



Great Britain and the United States of America as alterity figures for Romanians in the modern epoch: Ethno-cultural images and social representations

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Abstract

The main characteristics of any given social group are defined through comparisons with members of other communities and result from a complex interplay. Identity and alterity are thus constructed simultaneously and interdependently in accordance with group representations emerging from various sources: direct contact through travelling, mere legends or more verifiable accounts, scientific or fictional works, press articles tackling diverse topics, school textbooks, almanacs, etc. The British and the Americans were not identified as the most noteworthy alterity figures by the Romanian mentality of the modern period, but they were surely perceived distinctively from other foreigners. Despite the cultural and/or geographical distance between Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia, on the one hand, and Great Britain and the United States of America, on the other hand, towards the end of the 19th century average Romanians were able to interweave information gathered from a wide range of sources and to transform it into realistic depictions of these two countries and their inhabitants. This process of defining the Other combined diachronic and synchronous tendencies, fiction and facts, stereotypes and

Rezumat

Principalele caracteristici ale oricărui grup social dat sunt definite prin comparație cu membri ai altor comunități și rezultă în urma unor interacțiuni complexe. Identitatea și alteritatea sunt astfel construite simultan și interdependent, în conformitate cu reprezentările de grup care reies din diverse surse: contactul direct prin călătorii, simple legende sau relatări verificabile, opere științifice sau de ficțiune, articole de presă tratând tematici diverse, manuale școlare, almanahuri etc. Britanicii și americanii nu au fost identificați drept cele mai remarcabile figuri ale alterității de către mentalitatea românească a epocii moderne, dar au fost cu siguranță percepuți în mod distinct față de alți străini. În ciuda distanței culturale și/sau geografice dintre Transilvania, Valahia și Moldova, pe de o parte, și Marea Britanie și Statele Unite ale Americii, pe de altă parte, spre sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea românii de rând au fost capabili să îmbine informații provenind dintr-un spectru larg de surse și să le transforme în descrieri realiste ale acestor două țări și ale locuitorilor acestora. Procesul definirii Celuilalt a combinat tendințe diacronice și sincrone, ficțiunea și faptele, stereotipuri și adevăr. Sintetizând munca realizată de

truth. By synthesising the work done by previous researchers, the present study provides an overall image of the ways in which Great Britain and the United States of America were perceived by Romanians throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

cercetători precedenți, prezentul studiu oferă o imagine de ansamblu a modurilor în care Marea Britanie și Statele Unite ale Americii au fost percepute de către români pe parcursul secolelor XVIII-XIX.

Keywords: imagology, ethnic representations, alterity figures, Great Britain, United States of America, 18th-19th centuries.

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Reciprocal images and alterity figures

Imagination has always played a very important part in the interactions between different communities, irrespective of the relative geographical or mental distance between them. Given that all social contacts rely on (mental) images, the way(s) in which the Other is perceived deeply impacts upon the qualities and defects attributed to any alterity figure.

Information that serves as a basis for the formation of opinions about the Other can be gathered in various manners, but usually foreign travellers' accounts and figurative depictions predate direct contacts. Consequently, accuracy and objectivity can be considered desiderata rather than accomplished facts and yet images formed on such shallow data can prove to be very influential and durable. Notably, although geographical proximity facilitates contacts and should thus generate images that are situated closer to reality, it can also result in disputes and conflicts that lead to the demonization of the enemy and hence alter the proportion of truth to fiction in the representation of the Other.

From this viewpoint, Romanians' contacts with the Anglo-Saxon environment benefited from what could be labelled as distance-related objectivity, given that neither the Englishmen nor the Americans were considered "mirrors" in the identity formation process by Romanians in the modern epoch. For example, as will be detailed below, it was only during the 19th century that information about the American continent began to be largely available to literate Transylvanians, Wallachians and Moldavians. By contrast, facts about the British Empire had reached Romanians sooner, but

the English were viewed as cold, distant and separated from the rest of the European continent.

The present paper emphasises a number of aspects related to the manner in which the British and the Americans were perceived by Romanians during the modern epoch. This represents a synthesis of the work previously done by other researchers, my intention being that of unravelling the diachronic evolution of these ethno-cultural images and of pointing out some of the noteworthy moments characterising this process. The sources used by the already mentioned previous imagological studies were press articles, school textbooks, travel literature, diplomatic reports, private correspondence and other types of writings (as for example, popular anecdotes and proverbs), each with its respective potential to influence public opinion, depending upon its broader or more restricted circulation. Within this context, it should be noted that the importance of periodical publications during the 19th century was overwhelming from an imagological viewpoint particularly in Transylvania, as here it was mostly newspapers that ensured the dissemination of encyclopaedic (i.e. geographical, historical, economic, statistical, etc.) information, of political news, of diverse everyday facts, of travel literature, of translations from foreign works and of original articles written on numerous relevant topics by Romanian authors¹.

The following pages will reveal the clichés and stereotypes associated with the British and the Americans and the way(s) in which information about and/or contacts with these two alterity figures influenced Romanians' manner of defining the Other, whilst also implicitly illustrating the process leading up to the creation of two ethnic images which, with only a few minor revisions, were able to survive for decades as social representations.

