



ADAPTING TO SURVIVE: POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES TODAY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE INTER- IMPERIAL READING METHOD

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Abstract: This paper discusses Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu's recent volume, *Creolizing the Modern*, in relation to the debates surrounding the adequacy of the postcolonial framework for the analysis of East European and, more specifically, Romanian literature. It argues that the authors manage to signal, introduce and put into practice some of the most important methodological updates in the fields of postcolonialism, dependency studies and World Literature. Through a discussion of each of these milestones, Boatcă and Parvulescu's inter-imperial reading method is shown to provide a highly rigorous and productive world-systemic perspective on modern canonical literature.

Keywords: inter-imperiality, creolization of theory, (post)colonialism and (post)coloniality, modernity, Eastern Europe

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Since colonial expansion and domination are inextricable from the history of modernity, having spanned continents and centuries, postcolonial studies have also been applied to a great variety of geographical regions and socioeconomic situations. The beginnings of the discipline in the 1980s and 1990s prioritized the study of the most powerful Western empires, which established multiple colonies around the world (especially in India and Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean) and influenced the subsequent development of those regions and their societies. It was also when scholars like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha coined essential concepts such as orientalism, the subaltern, stereotypical repetition, hybridity, mimicry etc. These theorists and the ones who walked in their footsteps investigated both the colonial discourse and the response of the colonized subject, mapping the

specific circumstances and mechanisms of the colonial relationship. However, given the conceptual kinship between (post)coloniality and other forms of political and cultural oppression or domination, the postcolonial vocabulary and methodology were later deployed to describe and critique certain historical contexts which were not former colonies per se. In particular, Eastern Europe has recently become the object of heated debate regarding the utility of the postcolonial framework: Should we discuss the East European literatures of the last few centuries through the prism of (post)colonialism? If so, can these theoretical tools be imported as such, or do they need to be adapted to the particularities of East European nation building? Why is the postcolonial canon more suitable than other theories of political and literary dependence? Over the last three decades, various theorists and scholars have answered these

questions differently, often polemically, from Spivak to the Belgrade Circle and from David Chioni Moore to Maria Todorova, to name but a few.

In this context, Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu's most recent volume, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania Across Empires*,¹ appears as a comprehensive response to a series of theoretical dilemmas, conflicts and deadlocks in the field of postcolonial and World Literature studies. Published in 2022 and starting from an in-depth study of Transylvanian modernity, it represents the pretext and the premise of this article due to the authors' efforts to provide practical solutions to the many instances of polarization within contemporary postcolonialism. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to analyze the methodological junctures chosen by Boatcă and Parvulescu to articulate their theory of inter-imperiality and the corresponding reading method. In doing so, I also look at the work of other scholars who have recently supported similar disciplinary turns and argue that the updates and nuances brought by all of these authors to postcolonial critique are necessary for the survival and productivity of the paradigm.

Postcolonialism in Eastern and Southeastern Europe

After the publication of Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* in 1978, postcolonial studies were quickly enshrined as a legitimate scholarly field, especially in the Anglophone academe. As they generated more analyses and debates, some of the discipline's foundational concepts were questioned, nuanced and refined – including Said's own terminology and approach, which came under fire for essentializing the West and paying little attention to the subversive response of the orientalized subject.² At the same time, the geographical and historical applications of postcolonialism were also being discussed and supplemented: for example, prior to 1990, Said himself added Ireland to an already long list of formerly colonized regions (from India and the Caribbean to Australia);³ then, in the early 2000s, the history and the cultural legacy of the Balkans began being analyzed from a postcolonial perspective by important scholars, such as Gayatri Spivak and Alexander Kiossev.⁴ In fact, Maria Todorova has noted that the question of a so-called "Balkan (post)colonialism" first emerged at a time when this particular direction of cultural analysis was already being criticized or even abandoned in the West, appearing as obsolete or exhausted.⁵ Nonetheless, it can also be argued that it was precisely the renewed debate about the applicability of postcolonial studies in contexts which they were not initially meant for that helped revive the discipline, reign in its indiscriminate expansion and clarify its theoretical configurations, as will become apparent when looking more closely at Boatcă and Parvulescu's book.

Concerning Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the

last few decades have brought an increase in theoretical positionings having to do with (post)colonialism and its legacies. This is not the time or place to review all of them but suffice to say that compelling arguments have been made both in support of and against a postcolonial approach. Back in 2003, Gayatri Spivak wrote about the possible connection between postcolonial theory and "the Balkan as metaphor," concluding that it was "a critical task for our world."⁶ It should be noted that her phrasing is already cautious and sceptical, since she refers to the image and the perception of the Balkans rather than the region itself, introducing the distinction between colonized spaces proper and other forms of dependence and othering. In fact, many of the scholars advocating this approach are also aware of the significant particularities of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In Dušan Bjelić's words, it is a well-known fact that "the Balkan region was never colonized in the modern sense, as the Orient was, despite being subjected to Ottoman rule," which makes the contributors to the collective volume *Balkan as Metaphor* agree that Balkan specificity is, indeed, a logical paradox, with Balkan people seeing each other as both colonizers and colonized subjects in the wake of Ottoman-imposed re-population and religious conversion.⁷ Bjelić's verdict that "whether Balkan nationalism is post-imperial or post-colonial, it is fair to say that it remains distinctly liminal" has since been strongly criticized by Maria Todorova, who deems the two theoretical frameworks very different.⁸ In fact, Todorova opts for a more restrictive and rigorous understanding of colonialism as implying "the transfer of control over social organization from the indigenous population to the colonial power."⁹ She also took issue with the poststructuralist tendency to amalgamate all historical empires into a single, unitary colonizing discourse¹⁰ and devoted much of her work to developing the concept of "balkanism" as a phenomenon in its own right: "balkanism is not merely a subspecies of orientalism."¹¹ There is some overlap, of course, since, like Orientalism, balkanism refers to a stereotypical view of the people(s) in Southeastern Europe as uncivilized, backwards, violent, corrupt or chaotic, placing the Balkans "in a cognitive straightjacket."¹² But Todorova identifies a series of significant differences between the two phenomena: for instance, "the historical and geographic concreteness of the Balkans" vs. the imaginary, immaterial nature of the Orient;¹³ the exotic appeal of the Orient, which promises an escape from the industrializing West vs. the less imaginative, more historicized depictions of the Balkans;¹⁴ the otherworldly and timeless aura of the Middle and Far East vs. the transitional status of Southeastern Europe on its way to so-called "civilization" and "modernity" etc.¹⁵ In short, Todorova's methodological creed is that a clear distinction between localized discursive productions is of utmost importance, lest cultural history become a



linear, oversimplified narrative.

