

## LOCATION, DISLOCATION AND RE-LOCATION: INTERCULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ACROSS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC BORDERS<sup>1</sup>

**Carmen Andraş, Scientific Researcher, PhD., “Gheorghe Şincai” Institute for Social Sciences and the Humanities, Târgu Mureş**

*Abstract: The paper focuses on significant interpretations of the border concept in the interdisciplinary framework of border, travel and cultural studies, with reference to a particular case of a Transylvanian’s migration to the United States in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The theoretical foundation of the paper lies in the definition of: porosity as a main characteristic of border (Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Bruno Dupeyron, “Borders, Borderlands, and Porosity”, 2007); Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “fluid modernity” adapted to border analysis to scrutinize their shift of significance from “solid” markers of difference to “fluid” symbols of unity and communication (Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity, 2006). In connection to the concept of border, I will further define the concepts of location, dis-location and re-location in the specific situation of the travel and migration across international borders, which reflect a characteristic of modernity: the individual’s freedom of mobility beyond political borders initially meant to separate people and nations. I will apply the above mentioned concepts and methodologies to outline the stages of political, economic, cultural and identity border crossing in Ioan Blendea’s case (Din Ardeal in America. 35 de ani in Statele Unite/From Transylvania to America. 35 Years in the United States, published at Sibiu in 1945). He is a representative of a noteworthy phenomenon in Transylvania’s cultural, social and economic history: the migration of a large part of the rural population to the United States at the crossing of the 19- 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The principal reason for this voluntary dis-placement (dis-location) was economic: it was the American mirage of prosperity in an era of industrial development and establishment of the bourgeois ideals of wealth, which attracted the Transylvanian villagers. Their place of birth was an almost pre-modern society, still suffocated between the borders of a dying empire. Temporally, Transylvania symbolized the past; spatially, it represented the place of birth, family and traditions. America was instead the place of future emancipation and fortune. However well adapted to a new American identity pattern, their dream was to come back to their original place and bring along their fortune for the benefit of their families. It was thus the story of an original location, followed by a process of dis-location and a final re-location, all due to the “fluidity” of a promising modernity.*

*Keywords: borders, migration, travel, intercultural mobility, dis-location, re-location.*

### Contextual Preliminaries

The Europeans have always been fascinated by America, as Romanian poet Ştefan Aug. Doinaş observes. Nevertheless, this *fascination* has nothing to do with *exoticism*. It does not imply the reaction toward Otherness and absolute difference, “a problem of rejection or assimilation;” it is the Other within us, which defines us by the contrast of its superiority. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of Europeans, with “a practical spirit and the vocation of adventure”, were attracted by this “fabulous Eldorado”, in search of gold and immediate fortunes.<sup>2</sup> The Transylvanians were also searching for prosperity in America, but mostly gained through assiduous work perseverance and tenacity. It was the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ştefan Aug. Doinaş, “Fascinaţia Americii”, *Secolul 20*, 7-8-9, 1999, pp. 6-8. In what follows, the quotations from Romanian texts are in my English translation (C.A.).

century that inaugurated a significant *influx* of Romanians in the United States. Romanian historian Lucian Boia records a number of 137,000 Romanians who followed the American dream by 1920. Among them, “the overwhelming majority” was represented by the Transylvanians.<sup>3</sup> Historian Mary Leuca refers to them as part of the “new immigration wave”, between 1881 and 1914, when she mentions a number of 134,253 Romanian emigrants coming from Transylvania and the Banat to the USA.<sup>4</sup> According to Romanian researchers Gabriel-Viorel Gârdan and Marius Eppel, the “new immigration wave”, which “includes ethnical groups from Eastern and Central Europe”, was “different from what the American authorities called the old immigration that had come from the Western and Northern Europe and had reached its peak before the Civil War (1861-1865).”<sup>5</sup>

The Romanian emigrants to America were largely peasants, who could not lead a decent life based on their income and whose rights were defied by the Hungarian government, both from the national and the political-economic points of view. What exactly drove them to the remote shores of the New World? First and foremost, in Aurel Sasu’s opinion, the main reasons were “poverty, national oppression, the lack of political rights, the persecutions, and (for some of them) the spirit of adventure.”<sup>6</sup> Romanian literary historian Aurel Sasu also takes into consideration the role of the “economic agents”, “the correspondence and information” brought by those already settled in America, and the ads published in the Romanian and American papers.<sup>7</sup> In his opinion, emigration meant for Transylvania “at the same time, a phenomenon and a problem: the problem of leaving (sometimes) by scores, abandoning the villages, weakening the Christian and autochthonous element.”<sup>8</sup>