Great Britain and the Englishmen: proximate and yet so distant

Clearly, the reciprocal images of two peoples are influenced by the political, social and/or cultural connections between them. In what regards

¹ Gheorghe Lascu, *Imaginea Franței la românii din Transilvania până în anul 1918* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2000), 50.

the relations between the British and the Romanians during the 18th and 19th centuries, it is relevant to mention that these were, naturally, highly dependent upon the international context and rather sporadic, particularly given the Romanian provinces' feeble presence as relevant actors on the European political scene. For Wallachia and Moldavia these unfavourable conditions were maintained until late in the 19th century, namely until the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 (known as the War of Independence in Romanian historiography), when Romania gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire. For Transylvania the situation persisted well into the 20th century, as the province was removed from under the tutelage of the Austrian Empire only in 1918, through the Great Union.

Given these circumstances, the British knew very little about Transylvanian Romanians, who were not perceived separately from the other ethnicities that comprised the Habsburgs' Monarchy, while the Romanians from the Principalities represented only a minor part of the problems that defined the Ottoman Empire and were echoed in London during this period. This state of affairs was mirrored by Romanians' perceptions of the large and still influential British Empire, as the English did not represent a convincing ally neither for the Transylvanian Romanians in their struggle for gaining political rights within the Austrian/Austro-Hungarian (from 1867) Empire, nor for the Romanians living in Wallachia and Moldavia, where, although the British Empire was recognised as one of the great powers, its stance with regard to Romanians' goals on the international stage did not reach the state of benevolent neutrality and was rather unclear or visibly unfavourable.

As a consequence, in spite of the fact that the British were considered European, as they actually were from geographical and generally cultural viewpoints, they were nevertheless viewed as significantly different from the other defining European nations. In fact, this was a pose long cultivated by the British (and still in use, as the recent developments regarding the European Union reveal) and to which Romanians responded accordingly. Thus the British were seen as distant and unwilling to be of any help to small nations that pursued their independence, which was clearly in accordance

with the former's historical experience as the dominant people of a very large empire.

In fact, this type of perception was not a novelty of the 19th century, as similar attitudes could be observed earlier during the modern epoch. One such telling incident is William Paget's visit to Constantin Brâncoveanu's court at the very beginning of the 18th century, namely in 1702. What is striking about this event is that, although the new British ambassador to Constantinople was greeted and treated as his peers from other foreign countries, nothing more than mere deference can be revealed from the accounts referring to this encounter between this English diplomat and the Wallachian ruler. This obvious lack of interest towards an at least unusual presence can only be explained through the fact that the representative of the British Empire was not considered worthy of note in relation to Brâncoveanu's scopes and was probably viewed only as an exotic and passing presence that was hardly mentioned in Radu Greceanu's chronicle². Such an attitude was hardly to be blamed, given that British envoys which showed any interest towards the Romanian provinces in any other manner than just as a complication concerning the Ottoman Empire represented *rara avis* in the 18th-19th centuries.

However, during the first half of the 19th century, some aspects of British culture and civilisation such as the English contredanse were adopted by Romanians alongside other types of influences, although this was highly risky for the ones open to innovation: wearing Occidental clothes could be interpreted as an attempt of political emancipation by the Ottomans, as the English Physician William Mac Michael correctly observed during his visit in the Principalities in 1817³.

Nevertheless, historical developments were unfavourable to the old state of affairs and Romanians became more and more attached to Occidental values, some literary works going as far as mentioning the existence of phenomena labelled as „Anglomania”⁴. This happened in spite of the fact

² Dan Horia Mazilu, *Noi despre Ceilalți: Fals tratat de imagologie* (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 7-8.

³ Ștefan Cazimir, *Alfabetul de tranziție* (București: Humanitas, 2006, Second revised edition), 27.

⁴ Cazimir, 16-17.

that the English language was considered peculiar and lacking musicality (especially when compared with Romance languages), its short words being perceived as better suited to precise naval commands than to cultural purposes. Interestingly enough, this opinion was shared even by those who were able to understand and speak English, one such example being Ion Codru Drăgușanu⁵.

Great Britain's geographical positioning harboured a series of peculiarities in what concerns political organisation, for example, but also favoured an openness towards the positive reception of other cultures, even (or particularly?) of those situated far away. Chinese, Japanese or Hindu elements of civilisation were greeted and met with understanding by the inhabitants of "the Empire on which the sun never sets", a striking attitude particularly when taking into consideration the numerous and long-lasting conflicts with other European states during the modern period. Romanians who set foot on British soil could not disregard a certain tendency for combining tradition and innovation that was visible in gestures, fashion or architecture, but also "a profound and unostentatious attachment to everything that the people of Great Britain has accomplished in the cultural domain, either we are referring to Shakespeare, to Newton or to Turner"⁶.

Even the British Museum spoke and still speaks volumes about this tendency to bring together cultures and civilisations otherwise situated far away from each other and about the desire to learn from each and every one of them. Some pertinent observations concerning Great Britain's relations with other nations were made as early as 1840 by Ion Codru Drăgușanu, who noted that "England is the mother of political freedom", which was preserved through the possession of a very large number of battleships⁷. The Romanian traveller was also aware of the fact that the English showed deference towards his compatriots only because (or when) they considered the latter as potential buyers of industrial products, this conclusion being

⁵ Cristian Moroianu, "Peregrinul" ("The Pilgrim") by Ion Codru Drăgușanu: A multicultural synthesis of Europe", in *Discourse as a form of multiculturalism in literature and communication*, Coordinator Iulian Boldea (Tîrgu Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015, Literature Section), 659.