With post-Soviet states, the polemic is just as complex. Carey and Raciborski have written about the export of the communist model to Yugoslavia and the Soviet satellites as a form of colonization, claiming that, although countries like “Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia are culturally similar, Eastern Orthodox cultures,” they “represent significant ethnic differences and were parts of Russian and Soviet colonialism.”¹⁶ At the same time, the authors evaluate the history of former Soviet states and Yugoslavia through the social consequences of their recent political regimes: “Common to all forms of colonialism, from Russian and Soviet to U.S./West European, we find that former colonies generally have poor records on human rights and democratization,” which justifies, in their view, the postcolonial analysis of these regions.¹⁷ Similarly, but perhaps more convincingly, D.C. Moore has argued for the postcolonial status of the post-Soviet sphere: the Baltic States, Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia,¹⁸ showing that all the twenty-seven nations “were unquestionably subject to often brutal Russian domination (styled as Soviet from the 1920s on) for anywhere from forty to two hundred years”¹⁹ and that most stages in the colonization and decolonization of sub-Saharan Africa are identifiable in former Soviet states, as well – for example, agriculture being turned into monoculture (with dire environmental consequences) or recently decolonized nations being ill-equipped for self-governance and resorting to alliances with their oppressor’s opponents. In short, Moore suggests that literary scholars should engage in a “global postcolonial critique” because, given the geographical and historical span of colonization, there is no culture today which has not been affected or shaped by it: “as neo-, endo- and ex-, as post- and non-.”²⁰ Finally, in the field of anthropology, the use of postcolonial critique in the exploration of postsocialist societies began with Katherine Verdery’s 1996 article “Nationalism, Postsocialism, and Space in Eastern Europe,” which mentions that postcolonial theory would bring a new focus on the formation of self and alterity in a discipline traditionally concerned with comparing political systems.²¹ However, in her introduction to a collection of academic papers presented in 2006 at a biennial conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, Jill Owczarzak expresses the moderate view that, while anthropologists studying Eastern Europe can learn from postcolonial theory and while a deeper understanding of racial politics and ethnicity has already permeated the discipline, “the tremendous diversity in the socialist experience among different countries cautions us against broad generalizations.”²²

At this juncture, it is safe to say that much of the debate surrounding Eastern Europe and the postcolonial hypothesis can be put down either to the different definitions of colonization and (post)colonialism or the

purpose of the historical and literary survey itself. As Moore notes, “postcolonial studies have also become remarkably autocritical: since its inception, numerous important critics have interrogated the discourse itself,” including the likes of Benita Parry, Bishnupriya Ghosh, Graham Huggan or Linda Hutcheon,²³ which has proven regenerative for the discipline: it has made critics interrogate their own privilege and subject positions, address the apparent omissions in postcolonialism, while also paying attention to multiple forms of oppression and exploitation. However, terminological and methodological quarrels can also become sterile and circular unless they provide solutions and ways out of the crises they address.

Which brings me to a couple of examples in recent scholarship on Eastern Europe, Romanian literature and, more generally, literary peripherality, which manage to do just that, in spite of the authors’ reluctance to import the postcolonial framework without changes or to declare any of the Romanian provinces former colonies. Interestingly, the first example starts with a discussion of the same potential issue which had been anticipated by Moore: the risk of inflating postcolonialism “into a category so large as to lose all analytic bite.”²⁴ In a 2012 article, Andrei Terian shows that “postcolonialism without shores” is not only historically inaccurate when applied to Central and East European literatures but also methodologically questionable: that is, instead of allowing literary scholars to better comprehend and explain various cultural phenomena around the world, as Moore had hoped, this excessively broad framework would “cancel the utility of the concept.”²⁵ Terian provides plenty of arguments for his positioning in this debate: for instance, he shows that Orientalism should not be considered a sufficient criterion for postcolonialism, since its rhetorical mechanisms are not employed exclusively by the West to describe the East but function intra-regionally, as well; he also argues that, regarding socialism in East-Central Europe, the countries that came under Soviet influence in the twentieth century were not all colonies, since they retained their local governments, official languages and cultural identities, developing new nationalist movements after 1965.²⁶ However, it is the use of postcolonialism as “a reading mode which can be applied more or less successfully to different contexts” which interests me the most, as it points to the imperative of site-specific methodology and theory.²⁷ In this sense, it must be mentioned that Terian also proposes a taxonomy of East-Central European literatures based on their position in the world-system: minority literatures (literary subsystems made of texts written in a different language from the national one), marginal literatures (dependent on the literary system of another country), (post)colonial literatures (created by the native populations in colonized territories) and mimetic literatures (literary systems copying other literatures

which they are otherwise independent from). Not only do these categories allow for better contextualization – as opposed to an all-encompassing notion of (post) colonial literature – but they also highlight the possible simultaneity of distinct patterns of dependence and emulation, according to one's frame of reference (the national literary system, the official language of a certain territory, Casanova's World Republic of Letters etc.).

In their recent volume, *Creolizing the Modern*, Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu take on the same challenge of addressing and going past the debates about the adequacy of postcolonialism for the exploration of East European (semi)peripherality. They do so by bringing into the conversation the Latin American theorists of decoloniality, whose critique of the “overgeneralization inherent in the postcolonial category”²⁸ converges with Todorova's observations about the poststructuralist proclivity for decontextualized discourse analysis. Then, Boatcă and Parvulescu draw on the more political component of decolonial theory, which has to do with the contemporary consequences of imperialism and coloniality: “A critical conceptual change in the notion of coloniality was the acknowledgment that colonialism as a formal administrative status had come to an end, yet the hierarchies established between Europeans and non-Europeans—the coloniality of power—continued to underwrite social, political, economic, and cultural realities in these regions of the world.”²⁹ These theoretical sources are important for a few reasons:

On the one hand, the practical, constructive dimension of decolonialism is one of its defining features, which sets it apart from postcolonial studies and brings it closer to political activism, fostering a sense of urgency. For example, Walter Mignolo and Catherine Welsh's by-now-famous book *On Decoloniality* is divided into two sections, “Decoloniality in/as Praxis” and “The Decolonial Option,” with the authors mentioning that “they are both theoretical/praxical in different ways, starting at two ends of the spectrum and working toward the center: theoretical praxis and practical theory.”³⁰ Granted, the decolonial project has been accused of being too vague, optimistic and even elitist, since it evaluates its success by measuring the museal and academic democratization of culture.³¹ In one of his other books, Mignolo even bases his theoretical framework on a few enticing, highly ambitious but unfalsifiable assumptions: more exactly, he suggests that decolonial praxis can lead to a radically different and non-competitive world, in which the human person is more important than any institution and labor is no longer an end in itself, rather an instrument for a better life.³² In Alex Cistelean's words, “because of their idealistic premise, any attempt at designing a practical, effective axis ends up in the same subjective and a priori territory of epistemology.”³³ Cistelean's arguments are difficult to dismiss. However, going back to *Creolizing the Modern* and its use of decolonialism as a stepping

stone for the formulation of a new methodology, it is my contention that Boatcă and Parvulescu successfully select the most promising elements of decolonial theory and use them to produce a functional conceptual framework for the analysis of Transylvanian history and culture.