Romanian American writer, historian and publicist Alexandru Nemoianu states that the first stage of the Romanian emigration to the USA was represented by the pre-World War I generation, which had as distinctive features: “the predominantly rural social composition”, the imperial subordination of their place of origin (Transylvania, the Banat and Bukovina) to the Austrian and Hungarian rules and their initial goal to settle down in America only temporarily. The second stage of the Romanian emigration to the USA took place between the end of the World War I and the 1940s, when a significant number of Romanian emigrants returned “home”, to “Greater Romania.”<sup>9</sup> Due to their Austro-Hungarian passports and other

<sup>3</sup> Lucian Boia, “On the History of Romanian Immigration to America: 1900-1918”, *An International Annual of the Humanities and Social Studies*, vol. 3, *Romanian Studies*, 1976, (61-77): 62.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Leuca, “Imigrația românească în America – primul val”, *O istorie a românilor de pretutindeni*, vol. 5 (*Românii din America*), eds. Victor Crăciun, Gheorghe Zbucnea, Liga Culturală pentru Unitatea Românilor de Pretutindeni, Congresul Spiritualității Românești, Editura Semne, 2006, (53-67): 53. See also Mary Leuca, *Romanian Americans in Lake County, Indiana: An Ethnic Heritage Curriculum Project*, Purdue University, Department of Education, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel-Viorel Gârdan, Marius Eppel, “The Romanian Emigration to the United States until the First World War. Revisiting Opportunities and Vulnerabilities”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, XI, 32 (2012): 256-287.

<sup>6</sup> Aurel Sasu, *Cultura Română în Statele Unite și Canada*, vol. 2 *Nostalgia Românească*, București, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*. See also Aurel Sasu, *Comunitățile românești din Statele Unite și Canada*, Cluj-Napoca, Limes, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandru Nemoianu, “Despre importanța istoriei românilor americani”, *O istorie a românilor de pretutindeni*, vol. 5 (*Românii din America*), eds. Victor Crăciun, Gheorghe Zbucnea, Liga Culturală pentru Unitatea Românilor de Pretutindeni, Congresul Spiritualității Românești, Semne, 2006, (15-53): 18. See also by the same author: *Cuvinte despre românii americani*, Cluj-Napoca, Clusium, 1997 and *Ortodoxia și românii americani*, Cluj-Napoca, EIKON, 2011.

identity papers, the first generation of East European emigrants to the USA (the Transylvanian included), the North American immigration and census services were confronted with difficulties in accurately identifying their national identity. Therefore, historian and writer Radu Toma concludes, they were labelled according to their country of origin and not to their ethnicity. Thus, the historian considers that one could identify in 1870 approximately 700-750 Romanians who left Transylvania (“a Romanian province incorporated in the Hungarian state at that time”) for the USA, while, in the period 1903-1914, the Romanians represented 21, 3% of the total number of the emigrants from Hungary to North America.<sup>10</sup> Even in absence of precise information regarding the ascendant trend of the Romanian emigration to the USA during the First World War, the phenomenon has been remarked and studied by several Romanian historians. Accordingly, Romanian historian Ștefan Meteș synthetizes the information offered by the researches in the field of American immigration, by estimating a number of about 100,000-150,000 Romanian immigrants after 1914. The phenomenon was accompanied by a considerable infusion of capital in Transylvania, destined either to their families and their personal bank deposits or to investments in land purchase.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the Transylvanian Romanian emigrants to America originated from the Făgăraș County. In 1918, for example, there were approximately 4,512 Romanians leaving the Făgăraș region to pursue their American dream.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, Transylvanian emigrant Ioan Blendea’s chronicle of his journey and settlement on the American soil (*Din Ardeal în America. 35 de ani în Statele Unite/From Transylvania to America. 35 Years in the United States*, published at Sibiu in 1945) is illustrative and mentioned in almost all the research works on the Transylvanian migration to the USA. His account reflects a fortunate compatibility between the Romanian peasant’s pragmatism and the pragmatism of the American society.