⁶ Alexandru Duțu, *Călătorii, imagini, constante* (București: Editura Eminescu, 1985), 56.

⁷ Moroianu, 658.

expressed without resentment: it was only natural that they would place their own interests above anything else.

As already mentioned, bilateral relations between Great Britain and the Romanian Principalities were established rather tardily and, as it usually happens in such circumstances, cultural contacts predated political connections. Thus, the first scientific work concerning the Romanian language was written by Max Müller in 1854 at the express request of the British ministry for foreign affairs⁸, while E. C. Greenville Murray recorded in writing his travelling impressions through Wallachia in 1854-1855, alongside composing an anthology entitled "*Doine or the National Songs and Legends of Rumania*", an example that was followed in 1856 by Henry Stanley⁹.

However, from a political viewpoint, Romania became relevant for Great Britain only after it gained its independence in 1877, an event that was well reflected by the British media and which was followed by the appointment of an envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of Great Britain to Romania in the person of William Arthur White in 1880. His Romanian homologue was Nicolae Callimachi-Catargi, who traded his post in Paris for the one in London during the same year. In 1917 the first English-Romanian Society was born in Great Britain, its counterpart being established somewhat later, namely in 1922, in Cluj¹⁰. Moreover, Romanian traditions and culture became increasingly known to the British, particularly given that Romanians' history, language and literature started being taught in London after the end of the First World War and also because over the years they were served by such capable minds as those of Robert W. Seton-Watson, Denis Deletant and Alex Drace-Francis, to name only three of them.

As for the Romanians' perception of British realities in the same period, it is interesting to note that travelling accounts represent the most valuable and detailed source of information, although Great Britain was not a favourite destination neither for journeys of pleasure nor for those with educational purposes. Political reasons (which sometimes motivated

⁸ Duțu, 145.

⁹ Duțu, 62.

¹⁰ Duțu, 60-61.

Transylvanian Romanians to temporarily leave the Habsburgs' Monarchy and to seek refuge or asylum elsewhere) did not habitually dictate the choice of the British Empire as a destination either. Romanians who preferred exile to imprisonment usually departed for places that were perceived as being situated closer to home, at least from a cultural viewpoint, if not geographically.

One of the first Transylvanians who travelled to England was Paul Iorgovici, but his journey was one forced by events and, unfortunately, did not result in a written account of the time he spent in London. He arrived in Great Britain from France, where he had lived for three years in order to complete his studies, after being a witness to Louis XVI's decapitation in 1793¹¹. For a year he fulfilled the role of a minor functionary in London, before returning within the borders of the Austrian Empire and continuing his intellectual work¹².

As for leisure journeys, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, the most famous Transylvanian traveller of the modern period, remarked in 1840 Great Britain's high level of civilisation compared to other foreign countries he had seen and affirmed that "The originality of English clothing, lifestyle and products is [given by] simplicity combined with solidity", everything perceived as being simple and elegant being considered "*à l'anglaise*"¹³. The tendency to gather, through various means, valuable goods from foreign countries and to carefully preserve them in museums, particularly in the British Museum, is also noted by the Transylvanian voyager, alongside a series of observations concerning London's parks and green areas or English culinary habits. Regarding this last aspect, Ion Codru Drăgușanu considered that "the Englishman is the most voracious nation on earth. As soon as he wakes up in the morning he drinks tea or coffee, at ten hours a.m. he eats a beefsteak and drinks beer, he lunches in trim at two, repeats the tea at five

¹¹ Lascu, 71.

¹² For more details about Paul Iorgovici's activity as a linguist and philologist, see Ion Medoia, 'Paul Iorgovici, lingvist și învățat de talie europeană', *Philologica Banatica*, I (2014): 68-80.

¹³ Duțu, 60.

p.m. and does not miss the occasion of a proper dinner at nine in the evening, while afterwards a punch often follows”¹⁴.

On other occasions, the Transylvanian pilgrim remarked that the British tend to consider themselves at home no matter where they found themselves, quickly adding however that they are entitled to such an attitude because “I don’t know which country would not be indebted to the English”¹⁵. Moreover, Codru Drăgușanu is able to extract and express the essence of the moral portraits of the various nations he encountered in his journeys, the British being characterised by faith in money and in their diplomats, who deceive the entire world with finesse. They are also speculative (in a positive manner), highly aristocratic, punctual, skilful and industrious, these last qualities being supported by such arguments as the fact that in England one does not encounter houses with cracked windows or broken doors.