More precisely, the authors study the “coloniality of power” in its particular East European configuration, where “the dissolution of the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Tsarist imperial states often led not to the liberation of the previously occupied provinces but to a shift from imperial systems based on the exploitation of peasant labor to systems under the jurisdiction of Western capitalist powers.”³⁴ While recognizing that Eastern Europe has generally experienced patterns of oppression typical of imperialism rather than colonialism, they also reveal throughout the book that certain phenomena associated with colonialism and critiqued in postcolonial studies – such as racialization, restrictive and hierarchical understandings of labor, the strategic deployment of language against one's oppressor etc. – can also be identified in the last few centuries of Transylvanian history and, more specifically, in canonical interwar literature. In fact, postcolonialism has previously informed other literary disciplines and approaches, as well, without being absorbed into or amalgamated with them. The most intuitive example is, perhaps, World Literature, which has evolved from Goethe's uncritical celebration of cultural dialogue and difference and from his definition based on aesthetic value and taste to the investigation of literary circulation as a material process in the works of David Damrosch, Pascale Casanova and Rebecca Walkowitz. Moreover, recent scholarship by authors such as Aamir Mufti, Pheng Cheah, and Lorna Burns further proves the impact of postcolonial theory on World Literature studies. In Burns' words, “world literature needs postcolonial critique lest it become complicit with the global structures of capitalism that it might otherwise seek to challenge.”³⁵ Likewise, the study of East European literatures requires, in Boatcă and Parvulescu's view, the renewed awareness that, while not all forms of dependence in World Literature are colonial, the overlaps, as well as the differences or the desynchronizations between imperialism and (neo) colonialism need to be investigated in each historical scenario and in each literary system, considering both the national and the regional scale.

As for the transition from imperial to capitalist dependence, Boatcă has previously articulated this pattern in an older study linking Eastern Europe and Latin America. In *Laboratoare ale modernității* (Modernity Laboratories), she writes that “even though it was never formally colonized, Romania gained access to European modernity through the back door – coloniality.”³⁶ Note here the difference between “colonialism” and “coloniality,” which structures much of Boatcă's work in



these two volumes: while colonialism refers to the actual process of political, military, institutional and cultural colonization – which implies direct action on the dominated society, direct changes in their ways of life – coloniality names a type of dependence which became widespread – in the case of Eastern Europe – during the fast-paced globalization of capitalism, that is, upon the waning of the Habsburg, Ottoman and Tsarist empires.

Not only is this a swift, effective response to a debate which has often resulted in pointless polarization, but it also allows the two authors – a sociologist (Manuela Boatcă) and a literary scholar (Anca Parvulescu) – to use the insights of postcolonial and decolonial theory in a rigorous and self-reflexive manner. For this purpose, they begin by adapting Laura Doyle's concept of "inter-imperiality" to the Transylvanian context and by treating this space as a "world region": simultaneously unique through its own combination of imperial influences (intersecting, competing, sedimented), comparable to other far-flung spaces around the globe and, last but not least, permanently subject to power struggles within the world-system. In her 2020 book, *Inter-imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor and the Literary Arts of Alliance*, Doyle defines her object of study as "a fraught position, lived all at once in the neighborhood, at the imperial court, on the road, in the body, and amid the invasive stream of political events and news" – the experience of clashing empires and agents of power, affecting every part of one's life and especially the creative lives of artists and writers.³⁷ Following in her footsteps, Boatcă and Parvulescu read Liviu Rebreanu's canonical novel *Ion* through its negotiations of political power, ethno-racial identities, linguistic belonging and labor regimes. In doing so, I argue, they signal, introduce and put into practice some of the most important methodological updates in the fields of postcolonialism, dependency studies and World Literature, which I systematize and discuss below:

1. The Imperative of Site-Specific Theory

One of the key moments in the evolution of postcolonial studies was the acknowledgement of the fact that colonization and orientalizing did not only target the political regime, social structures and religious profile of a marginal community, but also its specific patterns of knowledge formation. According to Aditya Nigam, for a very long time "the colonial mode of knowledge production" dominated both literary and political thought, "treating these [marginal or formerly colonized] societies as 'fields' for the collection of academic raw materials and application of theories produced in other climes."³⁸ In 2010, Revathi Krishnaswamy published a highly influential article on this topic, decrying the slow development of critical self-awareness in World Literature, where a broader selection of texts

(incorporating literature from all over the world) should have also made room for non-European theoretical work. In Krishnaswamy's words, "if the model of world literature involves sampling texts from different parts of the world, the epistemologies used to interpret them remain predominantly Western or Westocentric."³⁹ Starting from her plea for theoretical decolonization and decentering, many of the central concepts and categories in Western literary theory can be brought into question and relativized: the literary genres we operate with, the absolute distinction between prose, poetry and drama, between written and oral literature etc. Krishnaswamy also gives a few examples from Indian literary history (Tamil texts and poetics, bhakti poetry, Dalit aesthetics), showing that emergent or latent epistemological traditions might be the most suitable for the analysis of local literary phenomena, despite their lack of systematization.⁴⁰ For instance, a recent study by Alex Goldiş reconsiders narratology as a heterogeneous, localized approach to the literary text. Explicitly building on Krishnaswamy's "world literary knowledges," the author formulates an "ideologically minded narratology," which draws on the recent history of Eastern Europe, its experience of totalitarianism and the internal democratization of the novel in response to a lack of political democracy.⁴¹ Thus, site-specific theory prompts the reconsideration and reinvention of various literary subdisciplines, from poetics to narratology and stylistics.