Blendea is a representative of a noteworthy phenomenon in Transylvania’s cultural, social and economic history: the migration of a large part of the Făgăraș county rural population to the United States at the crossing of the 19 and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The principal reason for this voluntary dis-placement (dis-location) was economic: it was the American mirage of prosperity in an era of industrial development and establishment of the bourgeois ideals of wealth, which attracted the Transylvanian villagers. While on American soil, “most Romanians, Lucian Boia notes, worked in iron foundries, steel mills, meat packing, the canning industry, quarries and cement mills, coal mines, and in the construction of railroads and roads.”<sup>13</sup>

The present study will focus on Blendea’s travel account, which belongs to documentary literature, offering valuable economic and political information related both to the country of origin, Transylvania, and the country of adoption, the United States. Romanian

<sup>10</sup> Radu Toma, “Românii în America de Nord până la sfârșitul Primului Război Mondial”, *O istorie a românilor de pretutindeni*, vol. 5 (*Românii din America*), eds. Victor Crăciun, Gheorghe Zbucnea, Liga Culturală pentru Unitatea Românilor de Pretutindeni, Congresul Spiritualității Românești, Semne, 2006, (68-122): 70-71. See also Radu Toma, *Românii în cele două Americi: o experiență etnică și istorică*, Indiana University, Globus, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Ștefan Meteș, *Emigrări românești din Transilvania în secolele XIII-XX*, 2nd Edition, București, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1977, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*. In this respect, Ștefan Meteș cites Al. Bărbat, *Dezvoltarea și structura economică a țării Oltului*, Cluj, 1938, pp. 274-280.

<sup>13</sup> Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

historian Gheorghe I. Florescu exemplifies this category of Romanian travel accounts to the United States of America with those signed by C. L. Flavian, I. Vion, George I. Duca, Florian Begnescu, Andrei I. Gheorghiu, and Ioan Blendea.<sup>14</sup>

Significant diplomatic and cultural Romanian-American relations will be inaugurated in the interwar era, owing to Romanian intellectuals like Nicolae Iorga, Petru Comarnescu, D. Gusti, who will have a more profound American experience.<sup>15</sup>

### **Dis-location and Migration across Borders**

Transylvania was an almost pre-modern society, still suffocated between the borders of a dying empire. Temporally, it symbolized the past; spatially, it represented the place of origin, family and traditions. America was on the other hand the place of future emancipation and fortune. However well adapted to a new American identity pattern, their dream was to come back to their original place and bring along their riches for the benefit of their families. It was thus the story of an original location, followed by a process of dis-location and a final re-location, all due to the *fluidity* of a promising modernity. Therefore, if we adapt sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "fluid modernity" to border analysis, in order to scrutinize their shift of significance from "solid" markers of difference to "fluid" symbols of unity and communication, we can assert that borders transcend their initial rigidity and inflexibility. Borders in fact, like the liquids, "neither fix space nor bind time": "While solids have clear spatial dimensions but neutralize the impact, and thus downgrade the significance, of time effectively resist its flow or render it irrelevant), fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready ( and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but 'for a moment.'" <sup>16</sup> By travelling (migrating) across national and political borders into the space of the Other, identities also become fluid. They open themselves toward acceptance of homogeneity and difference: "Unlike other varieties of postulated identities, the idea of ethnicity is semantically loaded. It assumes axiomatically a marriage made in heaven that no human effort can tear asunder, a kind of preordained bond of unity which precedes all bargaining and eventual agreements on rights and obligations. In other words, homogeneity which allegedly marks ethnic entities is heteronomous: not a human artefact, and most certainly not the product of the generation of humans currently alive."<sup>17</sup>

Modernity encourages mobility and migration across international borders, the search for a better place and the impulse of travel. Therefore, political, economic or military reasons can hardly annihilate the intrinsic *porosity* of borders according to Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly and Bruno Dupeyron, specialists in public policy, European and border studies, Borders are therefore human inventions designed to separate nations, identities and spaces on purely

<sup>14</sup> Gheorghe I. Florescu, "Studiul Relațiilor româno-americane: realizări și perspective", *Relații româno-americane în timpurile moderne*, ed. Gheorghe I. Florescu, Iași, "A.D. Xenopol" Institute of History, Iași, the Society for Romanian Studies, U.S.A., Editura Universității "Al. I. Cuza" ("Al. I. Cuza" University Press), 1993, (19-91): 55.

