



INTER-IMPERIALITY: A POLITICAL ECONOMY READING

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Abstract: The concepts of “creolization” and “inter-imperiality” proposed in Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă’s *Creolizing the Modern* are superb interventions in the study of society in Europe’s semi-peripheries. These concepts usefully complicate conventional readings in orthodox, decolonial and postcolonial studies at both the conceptual and methodological level. From a historically-minded political economy approach, the book is an opportunity to ask further questions about the scope of inter-imperiality in early 20th century Transylvania, the paucity of analysis of the British-managed Gold Standard finance in shaping the political economy of late Habsburg Transylvania and the ambiguous foundations of ethnic and class relations in this part of Europe.

Keywords: Transylvania, Habsburg Empire, Gold Standard, Saxons, Hungarians, Romanians

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Rereading *Ion*

The novel *Ion* by Liviu Rebreanu is as canonical as it gets. It is core to any high school curriculum and its screening into an equally iconic feature film in 1980 ensured, perhaps more than the novel itself, the self-perpetuating nature of this impeccably realist story from 1920 that strips Romanticism from the rural life in an Eastern periphery of the late Habsburg Empire. Boatcă and Parvulescu’s *Creolizing the Modern* rereads *Ion* with an original analytical framework that turns this novel into a piece of world literature and world history at the same time. I am interested in this book as a specialist on comparative historical development, with a focus on political economy, an area that this book intersects with quite frequently.

At its basis, *Creolizing the Modern’s* demarche is steeped in the attempt to enrich the decolonial agenda with the concept of ‘creolizing’ European modernity, whereby creolization means “a mode of transformation premised on the unequal power relations that characterize modernity/coloniality—dispossession, colonization, and enslavement.”¹ These unequal power relations that underpin Transylvania’s modernization saturate this book’ multi-layered attempts to retrieve subaltern histories and experiences. Reading novels in

this historically rich and socially critical way should be a game-changer, indeed.

The book’s pages are rich, amply documented and stylistically captivating. Its thematic span is ambitious, ranging from political economy to gender issues and rights a historical wrong: the neglect, by postcolonial studies, of places such as Transylvania, Ireland, Galicia, or Bosnia that do not fit the boundaries of either Third World or the textbook postcolonial timeline.² The main argument of the book is clear and the concepts that make a difference are tractable and, I wager, highly likely to be deployed in scholarship looking at similar inter-imperial contexts.

Overall, *Creolizing the Modern* opens many analytical windows into historically-anchored comparative literature and sociology. As a comparative political economist drawing on economic history in my work, I am fascinated by the multi-faceted uses of the core terms ‘creolization’ and ‘inter-imperiality’ that the authors bring to a rich interdisciplinary tradition looking at canonical literary works as codes of macro-historical processes. While I find the term ‘inter-imperiality’ compelling, I also found it to be slightly overstretched at times, in contrast to the more tightly operationalized concept of creolization. But before delving into the review itself, a personal note is in order.

Ion as a Personal Encounter

It is not without some emotion that I write this review, being born and raised in the rural community that sits at the center of Liviu Rebreanu's *ur*-novel. Mostly spared combat, atrocities and the violent collectivization of land during the 1950s, the village of Prislop (now, of course, renamed as Liviu Rebreanu) also lived into an extended 19th century during my childhood and teenage years. Indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s, land was worked entirely by hand and beast. Ion could have been one of my older uncles risking it all for a few extra acres of land. Cow and, less often, horse-towed wagons with wooden wheels were the norm for freight and human transportation. The entire food chain and, one may add, the marriage chain was no more than several kilometers long. My father, born less than 80 kilometers away, was seen as an immigrant for decades.