In the same vein, regarding inter-imperiality, Laura Doyle makes the point that, besides the material accumulation of empires throughout the centuries, there has also been an accumulation and diversification of the "forms of relation" between communities. So that theory – be it political, cultural or literary – cannot mandate a handful of interpretive patterns for all inter-imperial situations but must become adaptable.⁴² This methodological trend, which might otherwise seem abstract or impractical, manifests itself most convincingly in Boatcă and Parvulescu's project to "creolize" modernity and theory.⁴³ The concept of creolization may have originated in the Caribbean, Boatcă and Parvulescu argue, but it can be applied to other contexts, as well, since it was designed by Édouard Glissant as a "mode of relation."⁴⁴ More precisely, "the term creolization has increasingly been defined as a mode of transformation premised on the unequal power relations that characterize modernity/coloniality."⁴⁵ Not only is inter-imperial creolization – with its components: ethnic, linguistic and religious creolizations – a crucial phenomenon occurring in Transylvania, but it is also employed as a methodological option, replacing the ethnic lens of methodological nationalism with a multiethnic perspective: "The project of creolization involves the rethinking, reframing, and creative recomposition of the received categories structuring our

respective disciplines.”⁴⁶

Thus, inspired by Glissant’s understanding of creolization as a creative force for the future and a form of dialogue, Boatcă and Parvulescu imagine a new approach to the semiperiphery, which combines two disciplines (sociology and literary studies) in order to found a critique of Transylvanian modernity.⁴⁷ They stress the unequal relationship between the elements of creolization (as opposed to hybridity, which is generally seen as the mixing of equal components)⁴⁸ and they draw on the work of Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, who have previously defined “creolization” as “the becoming theory of the minor”⁴⁹ – there is a processual, dynamic dimension to these transformations, as this kind of site-specific, perspectivist theory can never reach a definitive formulation. Rather, creolized theory requires repeated contextualization, which becomes apparent in Boatcă and Parvulescu’s archival and historical work, taking the viewpoint of multiple ethnic, linguistic and religious communities in order to capture their negotiations of power and identity. To give but a brief example, the authors conduct an extremely interesting intersectional analysis of the relationship between the church and the nation in Rebreanu’s novel, by pointing out the racializing discourse of the local priest, Belciug. In his informal preaching to Ion, the peasant protagonist, this authoritative figure of the rural community equates the Romani ethnicity with a lack of civility or virtue, asking the protagonist “not to behave like a Gypsy.” Even more interestingly, however, he also replaces Christian morality with racial polarization: in the priest’s view, the people of Pripas (Rebreanu’s fictional village) are not to abuse alcohol not because drunkenness itself were a sin, but because they would contribute to the Jewish innkeeper’s economic success. Thus, rather than dismissing this situation as a mere fictional conflict between fictional characters, Boatcă and Parvulescu place Belciug’s discursive strategy of othering and vilification in a broader sociohistorical context. They quote the historiographical work of both Ladislau Gyémánt and Robert B. Pynsent, who have identified a similar phenomenon in Transylvanian and Czech nationalisms, namely that the poverty and the unemployment resulting from the “modernization” of semiperipheral spaces has been routinely ascribed to the commercial activities of the Jewish minority.⁵⁰ Consequently, even when the author of the polarizing discourse is a representative of religious authority, his plea is not confessional or moralistic in nature, but rather economic (and, for that matter, also in favor of capitalist competition).

This particular approach – looking at literary phenomena sociologically and transnationally – sheds light on the connection between modernity and racialization, which also transpires from other classical works in the Romanian canon. Boatcă and

Parvulescu’s method can and should be extended to the numerous texts which reflect, metabolize and perform the interethnic dynamics dominating premodern and modern Transylvania, especially those pertaining to literary realism. Ioan Slavici’s work, for example, which represents a trove of interethnic tensions, has not been studied from the point of view of radical altering. Nevertheless, the novella *Moara cu noroc* [The Lucky Mill] includes multiple instances of Romani musicians being compared with animals (they have a keener sense of smell than the dogs, according to one of the characters) and excluded from any form of legal, organized, regularly paid employment.⁵¹ In the same text, violence and even murder against Jewish merchants and landlords are presented as normal, frequent occurrences which surprise nobody, with the Jewish characters appearing as nameless victims.⁵² At the same time, Slavici’s novel *Mara* captures a similar inter-imperial society as Rebreanu’s *Ion*.⁵³ The protagonist, a Romanian widow with remarkable commercial skills, models both her position in the Transylvanian economy and her hopes for her children on a nationalist, segregationist agenda: on the one hand, she welcomes the Catholic (German and Hungarian) pilgrims who visit the local monastery on Easter, because the holidays are generally profitable from an economic standpoint; however, when she suspects that her daughter might want to join the Catholic convent where she is being educated, Mara remembers that no member of her family has ever abandoned the good, “Christian” way of life – that is, marriage with a Romanian man, blessed by the Orthodox Church.⁵⁴ Thus, Slavici provides a peculiar case of inter-imperiality: the negotiation of one’s principles and identity, where economic exchange with the “other” is perfectly acceptable, whereas marriage or conversion to their (Christian) confession constitute unforgivable transgressions; throughout the novel, Mara’s worldview showcases the intersections between religious and economic competition in nineteenth-century Transylvania. Thus, it could be argued not only that Slavici’s prose would benefit from transnational contextualization – for example, were other East European multiethnic societies also characterized by a radical divide between permissible (economic) and impermissible (familial) relationships with other social groups? – but also that our understanding of Romanian modernity should incorporate the methodological turn suggested by Boatcă and Parvulescu.⁵⁵

2. The Creolization of Theory

Unsurprisingly, the first reason for the development of site-specific theories is scientific rigor. More precisely, in the case of postcolonial reading, it is my belief that we must distinguish between rhetorical mechanisms, which are easily exported and emerge with a similar logic in



extremely different geographies and, on the other hand, actual events and material processes, which are rarely replicated as such in other historical situations; conflating such evolutionary patterns (claiming that all anticolonial revolutions had the same causes around the world, for example) can only result in their distortion and ultimate irrelevance as theoretical instruments. For instance, let us consider the stereotype, as presented by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha explains that colonial regimes often resorted to stereotypical depictions of their subjects because although their collective traits were seen as natural, biologically inscribed, any such generalizations (most of which were belittling and dehumanizing) actually required constant reinforcement.⁵⁶ In this sense, the stereotype is fundamentally paradoxical. And, as multiple postcolonial theorists have shown, paradoxical logic defines much of the Western discourse about the Orient and various indigenous peoples. To quote Ania Loomba, “one of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it needs both to ‘civilize’ its ‘others’ and to fix them into perpetual ‘otherness.’”⁵⁷ Therefore, we can be as bold as to conclude that, while site-specific evolutionary patterns should not be universalized, certain discursive mechanisms – such as the stereotype and the paradox – do fit a large number of historical contexts defined by inequality and oppression.