Other famous Romanian travellers to England were Alexandru Odobescu, who was impressed by Westminster Abbey’s gothic architecture and by the Egyptian, Etruscan and Greek antiquities of the British Museum, which he visited in 1852¹⁶, Gheorghe Bariț, who considered that in London positive aspects were paralleled by negative ones, without providing too many details in this respect, whilst revealing some signs of admiration, and Alexandru Șterca-Șuluțiu, for whom London is cold and prudent¹⁷. Nicolae Bălcescu, Ion Brătianu and Ion Ghica devotedly pleaded the cause of the Romanian Principalities in front of the British officials during the second half of the 19th century¹⁸, while at the end of the seventh decade of the 19th century, Iacob Negruzzi voluntarily mixed truth and fiction and portrayed the British Isles and its inhabitants in a deeply humorous manner. For him, the British are stiff, uncommunicative, vexatious, dull and obsessed with speed not only

¹⁴ Moroianu, 652.

¹⁵ Moroianu, 654.

¹⁶ Florin Faifer, *Semnele lui Hermes. Memorialistica de călătorie (până la 1900) între real și imaginar* (București: Minerva, 1983), 240.

¹⁷ Lascu, 72-73, 145, 176.

¹⁸ Duțu, 59.

in manufacturing and technological innovation, but in all aspects of life, up to the point where they comprise a particular human race¹⁹.

Other characterisations of Englishmen pertaining to Romanians view the former as inseparable from a travel guide (Vasile Alecsandri) or as being eccentric (Dimitrie Ralet), particularly when they function as tourists²⁰. Similarly, Ion Codru-Drăgușanu considered that, for the serious, taciturn, egotistical, pragmatic and clockwise-exact British, travelling represented a very efficient manner of avoiding spleen²¹.

Nicolae Iorga provided an even more detailed portrait of the English tourists, which simultaneously intrigued and amused him through their physical appearance (tall and lean, wearing checkered jackets and bouffant pants) and which were phlegmatic, puritanical, rigid and patient, acting like they fulfilled a duty even when travelling, causing Iorga to label them as “the Wandering Jews of the modern world”²². Ioan Russu-Șirianu visited London in 1895, his impressions about the Englishmen being similar to those of other Romanians who were struck by the former’s seriousness and lack of expansiveness²³. From a physical viewpoint, most British were tall and well-built, but their preference for beer predisposed them to “fat bellies, rosy cheeks and a rather feeble mind” (at least in the opinion of Ion Lapedatu²⁴), although taken as a group they comprised a strong people, which, in alliance with the French, was not only capable, but entitled to rule the entire world.

A very thorough account of a visit to Great Britain at the end of the 19th century was signed by Victor Ardeleanul and was published in a widely circulated Transylvanian periodical²⁵. According to the already established model, the Romanian traveller resorted to comparisons with other European countries in order to paint a picture of a nation that was highly advanced and worthy of admiration. The author seemed to discover a tight connection

¹⁹ Faifer, 269.

²⁰ Faifer, 313.

²¹ Moroianu, 658.

²² Faifer, 315.

²³ Lascu, 84.

²⁴ Lascu, 144.

²⁵ Victor Ardeleanu, ‘Englezii și capitala lor’, *Tribuna*, XIII (1896), No. 235: 937-938, No. 236: 941-942.

between the qualities of the British people and its achievements on economic, urban, technological or cultural levels. He considered that London was “the capital of the world, at least from a commercial point of view” and particularly admired its “large streets, spacious dwellings” and reduced noise, which was highly discordant with the frenzied activity characteristic of such a large city, but explicable given the British’ seriousness, discipline, common sense and lack of the exuberance that was typical of Latin peoples.

Means of transportation represented another domain in which the English clearly surpassed other European nations, regardless if we are referring to trains (which were fast, noiseless and comfortable), to “cabs” (available in sufficient numbers and characterised by fast horses, polite coachmen, two wheels and a size fitted for narrow streets), to “underground trains” (which were widely used, particularly as they passed at every five minutes in either direction, but had the disadvantage of soiling the passengers with coal fumes and particles) or to the underwater electric train (that was built under the Thames in 1892 through a collaboration between a British and a French engineer as proof that the two sides of the English Channel could be connected via train).

The geometrical regularity of the streets, the houses aligned on them and an overall lack of monumentality represented other aspects that clearly differentiated London from other European capitals, given that the buildings which served as homes resembled one another up to the point where you could confuse them and also because very few institutions were worth mentioning from an architectural viewpoint (such as Crystal Palace, the British Museum or Buckingham Palace). One obvious exception from this unwritten rule was “commercial London, called the City, having in its centre the Bank of England and the Stock Exchange”, because here buildings had up to seven floors and were furnished with elevators. The low frequency and doubtful quality of monuments, the inexistence of coffee houses, the rather reduced number of theatres, which was however compensated by the number and quality of music-halls and ballets, the lack of proper boulevards and a striking cease of activity on the streets after six p.m. complete the picture of a town and of a people centred around commerce.

According to Victor Ardeleanul, the British devoted their entire spare time to their home-life, were conservatory in their mores, possessed a typical self-confidence, did not seek to imitate other peoples and customs, were somewhat selfish (but in an honest and open manner) and were extremely pious. The Romanian traveller also remarked a few signs of women's emancipation, which were noted rather open-mindedly, the only truly negative aspect that characterised Great Britain being the climate, which included extensive periods of dense fog and temperatures situated around the freezing point and which was considered responsible for the proverbial English spleen and for the associated high number of suicides or suicide attempts (that were harshly punished by law).