<sup>15</sup> See Dumitru Dorobăț, "Relații culturale româno-americane după primul război mondial", *Ibidem*, pp. 297-313.

<sup>16</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Malden, Ma, Polity Press, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 107.

conventional grounds. Modernity dissipates their almost mythological or sacred aura of ultimate truth.<sup>18</sup>

Porosity and fluidity of borders facilitate mobility (travel, tourism, migration, exile, etc.) across the demarcating boundaries of space, stages of civilization, political or economic systems, cultures and identities. The discourse of exile implies the need of defining oneself with reference to certain landmarks representing the stages of one's journey to the unknown, since, in the interpretation of Caren Kaplan, a specialist in gender and travel studies, "each metaphor of displacement includes referentially a concept of placement, dwelling, location, or position. Thus exile is always already a mode of dwelling at a distance from a point of origin."<sup>19</sup> If "tourism is travel between points of origin and destinations," "diaspora disperses the locations of dwelling into an interstitial habitus," and, consequently, "most notions of displacement contain an oppositional notion of placement and vice versa."<sup>20</sup>

Dislocation and displacement are concepts defined by post-colonial studies as migration across political borders caused by imperial occupation of a country or countries. Thus, dislocation "may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing movement from a known to and unknown location. The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, under the "catalytic cultures of the New World", "diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation and regeneration too (...)."<sup>22</sup>

Ioan Blendea's experience of emigration from Transylvania to the *New World* is obviously different from the post-colonial understanding of *dislocation*, but, nevertheless, the concept can be suitably adapted to his case. It is a voluntary migration to a remote place, but, meanwhile, imperial hegemonic power is intrinsic in this process of dislocation too. He decides to challenge the Austro-Hungarian system, which enclosed its subjects between its *solid*, almost unbreakable borders, in order to discover the benefits of democracy and freedom in a faraway place. Such a gesture of audacity and insubordination, like that of thousands of emigrants, proved that Austro-Hungarian mythical self-representation as absolute, invincible and everlasting entity was but a political invention meant to guarantee its self-conservation. Blendea's American immigration was congruent with its post-colonial interpretation as *a process of dislocation and regeneration too*. It meant a painful dislocation from his birth place, but also a personal *regeneration* and *self-discovery* of the latent qualities of his

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Bruno Dupeyron, "Borders, borderlands, and porosity," *Borderlands. Comparing Border Security in North America and Europe*, Ed. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Ottawa, Ontario, University of Ottawa Press, 2007, pp. 1-2. See also Carmen Andraş, "Border Studies: Interdisciplinarity, Mobility, and Permeability," *Itineraries Beyond Borders of Cultures, Identities and Disciplines*, eds. Carmen Andraş, Cornel Sigmirean, Corina Teodor, Sibiu, Astra Museum, 2012, pp. 15-29.

<sup>19</sup> Caren Kaplan, *Question of Travel. Postmodern Discourse of Displacement*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74.

character and identity, due to most favorable conditions and opportunities. Actually, he does not reinvent himself. He adapts in fact his personality and identity by perfectly fitting into the American pattern. His displacement does not become the source of profound dissertations on the dramatic condition of the exile. He permanently keeps the balance between his country of birth and the country of adoption, which he equally adores. Estrangement is attenuated by his generous adoption by the New World.

### **Home, Sweet Home: Sites of Memory**

Memory of remote, far-off time and space of origin is always a reference point in one's personal history. "Memory is, in fact, a space of ghostly fractures, where humans seek, for whatever reason, to bring back the past into the present", as Asunción López-Varela Azcárate, a specialist in English and North American studies, writes in her essay "The Itineraries of Memory: Textual Hybrids and Intersubjective Experiences."<sup>23</sup> Our awareness of *lieux de mémoire*, French historian Pierre Nora observes, only arises "at particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of a memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists."<sup>24</sup> The observation is also true for Ioan Blendea's recollection of his childhood and youth realm, where family ties and tradition last despite his absence. Though no longer *milieux de mémoire* or *real environments of memory* (Pierre Nora), in a new life stage as American adult immigrant, Blendea starts his account with a remembrance of his Transylvanian early stages, in Cârțișoara, a village in the Făgăraș county where he was born in 1880: "If memory refuses with determination to give an answer to the person who keeps asking it, things are totally different when it is about the places and people among whom first chances bloomed, which make, through years passing like haze in the valleys, the charm of childhood recollections."<sup>25</sup> He thus contemplates his childhood in a "magic mirror."<sup>26</sup>

