ROMANIAN JOURNAL OF
COMMUNICATION
AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Contents

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Immigrating Ethnicity: Configuring Romanianness in North America at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Abstract

This article gives a social-historical account of Romanian immigration to North America at the turn of the twentieth century. The story is traced through the notion of ethnicity, which is conceived as a discursive, representational, and practical repertory emergent in social relationships, at the confluence of specific historical social structures and institutions. The scrutiny of the experience of migration objectifies Romanian ethnicity's variable internal organisation, functioning, and manifestation, as it is produced in other territories, within other states, and articulated in specific ethnic and racial hierarchies.

Keywords: Immigration; ethnicity; Romanian immigrants; Canada; United States.

Rezumat

Articolul propune o naraţiune social-istorică a imigraţiei româneşti în America de Nord la începutul secolului al XX-lea. Aceasta este scrisă prin mobilizarea noţiunii de etnicitate, concepută ca repertoriu discursiv, reprezentaţional şi practic, rezultat al relaţiilor sociale formate la confluenţa unor structuri sociale şi istorice particulare. Experienţa migraţiei relevă analistului organizarea internă variabilă a etnicităţii, funcţionarea şi manifestările sale, aşa cum sunt produse în alte teritorii, ale altor state, articulate de ierarhii entice şi rasiale specifice.

Cuvinte-cheie: imigraţie; etnicitate; imigranţi români; Canada; Statele Unite.

1. Introduction

Public language designating historical communities of immigrants has a social history of its own. It mirrors contexts of departure and contexts of reception. It reflects changing political relations between immigrants and their country of origin. It expresses stages of adaptation, integration, acculturation, and assimilation, or of *mestizaje*, *hybridity*, and marginalisation. Shaped by global power relations and labour regimes, it has often been part of national identity politics. Academic language has borrowed, and, at its turn, has provided terms and meanings for immigrants' description of the self and inscriptions by the other, making sense of their experience, as well as creating it throughout.

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Using the metaphor of the "'diaspora' diaspora", Brubaker for instance noticed the proliferation of diasporas, and alongside, of diaspora talk (Brubaker, 2005). The original sense depicted the Jewish expulsion from the Land of Israel. To this "paradigmatic" case were added the Armenian and the Greek cases. The term was then gradually extended to the African diaspora created by the trans-Atlantic slave trade; to the Asian diaspora resulted from the Coolie Trade; to the various labour migrant communities maintaining ties with their homeland; to groups of emigrants practicing long-distance nationalism; and to almost "any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space" (Brubaker, 2005, p. 3).

For the case of Romania, the word "diaspora" initially distinguished immigrants who had left for European, North American, and other states to flee the communist regime. The word captured a classical diasporic stance (Brubaker, 2005, pp. 10-13), related to the experience of exile: forced emigration, dispersion, commitment to homeland's welfare sustained by the promise of return, and boundary maintenance predicated on the need to identify with the country and the people left behind. With the massive post-communist international labour migration of Romanians, the term "diaspora" now refers at once to this particular group of Romanians whose efforts were counted to have contributed to the fall of the communist regime, and to all cases of Romanian emigration.

This restricted and broad use of the term also encompasses a novel situation occasioned by the freedom of movement gained after the fall of the communist regime: the encounters between the "new Romanian immigrants," the "old 'new' Romanian immigrants" of the communist era, and the descendents of historical, "old" immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. They reveal experiential differences determined by historically specific regimes of exit from Romania, access in the destination countries, and international mobility. They also uncover deeper differences, pointing to distinct notions of ethnicity and their workings through complex social structures.

This study focuses on the wave of migration from Romanian lands at the turn of the twentieth century to Canada and the United States. It shows the way Romanian ethnicity configured in North America out of the interplay of migration policies, genealogical links of solidarity, and locally constituted hierarchies. Starting from a relational approach to ethnicity, it traces the distinct paths of the making of Romanianness in Canada and the United States. Admitted to Canada as non-preferred nationals through an immigration policy conceived as a population-making device and aimed to domesticize the prairies, immigrants formed a sense of self, built a Romanian genealogy, and constructed a narrative of Romanianness out of their arduous life on the homestead. For the immigrants to the United States, coming massively from Transylvania with the experience of interethnic living and occupational diversification, the accommodation to the urban life, and the use of advancement opportunities presented by the American capitalist system, Romanian ethnicity became a secondary identification alongside the American one, a function of class that required progressive assimilation.

The study is based on empirical work done between 2008-2012 in Canada (Windsor and Toronto) and the United States (New York). It comprised examination of primary sources such as legislation, legal records, white and green papers, memoirs, immigrant publications, mass media reports, official statistics, census data, archival documents; study of secondary literature, including accounts of immigration from other regions in Central and Eastern Europe; interviewing and participant observation.[1] The first section discusses the notion of ethnicity. The second section writes the narrative of Romanians in Canada. The third section gives the account of immigration to the United States. The concluding section points out the

contingency of ethnicity, configured at the confluence between distinct state governmentalities, and dependent on local regimes of property, class, and race.

2. Ethnicity in and through the social-historical account

Analytically, ethnicity is commonly paired with *nationhood* and thus theorised through (or theorized out of) various social-historical, political, and cultural approaches to *modernity* and *the state* (for classical accounts see Gellner, 1983; Greenfeld, 1992; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992; Hroch, 1985; Smith, 1986; Weber, 1976). It is conceived either as a primary principle of solidarity and commonality of feeling – a subjective belief in the common descent upon which or against which political organisation is made possible and indeed sometimes necessary; or as an outcome of political struggles in which it is instrumentalized, forged, or forced upon a group, no matter how artificial or fictional it is.