The first half of the 20th century is characterised by an even higher number of Romanians who travelled to Great Britain in various circumstances, such as Mihai Ralea, Alexandru Rosetti, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Zoe Dumitrescu Bușuleanga, Alexandru Balaci or Adrian Marino, all of them carefully noted by Alexandru Duțu²⁶. However, the impressions left by London on these intellectuals' thoughts cannot serve the scope of the present study, as they are not characteristic of the period of formation and consolidation of British images in the Romanian imaginary.

The United States of America and the perils of overgeneralization

The continents beyond the Atlantic Ocean entered Romanians' imagination rather tardily, as information about the Americas became available on a large scale only during the 18th and 19th centuries. This occurred although the first pieces of news about the New World reached Transylvania during the 16th-17th centuries through foreign books and cosmographies, but these had a very limited spreading amongst the members of the intellectual elite²⁷. It was only towards the end of the 18th century that world history books written in Latin, German, Hungarian or even Romanian, as well as school textbooks and almanacs started to reach

²⁶ Duțu, 59, 64.

²⁷ Alexandru Vári, "Imaginea Statelor Unite ale Americii în paginile „Gazetei de Transilvania” (1838-1848)", in *Convergențe europene: Istorie și societate în epoca modernă*, Eds. Nicolae Bocșan, Nicolae Edroiu, Vasile Vesa (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1993), 106.

an ever broader audience and to really contribute to the emergence of an informed opinion about the state of affairs and the events from this faraway land, this happening in close conjunction with a shift of focus from the entire Western hemisphere to the most developed of its political elements, namely the United States of America.

At first, it was mostly geographical and historical information that became known to the Romanian public, which was informed about a series of facts characteristic to these lands surrounded by water on all sides, as, for example, their climate and their old inhabitants (mistakenly called “Indians” and treated very badly by the new arrivals) or that this territory had apparently been discovered in Antiquity and then forgotten. However, with time, other types of news started being circulated and created the image of a “land of opportunity”, such as the manner in which the United States of America gained their independence from Great Britain, the results of the industrial revolution, the economic advancements that characterised North America, religious freedom and seemingly endless possibilities of becoming rich. However, all these positive traits stood in stark contrast to the shamefully retrograde situation of Black slaves.

As a result of this evolution, this unusual and exotic continent that was opposed to Europe from almost every viewpoint conceivable started being perceived by Romanians less as an enigma and more as a political unit with characteristics that individualised it and that were worth replicating (with the obvious exception of slavery). Consequently, throughout the 18th and particularly during the 19th century, the stereotypes and clichés that were intrinsic to an image based almost entirely on infrequent direct contacts and mediated information of a bookish nature were gradually replaced by descriptions that were closer to reality and that included positive and negative aspects, garnished with exotic elements such as the Indians’ lifestyle or the gold rush.

Almanacs usually provided Romanians with (more or less accurate) factual data about the New World. For example, in the *Calendariu... făcut spre întrebuițarea norodului... rumânesc* [*Almanac... made for the use of the... Romanian people*] printed in Vienna in 1794, one of the historical events that was mentioned was America’s discovery that had occurred 303 years ago,

namely in 1492²⁸. The same piece of information was included without additions in subsequent almanacs, such as the one published in Buda in 1814 and referring to the past 100 years.

Geography books encompassed the widest collection of general, historical, geographical, ethnographic and, at times, political knowledge about the New World, this statement being also applicable to the first textbook in the Romanian language, namely *Geografia istorică, astronomică, naturală și civilă a continentelor în general și a României în parte* [*The historical, astronomic, natural and civil geography of the continents in general and of Romania in particular*], written by Ioan Genilie and printed in Bucharest in 1835²⁹. In this work destined to be used by students in the humanities the author included numerous notes about the discovery of the New World (mentioning Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, John Cabot and Francis Drake), about the importance of this event in humankind history and about the continent's physical characteristics, riches and populations, whilst the United States of America were merely deemed the best example of the civilisation level that could be reached by Europeans.

The textbook written by Ioan Rus and entitled *Icoana pământului sau carte de geografie* [*The earth's icon or geography book*] was by far the most comprehensive and widespread work containing information about the New World that was available to Romanians during the 19th century. Published in Blaj in 1842, this geography textbook contained over 100 pages devoted to America and provided its readers with facts presented with a touch of the author's personal opinions, such as when mentioning how the indigenous people, mistakenly called Indians, were wiped out owing to Europeans' swords and alcoholic drinks or when treating the matter of commerce with Black slaves brought from Africa. Religion also occupied an important place amidst the pieces of information provided by Ioan Rus about the United States of America and he mentioned the fact that Lutheranism and Calvinism were dominant. As for trades and crafts,

²⁸ Paul Cernovodeanu and Ion Stanciu, *Imaginea Lumii Noi în țările române și primele lor relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii până în 1859* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1977), 48.

²⁹ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 85.

American colonists had at least matched, if not yet surpassed, their European peers, this accomplishment being paralleled by the attention given to education, as proven by the approximately 700 journals printed each year. Statistics accompanied Ioan Rus's description of the United States of America's population, industry, agriculture and commerce and one of the conclusions reached at the end of this overview regarded the political regime, which was "very different from European countries, only the republic of Switzerland bearing a small resemblance" with it³⁰.