Although not aspiring at being acknowledged as a piece of *high literature*, Ioan Blendea's memoir is, according to Romanian academician Al. Borza, president of the Romanian-American Association in the 1940s, who also wrote the book's preface, "both interesting and instructive, representing a genuine document of Transylvanian cultural, economic and political history. The beginning of this life story of a Romanian laborer from the Olt country, reminds us of Creangă<sup>27</sup>, and the truthful chronicle of his tumultuous life in America is interspersed with so many passages reflecting the love for people and country of a man who knew how to win a leading place in his life, here and beyond the ocean."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Asunción López-Varela Azcárate, "The Itineraries of Memory: Textual Hybrids and Intersubjective Experiences", in *Itineraries Beyond Borders of Cultures, Identities and Disciplines*, (88-111): 88. López-Varela Azcárate refers to Pierre Nora's book *Les Lieux de mémoire (Realms of Memory)*, (1992), asserting that "the reason why we talk so much about memory is because it no longer exists."

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter Memory*, 26 (Spring 1989), (7-24): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ioan Blendea, *Din Ardeal în America – 35 de ani în U.S.A.*, Sibiu, Astra Culturală, 1945, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> Ion Creangă, Romanian writer, Author of *Childhood recollections*.

<sup>28</sup> Ioan Blendea, *Din Ardeal în America*, p. 5.

Ioan Blendea came from a peasants' family with little wealth, but with plenty of wisdom and love. His birth must have meant to his parents "a day of joy", for "God favored them to have one more son besides his elder brother, a son who was going to cause much trouble, but who would be a worthy keeper of the immemorial peasant traditions throughout his life, [traditions] of work and temperance, of faith and obedience to the rules of heaven and earth."<sup>29</sup> He has tender remembrance of their little house, "built of logs, attached with clay and covered by straw."<sup>30</sup> It was the place where his eyes first opened on the icons hanging on the walls and where he was overwhelmed with emotion while listening to his father's stories of dragons, fairies and princesses. While other children are going to school, the young boy begins learning by himself "the letters" from some "torn spelling books, kept from generation to generation."<sup>31</sup> He has attended school only twice, during the winters of 1887 and 1888. For the rest of the time, he has to graze his family and neighbors' cattle and sheep on the beautiful mountain pastures. He has little time to play with other children, but he has fond memories of going to church on Sundays, admiring the young people dancing the *hora*, or singing carols on Christmas Eve. However busy, he keeps learning from a worn out catechism, a biblical history and a 4<sup>th</sup> grade spelling book. He is thus able to pass the final primary school examination in 1889 and he is offered a stipendium from Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna, but his father refuses any help motivating that there was no need for an extra priest or schoolmaster in their village.<sup>32</sup> In spite of his poor education, life and direct experience will become his best teacher.

From this moment on, Blendea will try hard to earn an honest and prosperous life by himself, owing to his natural gifts: "...we like to compare ourselves, he meditates, with ships struggling on sea waves. But, if our inner essence is almost identical, not the same are the adventures that fortune brings in our way, nor the attitude we adopt in front of them. Men reach the harbor very differently. Yet, whether our triumph is eventually as durable as bronze, or not, it means more than a fading sparkle, because our soul is enriched with experience and wisdom, two inestimable assets."<sup>33</sup>

### First Stages of Estrangement

When he is nine, his father sends him to work as a servant in a neighboring village. It is his first experience of estrangement, which will last for one year and will make him the owner of a piece of land as a reward. From now on, as a true peasant at heart, his main goal will always be to gain more money and buy land. His wanderings will progressively lead him further across borders before reaching the American shore. After having crossed the limits of his village, he would find himself at the frontier of Greater Romania. First, in the company of his father, he will go over the mountains in 1891 "for a better life."<sup>34</sup> It is like going home, but somewhat different, because it is not a friendly border to cross, without passports and with the Hungarian guards chasing them. Once arrived in the Old Kingdom, they will start working in