However, more attention must be paid to phenomena like hybridization and creolization, which refer to a mixing of populations, identities, religions and languages. Here, context is crucial. Concerning hybridity, one of the most famous definitions was formulated by Bhabha, who envisioned it as a fundamentally polemic concept meant to counter the mythical homogeneity of identities and cultures: “The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tables of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation the seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.”⁵⁸ Bhabha also pictures hybridity as an implicit, unavoidable effect of colonialism, which amounts to its downfall or at least its weakening: “Hybridity (...) is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (...) the reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects.”⁵⁹ In other words, it means unpredictable change, transformation and mixing that happen precisely in the place envisioned by the empire as fixed, clearly divided into us and them, identity and alterity. Colonial power can never mold the colonized into its perfect double, suggests Bhabha, nor can it assert the colonized subject’s radical and permanent difference, since the two keep interacting and shaping one another.

Still, Bhabha’s pattern of resistance through hybridity

cannot be applied to the entire world, at least not in the absence of more detail and contextualization. For example, Roberto Fernández Retamar focuses on the colonial history of Cuba and distinguishes between the hybridity of the creole elite and the *mestizo* culture of the poor classes, i.e., the peasants and the workers.⁶⁰ We notice significant differences between the deployments of hybridity by various theorists: Is it seen as a form of protest by the self-conscious colonized subject? Or is it an automatic consequence of colonialism and cultures colliding? Does it *always* occur whenever one culture oppresses another? What is the role of gender, generational differences, religion in the formation of hybridity? etc. In response to this diversity, Ania Loomba argues in her summary of Bhabha’s theoretical system that “despite the accent on hybridity and liminality, Bhabha generalizes and universalizes the colonial encounter. Thus, ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogeneous—that is to say he could exist anywhere in the colonial world.”⁶¹

To prevent precisely this kind of indiscriminate generalization, Boatcă and Parvulescu define their concept of “creolization” most carefully. First, they acknowledge the “linguistic and religious creolizations”⁶² which occur in certain – not necessarily all – regions under imperial or colonial domination. Note here the use of the plural, which indicates that there is no single phenomenon of creolization happening all around the world; rather, the causes, outcomes, timelines, actors and agents differ from case to case. Second, the entire volume aims to creolize theory, to question its Eurocentric tenets and assumptions, designing creolization as a method and a purposeful theoretical practice. Creolizing Europe means surveying, evaluating and finally decentering our entrenched modes of knowledge production, our categories, hierarchies and the authoritative concepts used to explain history (modernity, progress, civilization, freedom, to name but a few). All of these became buzzwords and idols of Eurocentric historiography, which increasingly dominated the becoming of peripheral and subperipheral cultures ever since the emergence of the first nation states. Now, Boatcă and Parvulescu argue for the study of *multiple* Europes, just as postcolonial theory has stubbornly posited the existence of *multiple* modernities.⁶³ For instance, they look at the self-perception of the Romanian people living in modern Transylvania and their adoption of a unique Europe, which they aspired to be a part of: “By claiming continuity with the Latin-speaking territory of the Roman Empire,⁶⁴ Romanian nationalism opted for a whitewashed notion of Europe and rejected a creolized one.”⁶⁵ Ultimately, by retrieving subaltern histories and experiences, the authors aim to “reinscribe” them into literary and social theory, thus changing the disciplines from within.⁶⁶

How does one practise the creolization of the modern? Boatcă and Parvulescu begin by changing the unit of analysis, looking at a region rather than a nation state and considering the existence of multiple Europes rather than a unique continent or culture, whose peripheries are bound to become increasingly European as they mature and find legitimacy. Then, they also change the viewpoint: in their analysis of Rebreanu's novel *Ion* and the Romanians' struggle for land in Transylvania, rurality and modernity are revealed to be mutually constitutive, countering the well-known narrative of modernity as an exclusively urban phenomenon, reliant on industrialization and bureaucracy: "Rather than opposite ends of a continuum ranging from traditional to global, the rural and the modern are inherent, coimplicating heirs of imperial, colonial, and postimperial as well as postcolonial matrices of power."⁶⁷ A final note: Boatcă and Parvulescu also focus on the populations that left Transylvania during its so-called modernization – that is, they discuss the lesser-known phenomenon of poor, landless East Europeans migrating to European colonies in the Americas, as part of the process of capitalist integration; this increase in mobility made them part of the global division of labor but also made them invisible to most historical accounts of Transylvanian "modernization."⁶⁸

3. The Ethics of Site-Specificity

Criticism regarding the overuse and overgeneralization of the postcolonial framework usually has to do with the inability to capture particular contexts, transformations and patterns of oppression. As already mentioned, Andrei Terian rejects the postcolonial analysis of Eastern Europe as a whole precisely on these grounds. He proves, for example, that the development of socialist realism in communist Romania cannot be seen as colonial, since these literary norms were enforced both in the "metropolis" and the so-called "colonies" and were meant to uniformize a certain concept of "class" rather than a particular understanding of the nation.⁶⁹ Maria Todorova also writes in favor of site-specificity: "I plead professional deformation, but I think that timebound and place-bound specificity counts. It counts not only in order to avoid cognitive deformations, but it matters as well on ethical grounds. The emancipatory mantle of postcolonialism all too often serves as a cover for the perpetual lament of self-victimization."⁷⁰ Since postcolonial studies owe their very existence to the ethical mission of denouncing oppression and exploitation, it is only reasonable that any shortcut, unfounded verdict or impressionistic claim should be frowned upon. In addition to these concerns, however, I would argue that Boatcă and Parvulescu also provide a way around a less-discussed ethical issue, namely the erasure of diverse forms of resistance and negotiation.