Our great grandparents wore mostly home-made clothes made from three fabrics: hemp, wool, and sheepskin. Relatively large, tall, quaint and, to the heritage architect's eye, quite beautiful houses were erected in vernacular style using locally made bricks, beams and chiseled stones, with the whole street contributing labor and materials. Litigation over a few hectares of land and contentious successions generated endless legal feuds sorted out by Chekopian lawyers partly paid in veal meat and sour cream subscriptions. The local priest and the local teacher, as per the novel, carried more respect than the state. The work ethic was straight out of Max Weber's opus. Solidarity for those in hard times was unconditional. Yet at the same time, patriarchy ruled supreme and anti-Roma racism was structural.

Snow-rich winters were straight out of postcards. But the rest of the year was so inundated by ceaseless and repetitive toil that it took me decades to notice that I had shared with Rebreanu's characters a natural paradise. Its loved and hated multicolored strips of land have meanwhile been largely rewilded during the 2010s, when mass migration, industrial food, urban lifestyle and a massive reindustrialization powered by the country's integration into Western European industrial supply chains turned farming into little more than a hobby for highly motorized local retirees. It was only the communists' healthcare, education and urban employment for our parents' generation that snatched the community from its century old routines, gender roles, and low social mobility. By the late 1980s the place was a palimpsest of life in rural Habsburgia and Eastern Bloc clichés. Today it is about to become a suburb of the messy sprawl that is the deregulated urbanism of Nasaud, the historical epicenter of the Somes Valley.

As a villager myself, I often witnessed the cringeworthy politics of memorializing Liviu Rebreanu and turning his memorial house into a totem for cultural tourism. This happened most often to the astonishment of the

relatively prosperous locals who have instead gleefully replaced every single vernacular house with 150-200 square meter mortar, PVC, and metal mansions worthy of any deregulated East European suburban sprawl development. When the villagers, most of them without a high school degree and therefore unexposed to the novel, would be marched off by the local communist party secretary to watch, yet again, the film adaptation of the novel (us kids followed in tow, having been a visually starved lot by dreary 2 hours a day of TV during the socialist republic), they rarely expressed local pride. Indeed, most felt outraged that the various brutalities of village life were too realistically portrayed and therefore felt anything but pride. Hence the indifference that apathy that the authors of this book encountered when asking locals about the 'lived experience' of this literary hit.

Rebreanu definitely got the villagers right, stripping away the much beloved Romantic doxa of the country's classical cultural history while honoring their labor and their land. *Creolizing the Modern* also got things right regarding the current politics of memory related to this Romanian literary icon than anyone graduating from high school in the old country is expected to read.

Inter-imperiality as Method

Parvulescu and Boatcă's book really carries weight in the concepts of creolization and inter-imperiality. But while creolization is tightly defined and operationalized, inter-imperiality is an opportunity for further clarification. The book deploys a bespoke operationalization of Laura Doyle's concept of inter- (as opposed to post- or de-) imperiality, hereby understood as the legacy of tensions between Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian imperial formations that had shaped the history of Transylvania as a territory too weak to be a self-standing state and too distinctive to be easily digested by stronger political formations (p. 10).

Creolizing the Modern builds on the world system-rooted Latin American literature on decoloniality but prudently avoids a mere translation of it for the Transylvanian context. Instead, it goes further and develops Laura Doyle's notion of inter-imperiality, a concept forged at the intersection of world literature and world history and applied to the *longue durée* effects of imperial entanglements on given subaltern territories. The inter-imperial approach better enables the authors to differentiate between external colonies based around overtly racial categories and the internal colonies based around ethnic and class hierarchies. In Laura Doyle's original formulation, the "inter" in inter-imperial refers "both to multiple interacting empires and to the multiple subject positions lived within, between, and against empires." In turn "these relations structure the larger force field within which all populations must operate—creating specific kinds of inter-imperial positionality



and burdens for each community and person.”