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 16-20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30-31.

a village on the Ialomița valley for the winter<sup>35</sup>, and then go further, in spring, to Dobrudja, in a region called the New Făgăraș for its numerous Transylvanian settlers who came from the Făgăraș County to this “promised land.”<sup>36</sup> He stays there for six more years after his father has left. He works hard on the field and for all he is gaining he buys more land in his native village and in its neighborhood. When he turns eighteen, he moves to a village close to Constanța, where he works in agriculture using for the first time modern technique.<sup>37</sup> At the end of about eleven years of estrangement, he decides to cross the border back to Transylvania to see his family, but, again, without passport. He finds his family struggling with their poor life after the death of his father. While at home, he occasionally works at sawmills, goes back to Constanța to work for a couple of months and collect his salary (about 460 lei) and comes back to his village, where he purchases additional land.<sup>38</sup> He is already 21 and he is waiting to be recruited in the army, but, hearing about how much one could earn in the United States, he decides to emigrate once his military service done. His service in the barracks of Sibiu will represent a meaningful experience too. He does not intend to waste his time there so that he starts working as an apprentice to a shoemaker. Not only does he learn a good trade, but he also earns money and the favor of a Romanian general, who will grant him a passport to America and a shoemaker’s diploma at the end of his service, in 1904.<sup>39</sup>

### **A Romanian Peasant’s American Dream: Money and Respectability**

Ioan Blendea does not take important decisions randomly. Every step is planned according to his immediate or long-term goals. Money plays an important part in the description of his undertakings, with accurate references to expenditures, investments, and profits. Consequently, practical reasons prevail in every measure he takes to improve his living standards. That is why his departure for America is thoroughly prearranged: work at several sawmills to gain extra money and an arranged marriage meant to provide a trustworthy, diligent life (business) partner.<sup>40</sup> Once everything set in order at home, he leaves for the United States in the company of two other Romanian young men. They take the train to Hamburg and thence they embark on the “Rotterdam”, for a three week sea journey.

They set foot on American soil at an immigration checkpoint in New York, on July 2, 1905. Everything goes smoothly: “For strangers like us, he exclaims, everything was astounding, both the tremendous buildings and the good American organization.”<sup>41</sup> With only one dollar they could buy plenty of food for the travel to the company that hired them. “The agents of the industrial company where we were heading to, Blendea remembers, grouped us after nations and bought us train tickets, presenting our ship tickets at the station. We got on the elegant train, with armchairs and little shaving tables, a mirror and running water, things that we had not seen back home [...] It was a new world indeed, where every person was respected and esteemed, and the clerks were doing their work diligently and for the general

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 38-42.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 50-55.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 73-77.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 81-88.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 89-96.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.



welfare.”<sup>42</sup> Ioan Blendea is assigned to Westinghouse Electric Company, at a “huge” iron foundry in Cleveland, Ohio. There were numerous Romanian workers, most of them from the Făgăraș County. He distinguishes himself from the beginning by his frankness and resourcefulness and he is hired as a translator from Romanian to German and vice versa, earning \$1.75 instead of \$1.50 like the other workers.<sup>43</sup> He is using German as a communication language for two months, but he soon purchases an English dictionary, memorizes a few sentences and asks the “bick-bos” to let him work as an apprentice for a salary starting from \$1.50. The salary was raised by 25 cents at every six months, and after three years of apprenticeship, in 1908, he is promoted as a qualified worker, with 3 dollars/day, besides his extra work, equally well paid. Straightforwardness, ambition, initiative, a little astuteness, and a lot of hard work will be the key to Blendea’s success in America. It is now the time to bring his wife to America and to see his little daughter. At the end of his transatlantic journey, he lands at Cherbourg and follows the European route to Romania. He spends his time with his family, works again at a saw mill and, meanwhile, he reforms the old local administration. His second son is born and they are soon waiting for another one. His wife’s pregnancy and the imminence of the war make his return to America difficult. In 1910, he receives his order of recruitment in the Austro-Hungarian army, but he manages to escape.<sup>44</sup> His journey by train via Croatia will be adventurous, with the Austro-Hungarian guards suspecting him of deserting the army. He finally arrives at a station close to Zagreb and waits for the train carrying 300-400 emigrants to America. Upon his arrival, he is hired temporarily at the same iron foundry in Cleveland, and then moves to Michigan to work in agriculture, then to another iron foundry in Pennsylvania and back to Cleveland in 1912, always searching for the best profits. In 1913, concerned about the war in Europe, he calls his wife to America, together with their son. When the outbreak of the World War I was imminent, the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Cleveland gathered all the citizens of the Habsburg Monarchy asking them to go back to Europe, but he refused to die for a foreign cause, persuading most of the other immigrants to resist such a request: “Our country is the United States and Romania, not Austro-Hungary. Follow me!”<sup>45</sup> He earns his living by working in agriculture on the land he has bought, but he returns to his work at the factory, considering it more profitable and safe. Every evening, after work, he attends free American language, history and culture courses.