When the first aspect is emphasized, ethnicity comes to epitomize "traditional" (not modern) or localized forms of being socially, as metaphorical kinship or symbolic family. The difference upon which it is predicated is essentialized, becoming a "cultural" difference in language, phenotype, and artefacts. When the second aspect is emphasized, and this is usually the case in situations of migration and mass migration, the analytical focus on ethnicity changes perspective, becoming more involved with borders, boundary-making, difference, and hybridity (Anderson, 1983; Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994). The "cultural stuff" of ethnicity dwindles, and the relational and the political emerge, re-producing ethnicity through operations of inclusion and exclusion, marking on and marking off, organisation of internal and intergroup difference, and spatial re-configuration. In situations of migration, the association with nationhood gets de-centred and ethnicity is recast as *ethnic minority*, an object on which acts of assimilation, integration, accommodation, and positive action may be done. It can also be viewed as the *colonial,* the *subaltern,* the *racial,* the *illegible*, or the *primitive other*, a condition that explains phenomena commonly portrayed as alien to Western societies, though threatening to take them over.

The typical way to investigate ethnicity empirically from the first perspective is by determining a set of necessary or sufficient elements to be found in groups with a particular organisation, and to inventory its change in time (Smith, 1986). Conceived like this, ethnicity is a categorical identity, which links individuals through abstract equivalents, rather than through interaction (Calhoun, 1997, p. 46). Taking this route, Chandra (2006) sets off to appraise the definitions and uses of ethnic identity in comparative political science. She then advances her own, amounting to the greatest common denominator of the surveyed literature. Ethnicity is an identity category in which membership is determined by objective or subjective descent-based attributes, whose salient intrinsic properties are *stickiness* (difficult to change in the short term) and *visibility* (can be ascertained through superficial data sources). She suggests that ethnicity either does not matter or has not been shown to matter in explaining most outcomes researchers had attributed it. She then proposes that this concept should be replaced by empirically more appropriate ones, such as descent-based identities and identities based on sticky or visible attributes; and that the body of theories and datasets on ethnicity should be discarded and rebuilt anew on different foundations (Chandra, 2006, p. 422).

From the second standpoint, Brubaker expresses similar discontent with the concepts of ethnicity and identity (Brubaker, 2004). He warns against the mistake of taking categories of

practice as analytical categories, an error that bears the risk of unintentionally reproducing or reinforcing reification, rather than accounting for it. Brubaker calls "groupism" the tendency to take homogeneous and bounded groups as units of analysis of social life, and charges academics' groupism on their own political practice of identity. His theoretical revision, very much like Chandra's, concludes that questioning the unit of analysis, the ethnic group, may lead to contesting the domain of analysis, ethnicity itself. In the alternative epistemological routes he embarks in order to capture the multifaceted and fluid forms of ethnicity, and reacting against "complacent and clichéd constructionism," Brubaker (2004, p. 3) proposes to break up these concepts into smaller analytical units like "identification" and "categorisation," "self-understanding" and "social location," "commonality" and "connectedness," and to depict social reality in relational, processual, and eventful language.

The logical or empirical examinations of abstract representations of ethnic groups, conceived as bearers of categorical identities, and micro-dynamics rendered by relational studies, focused on boundary-making and internal signification of difference, are both useful steps into understanding how ethnicity works, but they either suspend its temporality completely, or place the study of ethnicity in a presentist temporality, leaving us short of explaining why ethnicity actually "happens" and how it matters. Events are not simply ethnicized, ethnically framed, or contingent. People are not just doing things with categories or "doing being ethnic" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 13). Ways of seeing ethnically are produced in specific historical and social conditions, and reflect a commonality of culture (see also Calhoun, 2003, p. 559) and a recognition or imposition of that commonality.[2] Eventfulness occurs as the instantiation of a particular articulation of "social structures" just as countless "ethnic" events stabilize practices and understandings, and transform them. Ethnicity *hails* the actors variably in the relational situations they find themselves at any moment, and it also hails the researcher.

A more comprehensive understanding of ethnicity requires to unravel the specific "mechanisms" (Steinmetz, 1998, pp. 177-178) active in a given conjuncture – the structuring structures and the power-producing interactions that make ethnicity relevant relationally, to which the empirical analysis of ethnic things that "happen" provides access (see Steinmetz, 2004 for the relationship between single social events and explanation).[3] If people can do various things with ethnic categories, it is because categories too do various things with people in particular contexts. Their ethnically fluid everyday existence takes place on specific social bases, and their particular degree of ethnic groupness or thing-in-the-world-ness depends on those social bases, and on the conjunctures they enable.

This article provides a historically informed account of how ethnic categories are produced within complex configurations of class, racial hierarchies, and perceived cultural differences. It is conceived as a discursive, representational, and practical repertoire emergent in social relationships, at the confluence of specific historical social structures and institutions.

3. "Stalwart peasants in sheepskin coats": Romanian immigrants to Canada at the turn of twentieth century

The first immigrants from Romanian lands who came to stay in Canada left in 1898 from the village of Boian in Bukovina. They were Ichim Yurko (Ichim Jurcă) and Elie Ravliuk (Iliuță Rauliuc) with his wife and four year old daughter. They were soon joined by other thirtysome families from the same village, and by Bukovinians from other villages. By January

1901, in the district of Boian, named after their origin place, in what is now the province of Alberta around one hundred Romanian families were settled (Popescu, 1986; Zawadiuk et al., 1998). Small communities of Romanians formed in the surrounding area, about 100 kilometers North-East of Edmonton, in Saskatchewan, North-East and South-West of Regina, and along the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border. Most of them came from Bukovina, but there were also handfuls who came from Transylvania and Banat, part of Austria-Hungary at the time, and from Dobrudja, in the Kingdom of Romania (Patterson, 1977; 1999; Popescu, 1986).

The lands that lured Romanians from their homes had belonged to Metis and First Nation peoples, and had been transferred to Canada in 1870, through negotiations conducted by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald. Over two hundred million acres of land were surveyed by the *Dominion Lands Act* of 14 April 1872, which stated that:

> Any person who is the head of a family, or has attained the age of twenty-one years, shall be entitled to be entered for one quarter section [160 acres] or a less quantity of unappropriated Dominion lands, for the purpose of securing a homestead right in respect thereof. [...] At the expiration of three years the settler [...] upon proof, to the satisfaction of the Local Agent that he [...] resided upon or cultivated the land for the three years next after the filing of the affidavit for entry [...] shall be entitled to a patent for this land, provided such claimant is then a subject of Her Majesty by birth or naturalisation.

