Foreword

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This volume hosts a selection of papers presented at a panel dedicated to social-anthropological and linguistic views on migration included within the "Migrations and Identity in European History: Communities, Connections, Conflicts" Conference (Iași, Romania, 25 – 28 September 2019), a major academic event organized by Humboldt-Club Iași, Deutsches Kulturzentrum Iași, Romanian Academy – Iași Branch, Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg. The conference which brought together the five authors and their specific perspectives on the migration topic was organized as a dissemination context of the research project "Migration and identity within the Romanian cultural milieu. An interdisciplinary approach" (2018-2021), carried out at the Romanian Academy – Iasi Branch in partnership with the "Lucian Blaga" University in Sibiu and the North University Centre of the Cluj-Napoca Technical University in Baia Mare, a project funded by the UEFISCDI (The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding in Romania). The Iași Conference also represented a side event of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of Alexander von Humboldt's birth, and was sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, to which the editor and the authors wish to express their deepest gratitude.

Lately especially, questions of population mobility, belonging and ethnic or national identity, social inclusion and exclusion, migrants and refugees' rights, transnational cultural heritage – all influenced by domestic and foreign policy programs became even more salient matters in the global arena and especially in Europe. Though representing various academic insights and methodologies, the papers below manage to appropriately meet in a well-rounded perspective thanks to the fact that they problematize some of the most sensitive and challenging topics of current migration studies, and that they all display an anti-essentialist epistemological stance. Beyond the main topics of their specific chapters, the contributors deal with the unsettling relationship between mobile individuals, able to be part of diasporic communities or immigrant clusters situated far away for their place of birth, and state-centred actors, and intend to help deconstruct the artificial power structures and societal stereotypes with which these people's life choices have yet to struggle.

Revisiting with ethnographic instruments and empirical research the individual point of view and assessing how migration affects positively and/or negatively personal relationships, families and communities represents the best way to capture accurately the dynamics of the researched phenomenon, and it is one of the most important contributions of the present volume. Taken together, the chapters generate a balanced combination of theoretical and empirical standpoints, and could act as a convincing manifest from the better acceptance of pluri-national or pluri-ethnic subjectivities, and for the filling up of the gap between 'us' and 'others' in our worlds that are still aiming unrealistically at perfect homogeneity.

The five studies examine various aspects of social and/or ethnic identity dynamics in a migrating or a sedentary context, the relationship between top and bottom perspectives being analysed by the authors either from a macro or a micro perspective. The first two papers, the one authored by Dan Gabriel Sîmbotin and the one of Alexandru Laurențiu Cohal, offer a rather panoramic view of the researched phenomena, focusing on public policy regarding migration or identity, politics of identity, collective imaginary. The three other chapters privilege the microlevel experiences of migration employing ethnographic tools to better grasp the bottom-up dynamics of mobility and transnational communities. Issues of belonging and homecoming, psycho-emotional or discursive identity, conflict

between identity politics and individual perceptions of cultural and social realities emerge of all chapters and help the reader get close to the indeterminacy of contemporary world. Another important issue that supports the line of thought of all contributions in this book is the status of 'the other' as a political and social construct targeted by multiple decision-making processes that impact the migrants' way of life.

In the first chapter, Dan Gabriel Sîmbotin offers a fresh view on older prejudices disseminated as major prerequisites of legislation trying to point out the loss of the individual rights and human dignity in public discourses of how migration is described and ruled by international entities and local administrations alike. In his thorough critique, Sîmbotin is targeting the unthoughtful public narratives of global population flows in an increasingly mobile world. He brings anthropological and historical arguments to showcase the need of global actors to support and protect freedom of movement of all humans, and the important realization that the two preconceived images of the immigrant, i.e. the intruder/invader and the slave which nurtured long time collective fears need to be aborted at last. Within the European public sphere especially, a continent which recently became an important destination of war refugees, the careful consideration at the level of public policy and of mass media of these issues represents a timely undertaking.