From the very beginning the authors clarify that in practice the time frame for the inter-imperial method entails looking at such effects and at the mechanisms of their reproduction, over centuries, from the 1400 onwards. Transylvania is argued to be an ideal terrain for the study of these inter-imperial interactions due to “its location at the crossroads of several empires” and its provision of “an entry point into the creolization of the dominant notion of Europe as a geographically, culturally, religiously, and racially coherent entity” (p. 6). More concretely put, the authors aim to “examine the constant tension between Habsburg, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian imperial formations as inter-imperial rivalries. We resist, however, the reification inherent in the assumption that empires interact with each other only *as* state formations by revealing connections, exchanges, and mobilizations *across* empires as well as *below* the state level” (p. 6).

The deployment of the inter-imperial method enables the authors to masterfully unpack and then organize the dizzying complexities of politics, economics, class, gender and ethnicity constituting Transylvanian life in mostly rural (but also small town) Austria-Hungary on the eve of the Great War, a European disaster that terminated over two centuries of Habsburg and almost 900 years of Hungarian aristocratic rule over those lands. However, as showed below, the analysis can leave one wanting for more conceptual clarity and this may have less to do with *Creolizing Transylvania* and more to do with the at times too loose specification of the mechanisms that reproduce the consequences of inter-imperial entanglements across centuries in Doyle’s initial work.

The Merits of Inter-imperiality in the Case of Transylvania

How does “the constant tension between Habsburg, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian imperial formations as inter-imperial rivalries” manifest itself in the Transylvania of the 1910s? At the micro-level, the authors are right to point out at myriad forms of inter-imperiality such as peasants fleeing feudal oppression in Transylvania and the ensuing negotiations between Transylvanian lords and the powers that be in Russian-dominated Moldavia and Ottoman-dominated Wallachia disciplined these flows until late in the 18th century. The same can be said of the mobility of the Jewish community within Austria-Hungary and from the Russian Empire to Austria-Hungary.³ These were not social facts that mattered in *Ion*, per se, but they matter for underpinning the concept of inter-imperiality historically.

Also, many macro-level features of Transylvania are born from inter-imperial struggles, so Transylvania is surely eligible for this key term. Most notably, as the authors show, young men in *Ion*’s parts served

as imperial soldiers and, as such, took part in the continent’s major wars, with their feats in the Napoleonic wars still memorialized with pride. But also notable for its interimperiality is the strong dominance of Protestantism in Transylvanian life would have been unfathomable without the autonomy of Transylvania during the Ottoman’s century of domination of Hungary and the influence exercised by Swedish and Prussian elites.⁴ This is also the case with the more archaic form of Transylvanian feudalism, conserved by the region’s autonomy thanks to the Ottomans. Again, these social facts do not carry weight in *Ion*, where neither Protestants, nor archaic medieval lords appear, but it is a strong case of inter-imperiality that can be accommodated by the book’s historical excursus.

However, if one takes anything less than a *longue durée* perspective on the issues present in *Ion* at the macro level the answer is: inter-imperiality has a much weaker grasp. Most historians would agree that Transylvania had not seen actual inter-imperial rivalry since 1683, when the Ottoman Empire lost inter-imperial rivalry with the Habsburgs and Poland over Central Europe, an event that enabled a chain of events whereby Transylvania eventually got to be ruled by Vienna. Or, Vienna’s control over Transylvania remained absolutely unrivalled there until 1918, when the empire fell apart. The only instance of inter-imperial interaction in Transylvania was in 1848, when the united forces of Vienna and Moscow, in coordination with the troops of nationalist Romanians (fiercely loyal to their imperial capital), quashed the liberal Hungarian Revolution. But rather than pass the test of inter-imperial rivalry set by the authors, this was a one-off event remarkable for conservative inter-imperial concord in smashing a liberal-nationalist revolts, and, therefore, not an obvious candidate for inter-imperiality. While the Ottoman Empire clashed with the Habsburg Empire in Bosnia and the Russian one in Crimea, there is no evidence (in this book or the wider historical literature) that these historical events proximate enough to speak more directly to the realities of the 1910s, had any impact on developments in Transylvania. Neither is there evidence of Ottoman or Russian “connections, exchanges, and mobilizations *across* empires as well as *below* the state level” that would be significant enough to actively bear on the realities of the 1910s. Is *Ion*, then, more of a case of a particular kind of inter-imperiality, rather than a representative case thereof? Indeed, readers hostile to *longue durée* would have found it easier to see full-fledged rather than a very indirect inter-imperiality at work in a novel set in, say, Bosnia-Herzegovina during the late 19th century, when the rivalry between Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in that part of Europe was very much alive. Or in the Galicia of the mid 19th century.