Proving up the homestead meant improving the claimed land by constructing a home, breaking at least thirty acres of land, cultivating some crops, and actual residence on the homestead for a set period of time. In 1874, the new version of the law, the *Homestead Act*, reduced the age of claimants to eighteen or more.

Despite energetic actions from the Canadian federal government, which targeted farmers with capital and agricultural labourers, preferably from Great Britain, the United States, and Northern Europe (Troper, 1972), settling the vast Dominion Lands proved a hard task to accomplish. Only 8.8 per cent of the total homestead holdings had been recorded in the Dominion township registers by the Land Branch agents by 1885, and 20 per cent by 1900. (Norrie, 1979, pp. 239-240).

In 1897, Minister of Interior Clifford Sifton visited Bukovina and Galicia in a campaign intended to encourage peasants to migrate to Canada. Member of the recently formed Liberal government (1896) which had pledged to populate Canada's West and transform it into the country's granary, this remarkable man had a clear depiction of the required immigrants:

> When I speak of quality I have in mind, I think, something that is quite different from what is in the mind of the average writer or speaker upon the question of Immigration. I think a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality. A Trades Union artisan who will not work more than eight hours a day and will not work that long if he can help it, will not work on a farm at all and has to be fed by the public when his work is slack is, in my judgment, quantity and very bad quantity. I am indifferent as to whether or not he is British born. It matters not what his nationality is; such men are not wanted in Canada, and the more of them we get the more trouble we shall have. (Sifton, 1922, p. 32)

Exactly such were the first immigrants from historical Romanian lands. Most of them came from Bukovina, and together with Transylvania, the two provinces accounted for 85% of Romanian immigration to Canada up until the 1920 (Patterson, 1999). The typical passage

of the peasants and their families had them set off in carts to borderland stations, from where they took the train to Hamburg or Bremen. Embarked on passenger steamships or cattle boats, they arrived in Halifax, and then crossed Canada by train to Winnipeg whose Immigration Hall functioned as the gateway to the West. From there they travelled to their destination by whatever means available: trains, wagons, horses, or by foot.

While national legislation and police regulations generally made it difficult to advertise and recruit immigrants from most continental European countries, booking agents, motivated by the commissions from steamship companies and bonuses from the Canadian government, developed knowledge and skills to evade them (Petryshyn & Dzubak, 1985, pp. 50-53; Petryshyn, 1997). State officials and their private enterprising associates in the origin lands used vigorous advertising, propaganda, and networking to organize groups of families for the passage. (See Petryshyn, 1997 for a critical assessment of Canada's Ministry of Interior contract with and functioning of the North Atlantic Trading Company, a rather clandestine syndicate of selected European shipping agents which obtained exclusive claim to government bonuses in return for recruiting agricultural settlers. See also Woodsworth, 1972, pp. 173-178). The Austrian administration helped through liberally issuing one-year temporary passports to young people, while entertaining hopes that the peasants would engage on a round-trip. Bankers deemed subsidizing immigrants more lucrative for the return of their investments through cash flows and remittances, than borrowing money for farm-improvement (Rasporich, 1982, p. 36). Through its agents operating in many European locations, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) offered packages of passage over sea, work, and land at relatively low prices. Fellow villagers already landed in Canada were the most efficient device of this complex assemblage in convincing peasants to embark on this adventure, whose reward was extensive land of their own.

Their historically specific experience of living in an imperial borderland made peasants from Bukovina, rather than from other regions of what was to become Greater Romania, embark to Canada. The changes in political administration, multiethnic cohabitation, complex class, ethnic, and political relationships, and intense contact between village and town shaped their availability for huge, life-changing projects (Barton, 1975, pp. 1-90; Bobango, 1979, pp. 3-4). The names of the first recorded Romanian immigrants to Canada, mentioned at the beginning of this section, are not Romanian, but Ukrainian. Many of the family names of those first pioneers from Bukovina, whose tombstones rest in the prairie cemeteries, sound Ukrainian: Hlopina, Holovaci, Moscaliuc, Porojnic, Petruniuk, Romanko, Săvăliuc, Seminiuk, Soprovici, Zaharichuk. Yet, their third and fourth generation descendants declare themselves of Romanian origin at present day Canadian census surveys, and work to promote their version of Romanianness through enactments of a collective memory of migration (Popescu, 1986, and according to various publications and online forums of the descendants of first Romanian immigrants).

Ukrainians were the most numerous ethnic group in Bukovina at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1910, those who declared themselves Ukrainian represented 38.4 per cent of the population, followed by Romanians with 34.4 per cent, 12 per cent Jews, 9 per cent Germans, and others, including Poles and Hungarians (Livezeanu, 1995, p. 49). Moved to Bukovina from Galicia in great numbers in the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of them were peasants, and were not recognized politically. By contrast, Romanians displayed a complex social structure, and had historically enjoyed representation in the government of the duchy and cultural rights. But those who settled in the same districts and

regions intermarried, whether Romanian or Ukrainian, and used the Romanian language to communicate. They experienced the same tough conditions of grim weather, arduous work in the fields, loneliness, and isolation. The need for cash and food forced them into schemes where the man worked at the CPR or in the cities for several months a year, while the wife lived in the homestead with the children, off a household – garden and sod house – strenuous to manage. The shortage of Orthodox priests, and the bad quality of the monks sent to Canada by the Metropolitanate of Moldova, in Romania, made Romanians turn to the help of Ukrainians to build their churches and serve in them as priests (Bobango, 1979).

