.

The theoretical underpinnings that will frame and guide my analysis revolve around ethnic identity and ethnic affiliation, transnational return, and social change. I draw my analysis on the understanding of ethnic identity as a socially negotiated and socially constructed element of status and identity (Jenkins, 2008; Nagel, 1996). I look at ethnic identity not as to a static and fixed attribute but rather a contextual and situational category which is "enacted and displayed depending on the restrictions imposed by various social settings and contexts" (Nagel, 1996: 45). I see ethnic groups not as "fundamental static units" but rather as collective agents who constantly work to make and maintain ethnic groups by redrawing and reinforcing the social and symbolic boundaries that differentiate and distinguish them from other groups (Brubaker, 2004). Drawing on a theoretical approach developed by Ervin B. Kosta (2018), Elisabeth Becker (2015) and Tomás R. Jiménez (2010) I analyze boundary work and ethnic group formation as a "more complex negotiation" of difference where both the "core" group as well as those outside of it hold



particularly powerful levers of boundary making and boundary crossing (Kosta, 2018; Becker, 2015).

**Key words:** affiliative ethnicity, ethnic affinity, ethnic migration, Transylvanian Saxons, transnational return, social change