In the meantime, the American government announces the recruitment of all North American citizens, irrespective of their nationality, to fight in France against Germany and its allies. Blendea yet, again using his power of persuasion, argues, this time in English, that “on the battlefield of Verdun, where you ask me if I want to go to fight, I have, in the camp of our deadly enemies, a brother, forced to fight and die. I cannot fire a gun against him. That is why I consider serving the interests of my American adoptive country in this very place, by asking you to mobilize me for work.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, during the war, until the 1918 armistice, he is

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 102-104.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

used by the United States as a “secret agent and informer.”<sup>47</sup> He thus has to spy upon persons involved in pro-German activities or in the commercialization of alcoholic beverage against the law of prohibition. Nonetheless, he is more zealous about discovering pro-German plots than the breaking of the prohibition law, which he considers ineffective.<sup>48</sup> His “secret agent” job is very rewarding: 350 dollars/month, which is added to his trading activities with agricultural products and his wife’s salary, their income going up to 750 dollars/month. At a certain moment, he has just realized that this job as “secret agent and informant” is not in accordance with his “idea about human dignity and freedom”<sup>49</sup> and he goes back to work in an iron foundry.

In 1919, the good news from Romania makes him happy: “The heavy yoke that the Transylvanians had been enduring for a thousand years was broken. We, the American Romanians, were proud that both our countries fraternized in the most awaited day of the victorious peace.”<sup>50</sup>

In what the American Romanians were concerned, Blendea notes that in 1920 there were 25,000 Romanians in Cleveland Ohio. Most of them were “workers in factories”, while others were “traders such as grocers, saloniers (sic!), butchers, etc.” He regrets that “few of them attended Universities in order to dedicate themselves to liberal intellectual professions like lawyers, doctors, teachers, and so on.” They were organized in cultural and charity societies like, for example, “Luceafărul”, “Carmen-Sylva”, or “Carpantina”, where Blendea contributed as a committee member.<sup>51</sup> The activity of the Romanian cultural societies intensified between 1914 and 1918, reflecting the Romanians’ solidarity during the difficult years of war. Members had the obligation to pay a 2 dollar contribution per month and to attend ordinary or extraordinary meetings. In return, they were provided with 2 dollars/day in case of illness and 1,000 dollars/family in case of death. Everyone was attending the funeral, “with music and national flags.”<sup>52</sup> They were also organizing cultural soirees, charity festivities: “such merry gatherings were hold in Carpatina’s huge *holl* (sic!), where the tricolor flags of our country beyond the ocean were waving.” He cannot forget either their groups of carol singers on Christmas Eve, or “the game of tip-cat they were playing to the Americans’ joy”, or the “*buhai*”<sup>53</sup> that was resounding on the New Year’s Eve, the dance of the *călușari*<sup>54</sup>, because “the Romanians from the United States have not changed their soul, faith and customs learned in their childhood spent far away, beyond the seas. They were wealthier, it is true, but their blood and soul stayed the same.” The two Romanian churches in Cleveland, the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic, had similar cultural and charity organizations.<sup>55</sup>

Ioan Blendea never stops reading about American history, but, mostly, he looked for models to follow in order to achieve a good career. Biographies of great men like Franklin,

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 128.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> A Romanian popular instrument similar to the French *pignata*.

<sup>54</sup> A Romanian popular version of the sword dance. My emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> Ioan Blendea, *Din Ardeal în America*, p. 131.