Alongside "Romanians" and "Ukrainians", other fellow adventurers arrived around the same period from Bukovinian lands. In 1882, a group of Volga Germans, relocated to Bukovina after 1871 for fear of drafting and dwindling privileges, came to work for the CPR and build their farms (Patterson, 1977, pp. 8-17). A report to the Parliament of the Dominion of Canada from 1891 (House of Commons Canada, 1891, pp. 97-98) describing several German colonies in the West, around McLean, north of Balgonie Station, refers to Romanian speaking Germans, and to Russian or Romanian types of dwelling built by these pioneers. A number of Szeklers, a Hungarian people that lives overwhelmingly in three counties of present-day Romania at the South-East border of Transylvania, came from Bukovina to settle in the same areas of the prairie. Bukovinian Ashkenazi Jews have started to migrate to Canada's West in the 1870s and continued to come, joined by fellow Romanian Jews from Basarabia and the province of Moldova. Many of them spoke Romanian, and Romanian functioned as *lingua franca* in places like the Dysart region in Saskatchewan, where they all settled (Patterson, 1977, pp. 18-19).

This global context represents the basic matrix of force within which immigrant populations emerged and took particular routes. It comprises two state jurisdictions, between which an exchange of population took place, and a vast entanglement of actors, interests, locations, ideas, and rationales, which enabled the mobility of these people. The commonality of practices and arrangements entailed by the terms of their cohabitation in Canada, and the commonality of political and economic regimes experienced in the country of origin, partly account for their formation into an ethnic group self-denominated as Romanian. It was initially prompted by their struggles with the Canadian authorities over the allocation of land sections, as they strived to settle in compact areas.[4] The solidarity grown out of cooperation and dependence needed for sheer survival, and the shared language and memory of native land were the matter of the Romanian ethnicity formed on Canadian soil. This becoming as Romanians was also mediated by World War One, as a few men joined the Canadian Forces and celebrated postwar Greater Romania, enlarged with Bukovina, Bessarabia, Transylvania, Partium, and the Romanian Banat, as their homeland (see accounts in Popescu, 1986). The experience of the war and Romanian nationalism ignited through parts of North America by diplomats and Orthodox clerics triggered the transformation of "home", which for most immigrants meant their street, village, or region, into the "homeland" or "vechea ţară" (the Old Country).[5] The narratives of Romanian identity, homeland, and ethnic origin, and the works that edify them, whether internal, such as the building of Romanian Orthodox churches, or external, through state-generated categories of ethnic origin, document Romanian ethnicity in Canada.

Most of the descendants of the first pioneers from Bukovina, while collecting the stories of their parents and grandparents, and while recollecting their own experiences as sons and daughters of tamers of Canada's West, ground their narrative construction on a foundational error. They claim that the village of Boian, the hearth of the original Romanian immigration

to Canada, now in Ukraine, belonged, at the genetic time of their arrival, to Romania. This slip of memory stands as an act of collective baptism. It aligns a specific awareness of cultural distinction historically contoured in the space of their origin, where they claimed social and economic superiority, while politically dominated by a foreign centre in a multinational empire; with a national project-in-the-making at the time of their departure, materialized in a "state of Romanians" – Greater Romania – which would incorporate their land as its own historical land;[6] and with an identity that had to be settled in the new country, to clear the lasting confusion of officials at entry points which had been recording them alternatively as Austrians, Germans, Romanians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Hungarians, or Russian (Popescu, 1986; Woodsworth, 1972).

This identity supported the life chances and the sense of self of migrants and their descendants by reflecting their increasingly well-placed position in a hierarchy of racialized ethnicities and nations. Until 1962, Canada practiced various immigration politics of exclusion based on racial, national, and cultural grounds (customs, habits, and modes of life), geographical area of origin, unsuitability with regard to the climate (euphemistic formulation for "race"), potential for assimilation, and others. The Immigration Act of 1906 aimed to prevent "undesirable immigrants" by adding restrictions and expanding categories of the "prohibited", and by giving the government legal authority to deport immigrants within two (subsequently three, respectively five) years of landing (for reasons including disease, becoming a public charge, or "moral turpitude"). The 1910 Immigration Act gave huge discretion to the government to regulate immigration through Orders in Council, and furthermore increased restrictions and grounds of deportation. Immigration fell dramatically during World War One. When in 1923, after the post-war period of economic low, Canada started again to encourage immigration, Romanians, as nationals of non-preferred countries, were admitted only as agriculturalists, farm labourers, domestics, and sponsored family members. From the few accounts of the early migration of Romanians to Canada, no hostility from the locals' part or from "Canadians" themselves was shown toward them. In contrast, the more numerous histories, memoirs, and studies of the Ukrainian first immigration to Canada (mostly from Galicia and Bukovina) are marked by traumatic reports of negative reception as "non-preferred continentals" – dirty, garlic-smelling, filthy, drunken, penniless, ignorant, holding unintelligent methods of farming (e.g. Czumer, 1981; Woodworth,1972). Romanians distinguished themselves expanding the boundary of whiteness and locality through hard work, industriousness, and self-improvement. These peasants which were "of exceptionally fine physique" and "good quality" as fodder for the great prairie domestication stayed peasants, and many of their children became farmers, on increasingly larger holdings of land. Other of their children, and almost all of the following generations moved to the cities into liberal professions, business, services, or administration.

The narrative about an earlier Romanian ethnicity in Canada is built on the stories of adversity of the first pioneers.

When my father arrived there [to his allotted land section, in Southern Saskatchewan] there was nothing, nothing. Only the sky and the ground [...] They were all given a square mile for ten dollars. But the weeds were this deep [she shows the length of her arm], the rocks were this big [she shows the height of her thigh], the mothers all went to pick the rocks, put them on the stone boat, and dug the weeds, and plough was two oxen.[7]

During the great depression, and in the following years, hardships multiplied, as various natural disasters stroke parts of the prairie inhabited by Romanians. Storm, dust and wind, Russian thistle, and grasshoppers are mentioned by this interviewee for successive years between 1932 and 1937. Many Romanians from Alberta and Saskatchewan moved to Montréal, Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener, or Windsor to survive economic bankruptcy and draught. The Canadian government paid relief to those who remained on the land ($32 per month for a family of twelve, and piles of flour and beans). World War II however produced greatest dislocations. Most Romanian men joined the army, while women took employment in factories in the cities. Very few returned to the farms, and when they did, they went back as university graduates, utilizing modern means of agriculture.