Indeed, some would wonder if a better literary setting for studying inter-imperiality would not be novels set in

early 20th century Kingdom of Romania. There, one would not have to go back centuries to work out *longue durée* effects because Russo-Ottoman-French inter-imperiality manifested itself quite directly as late as 1877, when Romania (then still not an internationally recognized state) joined a Russian invasion of the Ottoman Empire, an act which, with French support, granted Romania internationally recognized sovereign status in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. The country was also a complicated ethnic mix at all levels, with most towns and extensive rural areas dominated by non-ethnic Romanians, in which Ottoman legacies, French modernity, and Russian administrative influences layered in interesting ways. To use the author's term, this was a much more "creolized" and inter-imperial place, than early 20th century Transylvania was. But, as entertaining as this theoretical possibility is, it would be less compelling between one would be hard pressed to find a modern novel of similar prowess and attention to detail as *Ion*.

If one can talk about meaningful rivalries of relevance for Transylvania in the 1910s, they concern the competition between Austria-Hungary and the Romanian Kingdom. The authors do a superb job here showing how nationalist claims in Transylvania are organized below the state level, with literary and financial networks crossing the Carpathians, under the rather permissive eye of Hungarian authorities, one may add. Yet this is not a case of inter-imperiality unless we see Romania as a puppet state of the French empire, which Romania was not (witness Romania joining the German-led Triple Alliance). Romania (a state recognized as such only in 1878) was also not an empire, only an expansionist nation state with a recent decolonization experience matched by aggressive territorial expansionism at the expense of surrounding empires. Despite being in a public military alliance with Austria-Hungary for decades, in 1916, Romania sent the first invading army in Transylvania since the last raid Crimean Tartars in 1717. Romania may have entertained imperialist fantasies, as the authors point out, but as a country with very regressive neo-feudal social structures and whose GDP per capita gap with peripheral Transylvania in 1910 was comparable to the one between Romania and Italy in 2020,⁵ it had little in the way of wherewithal to back those fantasies with, so that the Romanian invasion became a massive rout within weeks.

Finally, to this political economist a surprising and significant omission was that the book missed on the role of the British Empire in the Victorian and Edwardian era as the paramount source of financial connections with Austria-Hungary both across and below the state level. Why look for inter-imperiality with Russia and the Ottomans when the elephant is in the room? As the custodian of the Gold Standard, the Bank of England played a systemic role in the management of Austro-Hungarian finances, with financial crises in Vienna triggering periods of extended austerity that slowed down the economy of this multinational

economy. Austria-Hungary dodged many harsh automatic adjustments imposed by the Gold Standard system,⁶ yet British banks played a key role in financing the railroad system in the region as well as the real estate boom in public buildings in particular that Budapest engineered for three decades between the late 1880s and the early 1910s. Most importantly, perhaps, London was a geopolitical rival to Vienna and Budapest in the imperialist balancing of the late 19th and early 20th century, with its financial inter-imperial connections colored by security concerns, one would presume. These are much more relevant connections and exchanges for *Ion*'s context than anything that the Ottomans or the Turks could ever have done in Transylvania, with *Ion*'s Banca Aurora perhaps feeling the heat from the global financial system managed by London even it was the most privileged peripheral economy in the Gold Standard system.⁷ It is true that the book elaborates with precision on financial integration as an aspect of coloniality and semi-peripheral status, including by highlighting the role of ethnic banking in nationalist mobilization, but does not speak to Victorian-Habsburg inter-imperiality as one would have expected. Examining the significance of this particular inter-imperial *courte durée* is a missed opportunity in the book.