Edison, Carnegie, or Ford, were stories of success, showing how they had started from the humblest social condition and succeeded through their “extraordinary power of work and perseverance.”<sup>56</sup> He realizes that he has to try harder to improve himself: “Starting as a servant in the past, I have soon become a shoemaker, and then a qualified iron founder and a proficient speaker of American language, which I learnt in the factory, but especially during the evening courses.”<sup>57</sup> He decides to persevere in the study of “state and trade sciences”, encouraged by the fact that one’s aspiration to gain “a higher intellectual position” in the United States was not conditioned by a diploma of university studies, but only by personal qualities. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1920, he successfully takes an examination for the buying-selling agent license, in front of a committee represented by four university professors and the President of the Supreme Court in Ohio. He succeeds first on the list with an excellent exam mark (ninety eight). Not only is his knowledge impressive, but his introductory speech too, frank and direct as always, a veritable one man show: “I want to tell you first a few words about the citizen and about the foreigner, in other words, the new comer. I came to this country fifteen years ago, a young boy with a barely sprouted mustache. I was looking with amazement at your houses, roads, cars, trains and factories and I was seeing how your people were staring at me too and were saying: O boy! I was looking to the left and to the right and couldn’t see either *boi* (sic! in Romanian), or carts, or ploughs. In the country where I came from, we call *boi* the animals which pull the cart and the plough. Me, who knew about my *boi* I was the foreigner, the new comer, and those who knew about their boy, they were citizens. And now, if I make a mistake, Mister President and Honored Commission, do not be surprised, but please be willing to appreciate how much did I struggle to come from my *boi* to your boy.”<sup>58</sup>

From this point on, his success as a businessman is guaranteed: he buys and re-sells real estate at much higher prices, he moves then to Detroit, where he opens his private buying-selling agent office and temporarily works for the Ford Motor Company as a supervisor. He also makes his agent diploma confirmed in Michigan and gets a public notary license. As a result of his hard work and his innate qualities of a businessman, he reaches an income of \$19,000 in 1924, \$30,000 in 1925, and \$90,000 in 1928. He decides to visit his daughter in Romania in 1928, now as an American citizen with an American passport. This time he makes an impressive appearance everywhere due to his status as an American wealthy notary. He arranges everything for his daughter’s studies at a good school and then returns to the United States to buy a modern, comfortable house and to send his other two children to Romania: his son attends the University of Bucharest and returns to the United States as a public notary. Unfortunately, the Great Depression influences in a negative way Blendea’s business and, therefore, he decides to deposit his money in Romanian banks in 1931.<sup>59</sup> He finally chooses to go back to Romania in 1933, to see his girls, to help them by granting them a prosperous future, and to invest in real estate (he buys several villas and two blocks of flats in Sibiu). In 1935, he travels back to America, where he continues his business in Detroit, buying or building and selling houses. In 1939, on the eve of the World War II, he returns to

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132-133.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, pp 133-134. My emphases.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 151-155.

Romania and, despite all the hardships, he is happy to speak again Romanian in his beloved country. He now has the time to recollect his entire life with so many admirable exploits and to describe them in an excellent book.

### Conclusions

I have emphasized the progressive stages of Ioan Blendea's location, dis-location and re-location in order to highlight the *porosity* (Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly and Bruno Dupeyron) of political borders, which, despite functioning as barricades against cultural communication and mobility, can be escaped due to modernity's *fluidity* (Zygmunt Bauman).

His dis-location from his native country and his re-location on American soil is a personal choice and is not determined by an imperial political decision to dis-locate its subjects from their places of origin. It is, nevertheless, an extreme individual decision influenced by the almost medieval political and economic system imposed by a vanishing empire.

Deeply rooted in his birth place, Blendea's existence becomes a continual struggle to transgress his initial condition and to return to his village not as a peasant, but as an accomplished man of career and fortune.

His re-location will represent in fact not only his homecoming, but also his settlement in America, his country of adoption. His life consisted of travelling back and forth between America and Romania, taking care of his family back home and preparing a good future for his children, making fortune and investing in real estate in Transylvania, and mostly, working honestly and obstinately, as hard as a peasant is toiling his land. To him, wealth, money and career meant stability and dignity.

He has never cut his ties with his birth country and he is the most happy of all Americans when Transylvania is united to the Romanian kingdom. That is why, he proudly returned from a free, democratic country to another auspicious place, a country that was going to become a free and democratic country in no time.

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