The narrative was thus fixed by a final departure from an early experience of farming in the prairie. In the late 1980s and 1990s the third and fourth generation Romanians have started to collect, talk, write, and perform accounts of a Romanian identity and ethnicity in Canada. While the (otherwise antiquated and dialectal) language was lost to English, and Romanians assimilated to an urban Canadian society, the narrative became separated from their actual ongoing experiences, cemented into a myth, and started an autonomous existence of its own. Memories of Greater Romania, to which Bukovina belonged between the wars, and of communist Romania never visited, grew on a Romanian identity sported on particular occasions, linked mostly with the Canadian state and the associational forms generated by its multiculturalism policy since early 1970s. It was activated when now hyphenated Romanian-Canadians went to church, where the service, for convenience, was held in English. It was also activated in lucrative commercial ventures (opening an ethnic restaurant), or social gatherings (balls, social clubs, local events celebrating the Canadian mosaic). The myth and its narrative went hand in hand with the census administrative category of ethnic origin – one of the peculiar pillars of the evolving Canadian multiculturalism policy.[8] It contributed to preserve the name of "Romanian" relevant in various contexts of identification, and to invest it with the positive impressions of these people's social achievement.

Romanian ethnicity in Canada evolved at the junction of Canada and Romania's state-building projects. Confederation Canada aimed to populate the vast extents of land recently acquired with "able-bodied men who are willing to work and can work" (Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier in Parliament, House of Commons Canada 1900, 10187). This was part of a larger National Policy, whereby agriculture established by farmer immigrants would support and complement industry in the rest of country, helped by the newly completed Atlantic-Pacific railway and the tariffs policy. It consolidated a transcontinental nation, threatened by an ever-expanding United States of America. In Austria-Hungary and Romania, national struggles were shaped by modernisation forces acting in contradictory way. Many immigrants who left for Canada were not poor and destitute, as the story would tell it, but rather socially mobile, in possession of land and implements, open to commercial ventures with the city, and holding multiple cultural ties. Their passage was part of larger plans made possible by the transformations in social and economic relations, citizenship regimes, and types of subjectivity. Unable to return due to costs of travel, the start of WWI, and the definitive establishment on Canadian soil through the toils of the first years on their granted land, their relationship with Greater Romania remained mythical and emotional.

"Since it is not 'objective culture' that shapes ethnicity", writes Eriksen (1993, p. 73), "it makes sense to state that ethnic identities can be maintained despite cultural change. However, such an identity maintenance may seem paradoxical, since ethnic ideologies stress the

continuity of that very cultural content as a justification for the continued existence and cohesion of the group". In the situation of migration this may appear even more paradoxical. Ethnic identities reconfigure in specific, contingent forms, while the principle that has linked people variously through kin, land, genetic memory, language, and shared fate remains active and manifests in a form of recognition by co-ethnics, grounded in the legitimacy accorded to ethnic belonging as one of the primary sources of self.

4. Peasants and the urban middle class: Romanian immigrants to the United States before World War Two

Immigration of Romanians to Canada was closely linked to its counterpart in the United States, and the case of Romanian immigrants to North America reveals how the immigration policies of the two states interacted. While the former produced peasants-farmers working to break the vast expanses of land in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, the latter concentrated in the industrial cities of the East coast and the Midwest (New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and smaller industrial centers) and made a prosperous urban middle class whose most important investment was education.

Before 1895 the great majority of immigrants from the Kingdom of Romania were Jews. Data collected by Galitzi (1929, p. 31) from the Annual Reports of the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration indicate that between 1899-1928 arrived from the territories of Greater Romania a total of 263,227 persons, of which 47.5% (124,637) were declared Romanians from former Austria-Hungary; 39.9% (105,214) were Romanian Jews; 6.8% (18,079) belonged to other ethnic groups; and only 5.8 (15,304) were Romanians from the Old Kingdom. Anti-Semite prohibitions, restrictions, and repression in Romania had increasingly afflicted the Jewish population's economic and social endeavours at the turn of the twentieth century. By then, the figure of the "American uncle", ostentatiously dressed and liberally spending money during his visits to the native homeland, started to ignite the popular imagination (see the formidable account of his experience by Ravage, 1917 and 2009).

Immigration to the U.S., similarly to immigration to Canada, emerged at a critical juncture of modernity. Combined interests of states and capital, supported by local communal and transnational solidarity associations, and backed up by family strategic plans, generated the huge wave of European Jewish emigration to the United States.[9] Set to succeed at a fast pace in the new country, they engaged in all petty jobs and activities that the Lower Eastside of New York allowed: peddlers, workshop labourers, shop-keepers.

> And in the mean time the East Side Ghetto *was* my America, a theater within a theater, as it were. No, it was even more circumscribed than that. The outsider may imagine that the Ghetto is a unified, homogeneous country, but a little more intimate acquaintance will rectify that mistake. There are in it strata and substrata, each with a culture, a tradition, and a method of life peculiar to itself. The East Side is not a colony; it is a miniature federation of semi-independent, allied states. To be sure, it is a highly compact union, territorially. One traverses a square, and lo! he finds himself in a new polity. The leap in civilization from Ridge Street to Madison Street is a much wider one than that between Philadelphia and Seattle. The line of demarcation is drawn sharply even to the point of language—the most obvious of national distinctions. Though both speak Yiddish, the Jew from Austrian Poland will at first hardly understand his coreligionist from Lithuania. Their dialects differ enormously in accent and intonation and very appreciably in vocabulary. And each separate group entertains a humorous, kindly contempt for the speech and the manners and the foibles of all the others. (Ravage, 2009, p. 63)

In this world of worlds, the most populous area on the planet at the time, individuals struggled on their own, while relying on webs of family relations and hometown ties. Mixing Romanian and English, they started their intricate journey into the American society-in-the-making looking for work and self-employment around the streets of their tenements and lodgings, taking English lessons, joining religious and educational societies, and planning their savings in order to pay for their parents or siblings' passage tickets. "Little Rumania" formed as close a society as other homeland groups, like "Little Galicia" or "Little Russia". Ravage tells us (2009, p. 64) that the Romanian side had nevertheless taken a character of its own. It had more restaurants than the Russian quarter, more confectionaries, and more coffee-houses. The hasty entrance into the vibrant economic and social activity of the Lower East Side thus produced immigrants as self-made Americans, with cleft emotional ties to their home country,[10] and complicated links with the national community of immigrants (here Romanian). These were, in their words, "Romanian and Jewish Americans".