Romanians' interest towards the world beyond the ocean was proven by the fact that geography professors also had access to *Harta gheenerală a Americiei* [*The general map of America*] lithographed at Jassy in 1840³¹, whilst for less specialised readers, press articles covering a large area of topics represented the main source of information. Consequently, average Romanians could learn about a new means of transportation (the train) and about its benefits or about the Americans' attempts at creating a set of laws against alcoholism, an endeavour that was highly praised. Moreover, data comprised in such works was soon enriched with knowledge that could serve economic purposes, such as details about the possibilities of using some species of plants typical of the New World in Europe, whether in nutrition or in the textile industry³². And theory soon turned into practice, as proven by the mere enumeration of the plants included in these writings: cotton, maize, field maple, tobacco, potato, sun flower or American beans.

Translations and adaptations of American literary works were also introduced to the public in the columns of the newspapers issued in the Romanian Principalities and in Transylvania during the 19th century or in the form of books. An analysis of early translations reveals that Benjamin Franklin was Romanians' favourite American author, the biographical information that usually accompanied his texts having much to do with the renown he gained so far away from home. Transylvanians' relation with Benjamin Franklin was multilayered and took the form of both direct contacts and of mediated and delayed reception of his works. The first type

³⁰ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 87.

³¹ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 88-89.

³² Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 55.

of connection was surely feebler than the latter, but it included the interesting story of Samuilă Dămian, an Orthodox priest eager to travel and expand his knowledge, whose passion for experimental physics turned him into Franklin's disciple on the realm of electricity³³. As for the second type of connection, the reach of the texts written by this outstanding American personality was surely superior to those of other of his compatriots. Understandably, works on electricity became known to Romanians soon after they were published in America, through French and German translations. However, a few decades later, Transylvanians also began to make contact with Franklin's literary, didactical and moralistic texts, particularly given that he had already proven himself as an important diplomat and politician during the American War of Independence. Both his life and his work demonstrated that Benjamin Franklin represented the very essence of Enlightenment and thus he was greatly respected by Transylvanian scholars and his writings were repeatedly translated into Romanian during the first half of the 19th century³⁴.

Romanians' growing interest towards the New World coincided with an increase in the intensity and frequency of political and economic contacts between other European countries and the United States of America. Consequently, although the old image of a Colonial America which was extremely rich in natural resources persisted until the end of the Phanariot epoch, beginning with the third decade of the 19th century it was replaced with a view of a political unit that was able to set aside the centuries-old yoke imposed on it by one of the planet's greatest powers, The British Empire, and thus serve as an example for other of the latter's colonies³⁵. However, the tales of the great sailors and of the geographical discoveries that took place

³³ Sorin Mitu, *Transilvania mea. Istorie, mentalități, identități* (Iași: Polirom, 2013), 615. Another Romanian that distinguished himself in the United States of America was Gheorghe Pomuț, commander of a Northern regiment during the American Civil War, later on appointed as consul general in Russia; for details, see Mircea Popa, 'Imagini și aspecte americane în mentalul românesc de până la Primul Război Mondial', *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia*, XXXI:2 (1986): 44-45.

³⁴ Sorin Mitu provides a very well documented and detailed analysis of how Benjamin Franklin and his work were received in Transylvania in Mitu, 614-622.

³⁵ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 49.

in the 15th-16th centuries continued to kindle Romanians' imaginations even after the northern part of the American continent took on new meanings for them and the United States of America were clearly separated from an imagological viewpoint from Latin America.

As for politics, in Romanian eyes, the largest power from across the Atlantic Ocean was often compared with Imperial Rome, given some resemblances between the two in the governing manner³⁶. It seems that the first piece of information about the American War of Independence that reached Romanians was comprised in a world history book written by the German historian Julius August Remer and published in Vienna in 1785-1786 under the title *Handbuch der allgemeinen Geschichte*. This work was anonymously translated and it circulated as a manuscript in Moldavia in two copies, one dating from the end of the 18th century and another that was composed at the specific request of a boyar named Tudurache in 1813-1814³⁷. Some details about the political developments from the United States of America after they declared their independence were also included in *Courier de Moldavie* in 18 February 1790 in the context of the Russo-Austro-Turkish War of 1787-1791.

Political news regarding the United States of America was also received in the Romanian Principalities by means of the foreign press and excerpts from French and Austrian publications were brought to the Sublime Porte's attention by Alexandru Nicolae Șuțu in 1808. During the summer of 1812, the same ruler also informed its suzerain power about the war that had broken out between the United States of America and Great Britain and presumably about its evolution, although subsequent correspondence concerning this issue was not preserved³⁸.

As already mentioned, until the third decade of the 19th century news about what happened across the Atlantic Ocean travelled in the Romanian area only (or, at least, mostly) through manuscripts and as part of private correspondence. However, printed works devoted to the American republic started to be more widespread after this date, thus proving a growing

³⁶ Vári, 109.

³⁷ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 70.

³⁸ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 74-75.

interest in this regard, particularly as advancement in general knowledge was paired with an interest for a potentially mirroring political destiny and spiced up by the first direct contacts³⁹.