***Ion*'s Saxon-Romanian Tensions and the *Longue Durée* of Inter-imperiality**

So far, the discussion has been largely about inter-imperial *courte durée*. How about *longue durée* inter-imperiality, though? The authors would point out that inter-imperiality is mostly about *the longue durée* and in this case anything of relevance since the 1400s. At times, the book's claims seem to go in this direction, albeit not in explicit ways. To take one example: "Though not a serf himself, *Ion* carries the memory of his ancestors' living in the long shadow of serfdom. In an inter-imperial framework, he does so in relation to Hungarians and Saxons, who own proportionally more land than Romanians, and in relation to Jews and Roma, who each, in their own way, have historically been at times excluded from landownership" (p. 31). A somewhat strong case for inter-imperiality can be made for relations between Saxon and Romanian peasants. If a *longue durée* (as in half a millennium *durée*) for inter-imperiality is adopted, the relations between land-poor Romanians and land richer (rather than rich) independent Saxon farmers living in the Nosnerland area bordering on *Ion*'s village were inter-imperial, indeed. Most settlements of Saxon farmers (mostly of Luxembourgish and Rhenish origin) by Hungarian kings had already been in place by the 12th and 13th centuries and the historical consensus is that these communities delivered effective protection against Ottoman-backed raids of the eastern borders of the Kingdom of Hungary. This led the Hungarian monarchs to renew the settlement deals, as pointed out



in the book. Clearly, while Saxon settlement predated the modern period, they were a clear manifestation of the Hungarian–Ottoman inter-imperial struggle whose mechanisms had been reproduced across centuries by the economic and military benefits of the fortified Saxon towns and villages, a form of military-economic organization that Romanian or Hungarian settlements did not master, in part due to their greater vulnerability to feudal immiseration. Half a millennium later, in Ion's village, the long defunct Hungarian–Ottoman rivalry still had consequences in terms of unequal land ownership. Otherwise put, Ion's land scarcity problem pays for inter-imperial rivalries going back centuries.

This is a plausible claim if one takes a very long view. But from a political economy of development perspective, it may have a problem of monocausality. In addition to the long legacies of medieval privileges giving them good land, autonomy and tax exemptions, Saxon farmers also benefited from micro-structural endowments that are less obviously connected to inter-imperiality: strong village level communitarian institutions that socialized essential labor and reduced levels of intra-community inequality, a strong division of labor between craftsmen and farmers that enabled a high level of development of capital goods in the Saxon's fortified villages, agricultural technique upgrading via long-run German speaking networks spanning the most technologically developed parts of Europe and, most importantly, Europe's earliest literacy campaigns for all children thanks to a particular version of the mission of the Protestant church. Land is not everything in rural societies.⁸ Communitarian organization, farming techniques, tools, education and storage spaces matter even more. At the level of high culture, also, Transylvania was indeed, part of the German imperial influence and cultural milieu until late in the early 20th century, as highlighted by the authors. In an empire in which high culture was an important form of capital, one would expect Saxons to benefit extensively from these transnational flows of insignia of prestige.

Finally, the text's creolization of Transylvania is perhaps insufficient: the dominant Saxon/Hungarian versus the subordinate Romanian contrast is less clear-cut in Transylvania in general⁹ and the area around Ion's village of Pripas in particular. Certainly, most Saxons were independent farmers there. But some Saxon communities (in Chirales/Kirjeles/Kerles and Posmus/Paszmos/Puespesch) had been cashcroppers on Hungarian landed estates (the closest one to Pripas being count Bethlen's and count Teleki's), and lived, like Ion, with the dilemmas grown in the long shadow of serfdom.