After 1900, the Romanians who came to the U.S. were mostly peasants from Transylvania, and also from Bukovina and the Banat. Three regions from Transylvania – the Carpathians, the Transylvanian Plain, and the Bihor Massif – produced about 85 percent of the Romanian migration (Barton 1975, p. 57).[11] They usually came from villages with property rights broadly distributed within the peasant sector, yet with a dwindling share of land, and engaged in small agricultural operations. In these regions, peasant agriculture had been supported by the appearance of intermediate forms of tenure, the growth of communal credit agencies, and the possibility of non-agricultural employment (artisan manufacturing, household industry). With the decline of all these, limiting peasant household's resources, many young men and women abandoned the land and looked for work on a globalizing labour market.

These villagers used to be geographically mobile, keeping inter-village relations through frequent outside village marriages, and good contact with the small neighbouring towns through artisans and their ware. Many of them spoke some German or Hungarian, as a result of interacting with German or Hungarian/ Szekler fellow villagers. This helped them get along with Austrian and German officials during their passage to America, and also follow the trail of Germans or Hungarians already left, in their search for work in the U.S. (Barton, 1975, p. 50, for the case of Romanians in Cleveland. See also Romanians' accounts in Galitzi, 1929). They tended to stick together initially and shared lodging in Romanian boarding houses – associational cum entrepreneurial forms organized along ethnic lines, where for a reasonable amount of money immigrants received accommodation, meals, care, and companionship. Boarding houses offered a survival environment to these peasants turned into workers, on which the toil in plants and mines, the loneliness, and the continuous challenge of a completely foreign place left deep traces. Romanians soon started mutual benefit and cultural societies, to help each other and their families in the too common occurrence of industrial accidents. Out of these, other organizations were born: family societies, parishes with confessional and instructional institutions; credit unions; cultural associations maintaining reading rooms and libraries. These formed the core infrastructure of Romanian ethnicity in the U.S. at the beginning of twentieth century, and still are, one hundred years later, the backbone of Romanianness for the third and fourth generations of Romanians descendant from the immigrant pioneers.

Like in the case of Romanian immigration to Canada, the basic context provided by two state jurisdictions and two local property, labour, ethno-racial, and class regimes set the field of forces which allowed international migration and coagulation of ethnic groups of Romanians in the United States. Romanian ethnicity was shaped out of togetherness based on com-

monality of language, the condition of immigrating alone without the family, comradeship based on the share of long, gruesome, daily labour routines, and the positioning within an ethnic scheme formed in the previous century of internal and international migration. The fluidity of the American class system gave the most important mark to the earlier formation of Romanian ethnicity on the new continent – that of class.

The early organizations of Romanians were formed by self-made mobile men, who had moved about the Old Kingdom and Austro-Hungary looking for chance. They seized the spaces of opportunity of their new country and entered with full forces into its society. While reproducing social forms of their villages, they adjusted rapidly to city life and to a society whose tenor was achievement. Besides functioning as beneficial and insurance societies, Romanian associations formed leaders and offered support for the education of youth. They pooled resources at "national" level and shaped the ascending mobility of the immigrants. Societies were the place where Romanians learnt about the American institutions, practiced cooperation and democratic decision-making, and started reading and writing.[12]

Romanians tended to give limited significance to property ownership, since buying a house also meant residential fixity in a working class settlement in the proximity of the factory; but they gave their children, boys and girls, a high education, passing unto them their achieved status of American middle class. Barton (1975, p. 131) notes: "The Rumanians present a fascinating picture of rural immigrants adopting urban norms of small families and restricted commitments. Italians and Slovaks, however, did not sacrifice traditional family values through the limitation of births. Rather, upwardly mobile parents in these ethnic groups seem to have had enough confidence to rear large families than those who remained in the same class."

The Romanianness enacted by and through Romanian societies took class-based forms. Education gave Romanians a means to preserve notions about their native lands and their language, and such aims were articulated and realized by the elites. Illiterate, unskilled workers frequenting Romanian boarding houses, bars, parishes, and societies maintained the Romanian ethnicity through the accommodating environment offered by these institutions (see also Bobango, 1978). Romanians who managed to learn English so that this gave them a palpable advantage, allowing them to move into skilled labour or lower white collar jobs, and those who accumulated enough capital to open small businesses, became more exposed to the whole society, admitted non-Romanian "social" members in their societies while reducing "cultural" programs, and moved to the suburbs (Bobango, 1979, p. 13). For them Romanianness dwindled as a relevant component of everyday interaction and sense of self, and assimilation into the American, white group followed.