The representatives of the 1848 generation were the ones truly responsible for seeding information about the United States of America into Romanians' imaginaries through their utter admiration for the Declaration of Independence and for the principles it stood for. Simion Bărnuțiu's translation of the American document greatly contributed to the propagation of democratic ideas that were synchronous with the developments from within the Austrian Empire, such as national independence and self-determination⁴⁰. Religious freedom also kindled the imagination of some Romanians, particularly Transylvanians, and transformed the United States of America into a Land of Promise, as proven by the migratory wave that was to characterise the turn of the 20th century.

During the second half of the 19th century, press articles continued to polish the image of the United States of America as a land governed by rapid economic development, by territorial growth, by technological progress and by a continuous increase in the number and performance of communication routes and means. American politics and other minor events that entered the sphere of sensational news (domestic incidents, epidemics, devastating fires, shipwrecks, Indian attacks, etc.⁴¹) also filled Romanian newspapers' columns⁴². The Black slaves' fight for emancipation represented a particularly ardent topic for Romanians, given that a number of parallels between the former's situation and that of Gypsies from Wallachia and Moldavia could be drawn and, unsurprisingly, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe received two translations into Romanian only a year after it was published.

³⁹ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 83.

⁴⁰ Cernovodeanu and Stanciu, 130-131.

⁴¹ Vári, 113-114.

⁴² Mircea Popa mentions other types of news about the United States of America that could be included in the "Various" category, such as information about women's education, about Fridays in American history, about marriage in America, about who discovered America and the origin of its name, etc. See Popa, 42.

In the same vein, journalists sometimes also reported that religious freedom was tainted by Anglicanism's predominance, whilst national equality was by no means real since English was deemed the country's only diplomatic language⁴³. Moreover, as the migratory wave accelerated⁴⁴, newspapers placed an emphasis on the fact that those who travelled for the United States of America exposed themselves to a number of perils, not only during their trip, but also when they arrived at their destination, because ruthless capitalists tried to turn them into modern-day serfs⁴⁵.

The last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century brought about an increase in the number of Romanian literary works translated and published in the United States of America, as well as recognition of the rather large Romanian community which was already living across the Atlantic Ocean⁴⁶. As a result, numerous on-the-scene accounts about life in America not only reached the Romanian public, but also served as a source of inspiration for some Romanian authors. The first scientific reports written by Romanians about the United States of America also date back to the beginning of the 20th century⁴⁷, as well as a rather peculiar and unusual text describing a trip across the Atlantic Ocean made by an anonymous Wallachian woman, presumably during her honeymoon⁴⁸. The author, writing some time after returning to Europe, remarked the apparently limitless possibilities that New York provided to the ones who decided to make a living there, a fact that revealed itself during the six days she spent in the American metropolis⁴⁹.

⁴³ Vári, 110.

⁴⁴ Some details in this respect are provided by Popa, 47.

⁴⁵ Vári, 111. Similar conclusions were drawn at the beginning of the 20th century by V. E. Moldovan, a Romanian publicist who spent 5 years in America; details in Popa, 48-50.

⁴⁶ Popa, 42-43.

⁴⁷ Popa, 45.

⁴⁸ For details, see Alin Ciupală, "Rediscovering the New World. An anonymous Romanian traveler in the two Americas in the early 20th century and her diary", in *Călători români în Occident: secolele XVII-XX*, Eds. Nicolae Bocșan, Ioan Bolovan (Cluj-Napoca, Institutul Cultural Român: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2004), 203-210.

⁴⁹ A more detailed account of New York was provided for those contemplating emigration across the Atlantic Ocean by publicist V. E. Moldovan; Popa, 48-49.

As the amount of direct contacts and indirect information increased, Romanians' image of the inhabitants of this extraordinary land became clearer and closer to reality. Americans thus started being perceived as people with qualities and faults, similar to Romanians in some respects, but very different in others. For example, they were prone to revolt, impulsive, temperamental, grandiloquent, careless, fashionable and easily steered by anger or admiration towards reckless acts. Moreover, they did not pay too much attention to ranks, as money decided the winner(s) of the day, although the tables could very easily turn, as financial tumult and resounding bankruptcies demonstrated⁵⁰. Equally relevant for Romanians was the fact that immigrants were treated as a labour force that had to be used to the highest degree, without any concerns about the men's physical and psychological health and/or welfare, something that was noted by several authors⁵¹.

Concluding remarks: A similar substratum, different materialisations

Ethnic representations are created during a complex process that combines top-down and bottom-up influences, the elites and the commoners reciprocally influencing their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards members of other groups than their own. Moreover, the resulting images are based on various sources of knowledge, as alterity is experienced both directly and in more mediated manners.

Meeting a foreigner, either by travelling to his/her country or by receiving him/her as a guest at home, represented merely one of the ways in which the Other became known to Romanians during the modern epoch. Somewhat unexpectedly, particularly as they were usually hosts, not visitors⁵², the number of Romanian travellers that crossed the English Channel to Great Britain or even the Atlantic Ocean to reach the United States of America was rather large for the analysed period. However, given

⁵⁰ Vári, 111-113.

⁵¹ Popa, 50-51.