Hungarians, Political Economy, and Inter-imperiality

If the essence of inter-imperiality is rivalry between empires over a certain territory, it is not clear what makes the relationship between Romanians and Hungarians

in Transylvania a manifestation of such rivalry. Given that the *only longue durée* inter-imperial rivalry of serious impact in Transylvanian history was between the Ottoman Empire and Hungary/Habsburgs, and that this rivalry happened prior to the idea of nation taking shape in the modern sense, one wonders how the disenfranchised Orthodox Romanian peasants were impacted by Ottoman interventions in Transylvania. In this regard the authors correctly point out that the exclusion of Romanians was on religious, not ethnic grounds and by the time Ion's story unfolds, religious discrimination had long been scrapped by Vienna's attempts at extracting political ideas from the Enlightenment. More could have been said about the fact that this exclusion was mitigated, not eliminated by the emergence of the Greek Catholic Church, an imperial creation meant to ensure loyalty while it also co-constituted nationalism (see Cosma's article in this special issue).¹⁰ One wonders, however, what the status of Romanians would have been had they been incorporated into Transylvanian Protestantism before the Habsburgs ruled supreme, as attempted, with little success, by Transylvanian elites during the 16th and 17th centuries.¹¹

The book sees in struggles over language rights as an instance of coloniality and inter-imperiality. If there was a real tension between Romanian peasants and 'Hungarians' in Ion's almost wholly Greek-Catholic hill country, it concerned mostly the language politics of the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Empire. Vienna used to mandate the use of all local languages in government offices¹² (something nationalist Romanian history conveniently omits) so, when Herdelea senior, the local teacher, agonizes over the Hungarian school inspector's visit, he does so because he had lived for decades in an education system in which not teaching the language of the state was allowed, a particular Viennese institutional legacy of 'interglottism' highlighted in the book. However, at what turned out to be the immense cost of alienating non-Hungarians such as this largely Romanian part of Transylvania Rebreanu describes, after 1867 and particularly after 1907, Budapest pushed for requiring Hungarian to be used as the sole language in the school, justice and administrative systems. Still, rather than represent a Hungarian peculiarity or some inter-imperial rivalry, these policies were inspired as much in Budapest as in Bucharest by French centralizing modernism, the difference being that Hungarians faced a non-Hungarian majority population at a time of nationalist mobilization throughout Central Europe.¹³ The collective language rights were maintained in the Austrian half of the Empire (including the largely Romanian speaking Banat and Bucovina) in what was a major exception of European modernity, with national language supremacy characterizing all other European nation states at the time (as well as the USA). If Vienna ruled imperially, it did so in a multinational way that few contemporary democracies can measure up to while

Budapest followed a more conventional, if extremely repressive, highly ineffectual¹⁴ and self-defeating (given the Romanian ethnic majority in Transylvania) approach characteristic of modern European states.

Bringing in Rebreanu's *Bildung* is important here and the book does a good job at that. As a young man, he was a model citizen of the Empire: he went to an elite military school in Hungary and his earliest literary works were written in Hungarian. But his personal politics matter just as much. Even as a star of the Bucharest literati of the interbellum, he was hardly your cliché Romanian nationalist writer and was always keen to highlight the differences between the Hungarian authorities and Transylvanian Hungarians, despite losing a brother to a Hungarian martial court during the war. His *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*Forest of the Hanged*] pits a Romanian-Hungarian couple against the absurdity of the war and in *Ion* he subjects to withering sarcasm the maudlin Romanticism and naivete of the nationalist Romanian intelligentsia represented by his sister's schoolmaster husband and by his own literary alter ego in *Ion*, the loitering, sinecure-hunting Titu. As such, and in support of Boatcă and Parvulescu's rejection of methodological nationalism, Rebreanu's politics and literary universe are permeated with a Romanian-Hungarian interculturalism that often gets sidelined by canonical readings.¹⁵