On the one hand, postcolonialism's universal critique of oppression prioritizes the center-periphery relationship: the colonist vs. the colonized, the empire vs. indigenous peoples and so on, often ignoring the chain reactions occurring *among* the colonial subjects. In other words, too little has been written about the perpetuation of marginalization, racialization, abuse and violence on a micro level, when the periphery is further stratified by replicating colonial (or imperial) forms of exploitation. On the other hand, a site-specific theoretical approach like the one in *Creolizing the Modern* has the advantage of unearthing the coping mechanisms of those populations which seek independence from colonial or imperial rule. Boatcă and Parvulescu demonstrate that not only is there a multiplicity of subject positions in an inter-imperial context, but the ways in which various social groups choose to manifest their agency and ambitions also differ. For instance, the Romanian peasants in Rebreanu's novel resort to pitting one empire against the other, preferring Austrian dominance (which granted lands to the peasant-soldiers from border regions) to Hungarian dominance: "the history of imperial dualism in Transylvania creates the trans-imperial agency of peasants."⁷¹ For the sake of their own survival and prosperity, Rebreanu's Romanian characters choose to tolerate one form of dependence and to legitimate it discursively, because this choice is their only form of autonomy. Needless to say, this specific kind of agency – which is also dependent on the extreme othering of certain internal populations, such as the Roma – would go unnoticed in the absence of a well-calibrated inter-imperial framework.⁷²

4. Against the Dichotomous Understanding of Cultural Exchange

As an alternative to the same core-periphery model which has dominated much of postcolonial and World Literature studies, as well as world-systems analysis, a recent methodological shift sets out to dismantle this dichotomous approach. The result is a closer focus on intra-peripheral relations and regional centers. There are many contemporary theorists who consider binarism inadequate when trying to describe the internal dynamics of the world literary system. Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek puts forward the concept of "in-between peripherality" using three points of reference – a Marxist core, an Indigenous one and a Western one, defining the identity of East European literatures not just relationally, but through a more complex construction involving more complex tensions.⁷³ Likewise, in an article from 2019, Terian proposed the method of "cultural triangulation," positing that "all (inter) cultural processes are ideologically filtered and imply the existence of an intermediary C between A and B."⁷⁴ This third element plays various roles, often obscuring



or compensating for the power relations between A and B and should be included in the analysis of East European literary history.

In *Creolizing the Modern*, Boatcă and Parvulescu also look at the tripartite construction of Romanian identity in Transylvania, arguing that the pursuit of legitimacy and recognition on the international stage – be it political, historical or literary legitimacy – always involved an internal Other. To do so, the authors explore the inter-ethnic relations in Rebreanu’s novel, concluding that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Romanian identity was generally defined in contrast to the Hungarian majority and, sometimes, the German minority, but never the Romani or Jewish populations. However, these marginalized communities are envisioned and depicted as the bearers of fundamental, intrinsic difference, so that their inferiority in the Transylvanian society can constitute a stepping stone for aspiring landowners like Ion. Not only does the racialization of the Romani musicians or the Jewish innkeeper help establish Ion’s whiteness, but his claim to legal property, accumulation and social status is in stark contrast with the plight of Romani people, who are condemned to social stagnation and are constantly dependent on others for income: “Ion’s right to social mobility is predicated on his presumed racial superiority vis-à-vis Roma, the internal colonial Others whose geographical mobility after emancipation did not lead to social mobility.”⁷⁵ Ultimately, the widespread internal discrimination of Romani and Jewish people even in the absence of proper colonialism is an argument in favor of the mutual dependence between modernity and racialization. According to Boatcă and Parvulescu, “Rebreanu’s brand of modernism fails to recognize the contradiction between modernity and the ‘tradition’ of racializing Roma and, in fact, seems to dwell in the contradiction.”⁷⁶

5. Linguistic Creolization, Polyglottism, Interglottism

This also applies to language. First, Boatcă and Parvulescu argue that “Transylvanian interglottism constitutes the most central manifestation of the region’s inter-imperial afterlife in the *longue durée*.”⁷⁷ Not only was the region home to multiple languages – Hungarian, German, Romanian, as well as Romani, Yiddish, Armenian – but their imbrications and competitive deployment both mirrored and enacted the negotiations of power and agency at the crossroads of several empires. In this sense, *Ion* is read through the prism of the linguistic choices made by the author and the characters alike. The mere fact that it is a Transylvanian novel written in Romanian amounts, in Boatcă and Parvulescu’s view, to “an anti-imperial statement.”⁷⁸ Then, a myriad of details also reflect the inter-imperial predicament of Transylvanian Romanians: the peasants speak about

“our land” using words derived from Hungarian; the priest refuses to use the Hungarian language, which he is quite familiar with, as a form of “resistance to the gradual imposition of Hungarian as the language of imperial administration and education;”⁷⁹ generally speaking, Hungarian appears in Rebreanu’s novel as “the language of domination” rather than an enlightened, official language⁸⁰ – for example, Titu prides himself on having learned the dominant language, echoing the manner in which colonized subjects often internalized the predicated “superiority” of the colonial culture, language and lifestyle.

However, in terms of methodological choices, perhaps the most relevant contribution made by Boatcă and Parvulescu to the project of creolizing theory is the very concept of “interglottism.” From the very start, the authors differentiate between linguistic creolization and interglottism, showing that “the unequal power relations at work in this and other inter-imperial contexts and the corresponding linguistic hierarchies echo but are not the same as or reducible to the creolization of languages in the colonial context of enslavement and the plantation economy.”⁸¹ In other words, interglottism is *a form of creolization*, but it is also defined by specific coordinates pertaining to the Transylvanian context. For instance, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had its own strategy for using language as an imperial tool, which does not apply to British, French or Spanish colonialism.⁸² Emperor Joseph II introduced certain language reforms at the end of the nineteenth century, replacing Latin as the official language and promoting German instead; this led to the marginalization of the languages of ethnic groups with a nationalist agenda (Romanian included) and the double silencing of the minorities which were seen as lacking such political ambitions (the Jewish, Romani and Armenian communities).

Even more importantly, Boatcă and Parvulescu distinguish between polyglottism and interglottism. The former was theorized and practised by the journal *ACLU*, the first comparative literature publication in the world, edited by Sámuel Brassai and Hugó Meltzl between 1877 and 1888, and was meant to represent “a polycentric mix of multiple but equal languages.”⁸³ On the contrary, the phenomenon of interglottism was a result of inter-imperial inequality, tensions and power struggles, having to do more with the linguistic negotiation of identities under the constant threat of uniformization. Thus, Boatcă and Parvulescu exemplify the difference between plurality – a historical situation in which multiple ethnicities, languages and religions find themselves in close proximity to and/or competition with each other – and pluralism, understood as the equal representation of groups engaging in actual productive dialogue (in this case, this would be polyglottism). More often than not, inter-imperial contexts produced the former scenario, with the struggle for equality and agency generating an

overwhelming variety of strategies and forms of self-expression, both in society and literature.