Many of these Romanians returned to their homeland after World War One, the "nation state" of Greater Romania.[13] For them, the goal of the travel had been to obtain enough money to conserve their small property, upkeep their family, and maintain social status in the village, a strategy reflected in the phrase common among Romanian immigrants to the U.S., "Mia și drumul" ("One thousand dollars and take the road back."). In the fiscal year of 1921, out of 6,206 Romanians who left the U.S. (excluding women and children without a definite occupation), 5,731 were unskilled workers. The second largest occupational group recorded by the American authorities was that of landowners with 254, followed by servants with 69. The number of Romanian workers to enter U.S. in the same year was 2,217, of which 780 were unskilled workers; 74 belonged to the liberal professions; 767 were skilled workers, craftsmen, and artisans; 252 were tradesmen; 666 servants and waiters; 216 agricultural work-

ers (all figures are from Drutzu, 1922, p. 42.) During this period, the American government initiated restrictionist immigration policy, culminating with the 1924 Immigration Act.[14]

While it is not clear how many of these Romanians actually came back to the U.S., the many obituaries of members of the Union and League's component societies, published since the 1950s to the 1990s in the newspaper *America*, indicate that a significant number of Romanian Americans who had returned to Romania between 1910-1939 came back to the U.S. They seem to have belonged to families who had several members left in the U.S. while they lived and worked in Romania; some had arrived as immigrants at very young ages or had been born in the U.S., and were sent to school in the mother country; others returned to get married in Romania and stayed. Their Romanianness was thus played on a more substantial transnational existence, and their emotional involvement, as well as economic interest, had more nuances. The recurrent visits to Romania nevertheless also objectified their attachment to the new country, and to the fact that it was there that they wanted to live their life.

Romanians followed closely the events in the Second World War. Quite a few of them fought in the U.S. Army, and many got killed. As mentioned before, a lively diplomatic activity in North America has been carried during the last years of the war, exposing Romanian government's position on the state's moves. In all American cities, Romanians showed at public meetings in great numbers and enthusiastically supported the Romanian government's mission. The end of the war, the drought and famine of the late 1940s, and the communist take-over in Romania were seriously engaged and responded with declarations, interpellations, and fund-raisings to help the afflicted. After the declaration of the Popular Republic, the first and second generation of Romanian Americans pondered on the rift it brought and defined belonging to the nation by alignment to the doxic Romanian organizations in America:

> On the occasion of one year after the set up of the so called 'republic' of the Romanian people, one could see what our national group thinks and feels.
>
> On the one hand there is the organized Romanian group: The Union and the League with the newspaper 'America,' the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate in America, and the Association of Romanian Catholics in America. These three institutions genuinely represent the Romanian people in the United States. […]
>
> Who remain outside these three organisations are neither Church people nor people from societies. Among these there are several communist agents gathered around the communist front IWO [...] and supporters of a communist newspaper to poison Romanian souls, 'Românul American.' [...] Here are the defenders of the Groza-Pauker government in Romania: unprincipled, with no responsibility and who only represent themselves, a handful of traitors of the Adoptive Country (țara adoptivă) and the Birth Country (țara de naștere). (Cine-s slugile Moscovei, 1949, p. 3)

Romanianness was now defined clearly with reference to the new country – at this point the first wave of Romanian immigration to the U.S. matured into a self-conscious ethnic group, holding its own institutions within the local institutional landscape. They related to the country of origin through American values, and clearly distinguished themselves from their former fellow-nationals by assuming an American identity. At the same time, the country needed to remain as an abstract reference, which offered a genetic source and documented their worth as an ethnic group. This is how the motivating announcement to participate in the fund-raising to help Romania was formulated in the newspaper America: "Our Birth Country, Romania, has been through fire and disaster. She went though disruption and unimaginable pain, and we, those privileged by faith, which had not been touched by anything because

we had the luck to be on this paradise on earth, America, we each did all we could, some with means beyond their possibility, but many did very, very little, or nothing at all, to help our brothers at home. This because race interests, beliefs, politics had been placed by most of us before the biggest duty, *charity*. [...] How would it be for you to show to the people that you indeed are the ones that keep the light and all the nation of Romanian origin in the U.S. to do their duty, to give generously, and send food to the hungry in Romania [...]. Support the initiative of the *Alliance* and *all unite*, at least once in 40 years!" (În ajutorul României, 1947, p. 1, Emphasis in original.)

5. Conclusion: ethnicity reconfigured

Heavily criticized as analytical concepts, ethnicity, ethnic group, and ethnic identity were deemed lacking explanatory power while perniciously reproducing reification. The alternative epistemological strategies employed to account for the reality of ethnicity and to disentangle its workings empirically did not however cleanse the analytical language of these terms, or offered satisfactory ways to depict their empirical referents. Following Hall (1996, pp. 1-2), rather than submit them "under erasure", I questioned in relation with what set of problems does their irreducibility emerge. This report aimed to scrutinize how ethnicity reshapes in contexts of international migration. Using the case of Romanian immigrants to North America at the turn of the twentieth century, it shows how ethnicity was reconfigured by their experience in the new lands, at the confluence of different state governmentalities, and local regimes of property, class, and race.

Romanians in Canada came as agricultural labour force, unloaded in the vast expanses of the West. Their original status was that of a non-preferred category of nationals in a formalized hierarchy of labour "quality", admitted to Canada when the traditional, desired, sources of immigration had started to dry out. The forms of cooperation, solidarity, and sociability determined by the harsh conditions of life on a homestead, in the prairie, contoured a new Romanian ethnic identity of assorted components: a common spoken Romanian language in an area where several foreign languages were spoken; memories of the homeland sublimated in the image of Greater Romania as external identity reference; solid material achievements and the recognition for their hard work, making and keeping them "white".

Romanians who went for fortune in the United States followed a path opened and thoroughly beaten by Jews from Romania at the turn of the twentieth century. Coming massively from Transylvania, they shared the experience of interethnic living, occupational diversification, and sustained relation with the town through commerce and work mobility. Confronting difficulties and hardships, their successful accommodation to American urban life involved strategic investment in education, and fruitful use of the advancement opportunities presented by the American capitalist system. Romanian ethnicity morphed into a secondary identification alongside the American one, object of an intimate link with several essentials: the Romanian orthodox faith, the romantic stance towards the heroic characters of Romania's unification and independence, and the strong allegiance to the values of democracy, entrepreneurship, and freedom. The relationship to interwar Romania was maintained through a certain type of transnationalism, comprising family arrangements that separated members between the two countries, and stakes built in their country of origin by Romanians in America. The persist-

ence of Romanianness was a function of class, where the rising middle class of Romanian immigrants and their descendants assimilated progressively into Americans.