In the following study, Alexandru Laurențiu Cohal provides a thourough deconstruction of cultural homogeneity assumptions based on the case of the Romanian national identity. While privileging also a critical stance of how public agenda creates and imposes stereotyped images of the conflict and separation between 'us' and 'others', as Sîmbotin also did, Cohal directs his entire attention towards a national case; he presents the long process of how the romantic phase of Romanian nationalism as well as the communist interface of nationalist propaganda orchestrated especially through language policy and ethnic standardization the setting of the boundaries of the Romanian 'imagined community'. Therefore, the Romanian case of "close nationalism" would reject as inadvertent multiculturalism and multi-ethnic realities and would let minorities find themselves "homeless" in a "homeland" inhabited by the main ethnicity and the native speakers of one language. In an applied discussion on transnational mobility, Cohal's analysis helps pinpoint the intricate network of problems and solutions attached unavoidably to the place of ethnic identities in the global world.

Bringing a much-needed combination of theory with empirical research, Nicolas Le Bigre displays a great critique of another reified concept of the public discourse on migration, i.e. the concept of 'integration' of migrants into the host society. In a functional context, the concept deconstructed by Le Bigre also postulates ethnic homogenization and standardization, while assuming the need of newcomers to gradually adopt the larger local culture. As Cohal did, Le Bigre also steps aside from the grand narrative of ethnic homogeneity and monolithic communities and shifts the attention towards personal narratives of migrants living in Scotland which he interviewed in depth. He underscores the importance of carefully considering the everyday experiences of migrants, representing as accurately as possible their voices, sensitivities, aspirations. Due to the special national environment in which his informants are based, i.e. at the crossroads of non-European, the European Union and the post-Brexit worlds, a closer look at the grassroot consequences of rigid bureaucratic regulations and politically convenient decisions is highly desired. Finally, Le Bigre opts in line with Sîmbotin for political agency to be better aligned with people's choices and individual freedom and emphasizes the need for de-exoticizing the 'other' while living in already ethnically hybrid societies.

The last two papers provide more ethnographic first-hand arguments for privileging an open view of migrants' identity dynamics. Ioana Baskerville's paper choose also to analyze a highly visited concept of the migration studies sphere, i.e. 'home' and 'homemaking'. She starts from asserting the inherent flexibility of 'home' and 'dwelling' in today's world, a world in which sedentarism seems to be more the exception than the rule. Her perspective, that is informed by the opinions of Romanians living abroad, shows how migrants' homemaking practices have less to do with the tangible dwelling, being rather an emotional space to which cultural objects, family dishes and ritual practices contribute. Transnational lifestyle and multi-located homes as realities of migrants' personal experiences come to organically counteract the political instrumentalization of an ideal 'homeland', as pointed out by Cohal in his chapter. In a post-ethnic world, the individual ontological security could be obtained by more flexible cultural ties and more diverse strategies of belonging.

How migrants creatively negotiate their cultural belonging is also addressed by Adina Hulubaș in her paper. She also offers anthropological evidences to support the research of the socio-cultural dimensions of migration. As an ethnologist, Hulubaș is well aware of her informants' need to continuously engage with the customs and traditional practices of their communities of origin even in the host country. Identifying gestures and behavior as informed by a salient collective memory is thus generating a home-like private world for these people. The gap between the culture of origin and that of destination is therefore experienced with more ease, finds Hulubaș. Homely tastes, ethnic objects, religious gestures, even aromatic plants are among the cultural symbols that support the succesfull practice of ethnic identity for Romanian migrants. By her thorough positioning close to the actual life experiences of migrants, Hulubaș contributes together with the other authors, to moving beyond the essentializing tendency and metholodogical nationalism of migration research.

The present volume hopefully offers a fresh and informed view on fundamental concepts, themes and ideas belonging to a much-visited topic, proving its actuality and the need for more research "from below" that will challenge the assumptions acting as layout of political decision-making. In mind with the expectations of fellow researchers in the field of migration, as well as of students of ethnicity and nationalism, social change and cultural heritage, the contributions in this volume aspire to keep the conversation ongoing and showcase the need of more scholarly engagement in matters that directly affect the present and future of our global society.