6. Transnational Connections

Finally, the creolization of theory has a fundamentally transnational character, not only because creolization itself was first theorized in the Caribbean and Latin America, but also because the site-specific analysis of social and literary systems ultimately reveals unlikely connections and structural similarities between far-flung spaces. In fact, linguistic and religious creolizations have also occurred in the Indian Ocean and Africa, with these cases informing contemporary research into East European history. As Boatcă and Parvulescu put it, “relational counter-mapping ideally uncovers the colonial and imperial entanglements between as well as within the peripheries and semiperipheries of the world-system, commonly constructed as fixed and unrelated locations on imperial maps.”⁸⁴

As with the other methodological updates made by Boatcă and Parvulescu, this transnational reach can also be found in other theoretical texts exploring inter-peripheral connections. In his article on the depiction of the Tatars in Romanian literature, Andrei Terian argues that it was the recognition of “structural similarities” between Romanians and Tatars – two small nations – which eventually fostered a sense of solidarity between the two peoples, simultaneously mediating the transition from vilifying fictional representations to a more positive perspective; from the “Bad Muslim” to the “Good Muslim” who is granted admission into a potential “transnational community.”⁸⁵ In his turn, Ștefan Baghiu embarks on a mission to “site” or “locate” World Literature in his chapter from *Theory in the “Post” Era*, discussing the thematic and formal parallels between the depictions of poverty in Communist-era Romanian prose and what he calls the literary system of “the Global Southeast.”⁸⁶ Due to the transnational scope of the analysis, geocritique (the critique of geocriticism) makes visible an imaginary which was previously underresearched and highlights

the phenomenon of “worlding through poverty,” as seen in places such as Romania, Italy and the United States at the end of World War II.

The same focus on inter-peripheral connections and their theoretical value plays a critical role in Boatcă and Parvulescu’s approach to inter-imperiality. Not only is the overlap between various empires a widespread occurrence (in spaces like the Caribbean, Taiwan, South Sudan, the Philippines), but the transnational study of different peripheries also requires theoretical and methodological imports, as seen above, thus shedding light on aspects of Transylvania’s history which were rarely discussed before the adoption of these instruments. For example, Boatcă and Parvulescu show that Moldovan legislation regulating the marriage and sexuality of enslaved people resulted in the stereotype that Romani women were generally promiscuous, just like the enslaved women on Caribbean plantations, who were seen in a similar light.⁸⁷ Likewise, the political debates on the subject of the official language, which were dividing the Budapest parliament in the second half of the nineteenth century, generated identical policies to those enforced in St. Domingue in the eighteenth century; namely, subaltern people, who were not part of the political body (just like the slaves and the non-whites in most colonies) were simply not included in the nation and could not participate in any decisional processes.⁸⁸ Ultimately, many of the measures taken in the European East in the nineteenth century to control the lives of local racialized populations actually mimicked those which had been adopted in British, German and French colonies throughout the previous centuries.⁸⁹ Hence, the need to analyze imperialism and colonialism as competing, convergent and intersecting forms of domination and dependence. By recognizing and harnessing this transnational methodological drive, Boatcă and Parvulescu see the “inter-imperial, multilingual locale” as a “world-historical phenomenon,”⁹⁰ thus diversifying and greatly refining our theoretical instruments for the study of East European and – more particularly – Transylvanian modernity.

Notes:

1. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania Across Empires* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2022).
2. See, for instance, Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 8–10; Homi K. Bhabha, “Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. F. Barker, P. Hulme, M. Iversen and D. Loxley (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1983), 200; Megan Vaughan, “Colonial Discourse Theory and African History, or Has Postmodernism Passed Us By?” *Social Dynamics* 20, no. 2 (1994): 3.
3. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 5.
4. Maria Todorova, “Balkanism and Postcolonialism or On the Beauty of the Airplane View,” in *Scaling the Balkans. Essays on Eastern European Entanglements* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), 93.
5. Maria Todorova, “Balkanism and Postcolonialism,” 98.



6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "In Memoriam: Edward W. Said," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, no. 1&2 (2003): 6-7.
 7. Dušan Bjelić, "Introduction: Blowing Up the 'Bridge,'" in *Balkan As Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 6.
 8. Maria Todorova, "Balkanism and Postcolonialism," 101.
 9. *Ibid.*, 100.
 10. "For structuralists of any kind, the Spanish empire is not much different from the Roman, the Ottoman, the British, the Russian, etc. In a way, they are all empires and they are colonial." *Ibid.*, 100.
 11. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.
 12. Maria Todorova, "Balkanism and Postcolonialism," 94-95.
 13. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 11.
 14. *Ibid.*, 14.
 15. *Ibid.*, 16.
 16. Henry F. Carey and Rafal Raciborski, "Postcolonialism: A Valid Paradigm for the Former Sovietized States and Yugoslavia?" *East European Politics and Societies* 18, no.2 (2004): 200.
 17. *Ibid.*, 231.
 18. These societies appear to him as "extraordinarily postcolonial." David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 114.
 19. *Ibid.*, 115.
 20. *Ibid.*, 124.
 21. Katherine Verdery, "Nationalism, Postsocialism, and Space in Eastern Europe," *Social Research* 63, no. 1 (1996): 77-95.
 22. Jill Owczarzak, "Introduction: Postcolonial studies and postsocialism in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* no. 53 (2009): 5.
 23. D.C. Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?," 112.
 24. *Ibid.*, 118.
 25. Andrei Terian, "Is There an East-Central European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of (Inter)Literary Dependency," *World Literature Studies* 4, no.3 (2012): 26.
 26. *Ibid.*, 30.
 27. *Ibid.*, 23.
 28. Boatcă and Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 6-7.
- It should be noted that the authors solve this terminological and paradigmatic quandary quite early in the book, precisely because they are providing a method (a mode of reading), much like Terian, rather than a mere "yes or no" answer to the hypothesis of a postcolonial Eastern and Southeastern Europe.
29. *Ibid.*, 6.
 30. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2018), 9.
 31. Alex Cistelean, "Critica rațiunii decoloniale," *CriticAtac* (2016), accessed October 22nd, 2022, <https://www.criticatac.ro/critica-ratiunii-decoloniale/>.
 32. Walter Mignolo, *Dezobediința epistemică. Retorica modernității, logica colonialității și gramatica decolonialității*, trans. Ovidiu Țichindeleanu (Cluj: Idea, 2015), 25-26, 43.
 33. „[U]rmare a fundamentului lor idealist, orice astfel de încercare de proiectare a unei axe practice, efective, aterizează tot pe terenul subiectiv și aprioric al epistemicului” (my translation). Cistelean, "Critica rațiunii decoloniale."
 34. Boatcă and Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 6-7. See Cornel Ban's review article in this issue, in which he evaluates the concept of "inter-imperiality" from the point of view of political economy. Ban argues that, while this central notion enables the authors to distinguish between external colonies based on racial hierarchies and internal colonies based on ethnic hierarchies, it should be used primarily in a longue durée perspective, since Transylvania did not actually experience inter-imperial rivalry between 1683 and 1918. See also Imre József Balázs's plea for a more nuanced discussion of Transylvanian inter-imperiality. Balázs shows that the landownership plot, central to Rebreanu's *Ion*, cannot be reduced to its ethnic dimension, as certain segments of the Hungarian population, such as the Szeklers, were also marginalized by the post-1867 regulations.
 35. Lorna Burns, *Postcolonialism after World Literature: Relation, Equality, Dissent* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 1.
 36. Manuela Boatcă, *Laboratoare ale modernității: Europa de Est și America Latină în (Co)relație* (Cluj: Idea, 2019), 19. „chiar dacă nu a fost niciodată colonizată formal, România a intrat în modernitatea europeană pe ușa din spate – colonialitatea” (my translation).
 37. Laura Doyle, *Inter-imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor and the Literary Arts of Alliance* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2020), 4.
 38. Aditya Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory: Thinking across Traditions* (Bloomsbury, 2021), xvi.