The study depicted the social-historical and relational polymorphism of ethnicity, pointing to its spatialization, and to the central role played by the states of origin and settlement. Ethno-national politics of a state, even if a state afar, may trigger claims of ethnic belonging and practices of ethnic identification through categories and symbols thereby provided. The existence of Greater Romania as a state, in conjunction with the solidarity formed on foreign land, the ethnic organisational infrastructure, and the salience of the Romanian language, produced Romanians out of immigrants with multiple social allegiances. The Canadian and American states, at their turn, have significantly contributed to this process, through their immigration policies, the specific ethno-racial hierarchies they supported, and the principles governing economic relations and class formation.

Notes

[1] Research in Canada was possible with the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU 89/1.5/S/61104, with the title 'Social sciences and humanities in the context of global development – development and implementation of postdoctoral research'. Research in the United States was carried out through a Senior Fulbright Grant 2011-2012 held at the Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University.

[2] 'But culture is not simply always already there as though external, but produced and reproduced in a shared process of practical action. Moreover, common culture not only contributes to 'groupness', it contributes to the extent to which groups appear to their members (and sometimes others) as natural and necessary rather than arbitrary and optional. And this is not merely a folk understanding to be supplanted by an academic one.' (Calhoun, 2003b, p. 559)

[3] This is also the point made by Calhoun when emphasizing "the constitutive role of culture and the ways in which the general phenomenon of human embeddedness in social relations also necessarily, but unequally, takes the specific form of embeddedness in particular collectivities" (2003b, p. 559). Ethnicity is produced and produces effects in social spaces in which options and needs for solidarities are unequally distributed (Calhoun, 2003a, p. 537).

[4] See the ethnic distribution on the quarter sections of the Dominion Lands Survey, e.g. in Luciuk & Hryniuk, 1991; Popescu, 1986; Rasporich, 1982. "Galicians" were mentioned most often in discussions concerning the quality of immigrants and the location of their land entries. See for example House of Commons Canada, 1900, p. 10186-7.

[5] See the successful political tour of Reverend and President of the "League for the Political Unity of all Romanians" as reflected, for example, in the newspaper America, issues of July-September 1917 and March 1918.

[6] The fact that the Greater Romania was a multinational state itself with almost one third of the population belonging to national minorities is effaced by Romanian nationalist ideology and by Romanian becoming unmarked for ethnic Romanians. The proportion of ethnic Romanians at the 1930 Census was 71.9. See Populația pe Neamuri, 1930, pp.XXIV.

[7] Filmed interview from 2005 with Dorothy Nicholson, born in Canada in 1915 to a father who immigrated in 1907. Courtesy Cristina Stamate from YMCA/ Immigration services, Windsor, Ontario. See also the tens of accounts collected by Ion Longin Popescu in 1983 from survivors of the first Romanian immigrants to Canada (Popescu, 1986).

[8] For the use and consequences of census ethnic categories, single and hyphenated, see Howard-Hassmann (1999); Boyd and Norris (2001). For criticism of Canada's multiculturalism policy see Bibby (1990); Bissoondath (1994). For a critical analysis of Canada's politics of citizenship, nationhood and multiculturalism see Thobani (2007).

[9] See for example Ravage's account of the Walking to America movement (2009, pp. 31-43). He joined the local walking group in Vaslui, and travelled to Galați. There he embarked a steamer to reach Vienna on the River Danube. Outside Romania, his group was taken charge of by the Jüdische Allianz zu Wien. They continued from Vienna by rail, through Germany to Rotterdam, at the expense and under the guidance of the Verband der Deutschen Juden and the Alliance Israélite. From Rotterdam they sailed to New York.

[10] I think here of the notion of 'cleft habitus' used by Bourdieu to capture his ambivalent relationship with the academic field, grown out of a trajectory that combined high academic consecration with low social origin, thus providing the self-certainty of recognition and the radical uncertainty towards its institutional source at the same time. Romania was both the source of all things good missing in America, and the source of all things bad, that made America a possibility. In his memoir, Ravage (2009, p. 150) talks about his difficulty in adapting to the American cuisine as slowing his becoming an American, since 'nationality is principally a matter of diet'.

[11] The following account is largely based on Barton, 1975, especially pp. 27-63.

[12] A divide that has been constant in the first decades of Romanian immigration to the United States was that between peasants-workers and "intellectuals". This class rift manifested in the new country at the level of labour strategies and associational patterns. It had subsequently been compounded by the religious conflict between Romanian Orthodox religious authorities, which mirrored the struggles between economic-liberal minded Romanian Americans and communists, as well as the communist take-over in Romania. See Bobango, 1978 and 1979; Diamond, 1988; Galitzi; 1929; and the issues of *America*, the newspaper of the Union and League of Romanian Societies of America, Inc. across 1949.

[13] Barton (1975, p. 55) notes that "The records of the Union of Rumanian Societies indicate that in 1916, the union's tenth anniversary, 10 percent of the members had moved between American cities at least once, while another 10 percent had returned to Rumania. Return migration reached such proportions that by 1920 only about 15 percent of the union's prewar membership remained in the United States." Bobango (1978, p. 90) mentions that between 1910–1939 around 43,000 Romanians returned home. See also Wertsman, n.d.

[14] President Warren G. Harding signed a temporary act in May 1921, after President Woodrow Wilson had pocket-vetoed it three months earlier, introducing a quota system for any given country in a single year, to 3 per cent of the people from that nation already living in the US, as reported in the Census of 1910. The total number of immigrants allowed for Romania for 1922 was 7,419. The Immigration Act of 1924 lowered the quota to 2 per cent, and the standard used for national origins was the census of 1890. This limited the number of immigrants allocated to Romania to 603. See Tifft, 1990, pp. 116-122.

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