⁵² Marian Popa, *Călătoriile Epocii Romantice* (București: Univers, 1972), p. 458.

their isolated nature, such contacts were habitually not decisive in establishing ethnic images, but had the potential of becoming more powerful when they acted as sources of inspiration for fictional and non-fictional works able to propagate and perpetuate certain (positive or negative) stereotypes and clichés. Fortunately, some of these travellers were talented and authored detailed and well-documented accounts of their journeys, accounts which shed light on a number of peculiarities and less-known facts through an in-depth and on-the-spot understanding of the alterity and which thus earned their place beside school textbooks and press articles as the chief sources of information about the Anglo-Saxons available to average Romanians.

Throughout all these depictions of the Other, the natural environment and the urban areas represented the most important scenes on which the British or the American actors revealed their defining traits, from phenotype⁵³ and clothing to main occupations, patterns of behaviour and moral codes. In fact, humans and their surroundings were usually inseparable, as exemplified by most descriptions of towns, particularly in the case of London (usually compared to Paris or Vienna) or New York (which stood in stark contrast to any European city).

In general, Romanians' impressions about London were unique and characteristic to each traveller, the British capital usually being portrayed with curiosity and in all its greatness, although it did not particularly struck a chord with them⁵⁴. This occurred mainly due to the fact that they habitually arrived in Great Britain after their perception was profoundly influenced by French texts about the latter's neighbours.

For the British, the English Channel represented (and is still considered) a borderland that distinctly separated them from the rest of the continent. They felt that they were situated "overseas" and their identity as islanders was viewed as one of the elements that defined them the most⁵⁵. Customarily they were positioned and positioned themselves amongst the

⁵³ The typical physical traits usually represent one of the first clichés circulated in relation to foreigners; Lascu, 16.

⁵⁴ Duțu, 65.

⁵⁵ Duțu, 56.

continent's "Nordic" countries, an opinion shared by many Romanians who reached the British shores during the 19th century, Titu Maiorescu being one such example⁵⁶. Other clichés of the same period depicted the Englishmen as aristocrats or as bad cooks⁵⁷, whilst the British women were considered beautiful in an imposing, stately manner, but were cold and lacked passion, as both Ion Codru Drăgușanu and Ioan Russu-Șirianu discovered⁵⁸.

As opposed to these images of members of a European nation who were striving to emphasise their peculiarities, Romanian stereotypes about the United States of America focused upon broader topics, better suited to describe a rather exotic faraway territory. Similar to other European peoples, during the 19th century Romanians viewed this foremost representative of the New World as a realm of political, religious, economic, individual or even moral freedom and independence, as a land of endless possibilities, a country in which liberties could be theorised, proclaimed and embodied (as in the noteworthy case of Benjamin Franklin), a place in which they could project all their dreams, hopes and expectations for the future. The United States of America were considered the quintessential exemplification of the idea of progress and overall development (with the striking exception of Black slaves), a model to be followed not only by Romanians, but also by old Europe.

These exaggerated representations were undisputed until the large (mostly Transylvanian) migratory wave from the beginning of the 20th century, which permitted a more thorough knowledge through direct contact. This revealed what I labelled "the perils of overgeneralization", a phrase intended to illustrate the fact that the United States of America was (and still is) a country of contrasts, with enormous differences between the rich and the poor, with large gaps between theory and practice, particularly for recent immigrants, which found here unimagined hardships and utter misery and which had to work extremely hard for a meagre living⁵⁹. The positive traits associated with the United States of America were generally

⁵⁶ Ciupală, 204.

⁵⁷ Lascu, 17-18.

⁵⁸ Lascu, 146-147.

⁵⁹ Popa, 51.

overrated, whilst the numerous social, cultural, religious or even economic problems were underestimated, habitually owing to the precarious political situation that characterised Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia during this period.

A comparative analysis of Romanian views on Englishmen and Americans reveals that the relevant sources were interpreted using separate paradigms, in the sense that realities from across the English Channel and those from across the Atlantic Ocean were passed through different filters of perception, the resulting images thus being governed by distinct rules. Consequently, in the case of Great Britain Romanians operated with a set of representations that synchronously depicted the political regime (through information about the Empire, the monarch and/or the capital, about relations with other European countries/nations, but also about the standard of living of ordinary people), the natural or the manmade surroundings (particularly in the case of urban areas), the typical British features (related either to physical appearance or behaviours) and/or certain cultural peculiarities (such as the famous five o'clock tea). On the other hand, Romanians' image of the United States of America was constructed diachronically and it evolved from a rather mythical and exotic representation of the New World to a more realistic depiction of a country that caught up with and then swiftly surpassed the standards of the European civilization and ultimately to a land that provided the chance to a better life to those willing to sacrifice their youth and sometimes their health through hard work in a very dynamic environment.

However, a common trait characterising the construction of Romanians' alterity images of Great Britain and the United States of America was the use of data provided by various sources (school textbooks, almanacs, press articles, travel accounts, translations of foreign scientific or literary works, etc.) in the elaboration of informed and sometimes of ill-formed opinions, both tendencies being typical of any social representation, due to the unavoidable mixture of truth and stereotypes that underlies all ethno-cultural interactions.

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