39. Revathi Krishnaswamy, "Towards World Literary Knowledges: Theory in the Age of Globalization," *Comparative Literature* 62, no. 4 (2010): 402.
40. *Ibid.*, 401.
41. Alex Goldiș, "Eastethics: The Ideological Shift in Narratology," in *Theory in the "Post" Era: A Vocabulary for the Twenty-First-Century Conceptual Commons*, ed. Alexandru Matei, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian (Bloomsbury, 2022), 74.
42. Laura Doyle, *Inter-imperiality*, 4-5.
43. Boatcă has written on this topic before. In 2019, she gave a presentation at the 14th European Sociological Association conference (Manchester) entitled "Europe Otherwise. On Decolonization, Creolization, and Inter-Imperiality." *Creolizing the Modern* was also preceded by an article published in 2020: Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, "Creolizing Transylvania: Notes on Coloniality and Inter-Imperiality," *History of the Present. A Journal of Critical History* 10, no. 1 (2020): 9-27.
44. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
45. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 4.
46. *Ibid.*, 4.
47. Snejana Ung describes this interdisciplinary aspect as dependent on the collaborative nature of the work: "Thus, an inter-imperial reading of a larger area and corpus of texts is a collaborative effort, where collaborative stands for both collective and interdisciplinary." See Snejana Ung, "Rethinking Romanian Literature Collectively: The Inter-imperial Modern Novel," *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2022): 55-61.
48. Stuart Hall, "Créolité and the Process of Creolization," in *Creolization Reader*, ed. Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato (London: Routledge, 2010), 29; Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 4.
49. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *The Creolization of Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
50. See Boatcă and Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 62; Robert B. Pynsent, "Czech Feminist Anti-Semitism The Case of Božena Benešová," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, vol. IV, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2010), 348; Ladislau Gyémánt, *Evreii din Transilvania în epoca emancipării / The Jews of Transylvania in the Age of Emancipation (1790-1867)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2000), 391-392.
51. Ioan Slavici, *Novela. Vol. 2: O viață pierdută; Moara cu noroc; Norocul; Comoara* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Socec, 1896), 168, 177.
52. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
53. The inter-ethnic conflicts are constantly visible. For example, when Mara's children run away in a boat after the boy is beaten up by an older classmate, the bystanders judge the situation ethnically: the teacher missed school on that specific day and left the children unattended *because* it was a Romanian school, and the Romanians were incapable of observing rules and order. Ioan Slavici, *Mara* (Budapest: Luceafărul, 1906), 39.
54. *Ibid.*, 32.
55. The authors argue for the importance of rereading the canonical texts of so-called small literatures, because, despite the small geographical space in which they exert their influence, their canonicity has "world-historical implications." Not to mention that, since literary historians have often perceived the canon as a homogenous, national product, Boatcă and Parvulescu's methodological update also redefines the concept, seeing the canon as a permanently disputed, multilingual and inter-imperial construct.
- Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 12.
56. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 66-85.
57. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 145.
58. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.
59. *Ibid.*, 112.
60. Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Caliban, Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America," *Massachusetts Review* 15, Winter/Spring (1974): 27.
61. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 149-150.
62. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 4.
63. Of course, there is an important and productive debate surrounding this issue. On the one hand, postcolonial scholars support the hypothesis of multiple modernities. On the other, theorists such as Fredric Jameson and the members of WReC argue that, by abandoning the framework of a single modernity, postcolonial scholars also erase the central role played by capitalism and its globalization in the development of social life in colonial contexts. Regardless of their priorities, all these theorists are interested in the matter of inequality and how best to analyze its causes and mechanisms.
- See Susan Stanford Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies," *Modernism/Modernity* 13, no. 3 (2006): 425-443; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2000); WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).
64. See Valer Simion Cosma, "Virtus Romana Rediviva: Latinitatea naționalismului ardelean între identitate națională, strategie



- politică și loialitate dinastică,” *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2022): 26-39.
65. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 21.
66. *Ibid.*, 4-5.
67. *Ibid.*, 28.
68. *Ibid.*, 53.
69. Andrei Terian, “Is There an East-Central European Postcolonialism,” 28-29.
70. Maria Todorova, “Balkanism and Postcolonialism,” 101.
71. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 32.
72. As Doyle explains, aesthetic innovation often derives from an inter-imperial predicament (in places such as the Caribbean, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Maghreb).
- Laura Doyle, *Inter-imperiality*, 187.
73. Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998).
74. Andrei Terian, “Cultural triangulation in Romanian travelogues to China under Communism,” *World Literature Studies* 11, no. 2 (2019): 19.
75. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 86.
76. *Ibid.*, 84.
77. *Ibid.*, 92.
78. *Ibid.*, 92.
79. *Ibid.*, 95.
80. *Ibid.*, 106.
81. *Ibid.*, 93.
82. *Ibid.*, 93-94.
83. *Ibid.*, 92.
84. *Ibid.*, 27.
85. Andrei Terian, “From frontier Orientalism to transnational communities: Images of the Tatars in modern Romanian literature,” *World Literature Studies* 10, no. 1 (2017): 59.
86. Ștefan Baghiu, “Geocritique: Siting, Poverty, and the Global Southeast,” in *Theory in the “Post” Era: A Vocabulary for the Twenty-First-Century Conceptual Commons*, ed. Alexandru Matei, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian (Bloomsbury, 2022), 235-250.
87. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern*, 75.
88. *Ibid.*, 97.
89. *Ibid.*, 117-118.
90. *Ibid.*, *Creolizing the Modern*, 3.

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