But whether this interculturalism, doubled by a proud interglottism, is truly an underexplored facet of inter-imperiality is less obvious. The authors write that Rebreanu's 'interglottism was very much a function of survival and aspirational social mobility in an inter-imperial local situation shot through with the possibility of social mobility on a worldly scale' (104). Is there a risk here, perhaps, of stretching the term inter-imperial to also mean simply "practical" or "cosmopolitan"? Wouldn't the average Romanian intellectual in 1910 Romanian Kingdom learn French to make credible claims to cultural capital? Hungarian peasant children had the structural privilege of speaking the language of the state but even the ultra-privileged offspring of provincial Saxon craftspeople or Czech industrialists in late Habsburgia, hardly in danger of not enjoying survival and social mobility, would have to practice interglottism because interglottism was a language of belonging in cultural and economic terms rather than the obligatory manifestation of inter-imperiality.

Generally, one gets the sense that nothing can exist outside inter-imperiality, whether it is the priests' crass manipulation of land deals using medieval practices ("Belciug is selling forgiveness for one's sins; the anti-Catholic theme functions as an inter-imperial, ironic motif," p. 178) or classism pure and simple ("Naïve peasants, as this inter-imperial classism has it, cannot be trusted to know what they want; they need intellectuals to whisper their own desires to them", p. 173). There may be a sense of inter-imperiality as a pervasive and

omnipresent social phenomenon,¹⁶ but I am perhaps too linear a political economist to embrace it.

Conclusions

Creolizing the Modern is a book which may stand to be a fork in the road for many strands of scholarship and particularly for literary studies. One can quibble on the margins with its historical details, goodness of fit of early 20th century Transylvania for the concept of inter-imperiality or the porous boundaries of this key term. One could also, perhaps, imagine how the book would have benefited from a more explicit debate with the newer historical literature on capitalism, society and the state the late Habsburg Empire such as the work of Mate Rigo, Steven Beller, Larry Wolff, and Pieter Judson,¹⁷ whose archival research brings to the fore a more complex and at times revisionist picture of the Habsburg empire. For example, Judson's work on the co-constitutive nature of imperial practices of rule and nationalist revival or his deconstruction of the thesis that Habsburg Empire was a "prison of nations" may stand at odds with the authors' take on the mechanics of Transylvanian Romanians' ethnonationalist struggle or the nature of imperial management of Europe's most ethnically diverse state (in its history, perhaps). Rigo's work on the budding Romanian bourgeoisie and its relations with the Transylvanian economy would have highlighted more the materialist underpinnings of nationalist struggles, very much in line with Rogozanu's review in this special issue. There is clearly an analytical distance between the historical understandings of the Habsburg empire coming out of Judson's work and from *Creolizing the Modern* and it would be wonderful to have a more explicit debate at some point on this issue.

Overall, however, such issues hardly dent this book's value as a door opened for social sciences and the humanities. But importantly, this book is a splendid act of good citizenship. For the approximately 1400 high schools in Romania for which *Ion* is an iconic reference for the baccalaureat, Boatcă and Parvulescu's diversification of the canonical reading frame away from pure hermeneutics, ethnonationalist history, and literary history and towards comparative history, comparative sociology and comparative political economy in a global context of semi-peripheries is an extremely valuable public good if one truly wants more reflexive and critically-minded generations of students than those produced by the educational status quo. As things stand in the mass politics of Romania and other European countries, this is no small matter. Doing this conceptual and normative feat, as the authors do, in a major university press book that is being translated into Romanian is something that deserves our celebration and a great deal of gratitude.



Note:

1. Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania Across Empires* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2022), 5. For the Romanian audience, until a translation will fully be available for the book, see Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, “Creolizarea modernității,” *Transilvania*, no. 5 (2022): 53–56. <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2022.05.07>.
2. See the discussion on postcolonialism and inter-imperiality in Maria Chiorean, “Adapting to Survive: Postcolonial Studies Today and the Emergence of the Inter-imperial Reading Method,” *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2022): 1–14.
3. I thank T. Szabó Csaba for this insight.
4. I thank Sorin Gog for this remark.
5. Cornel Ban, “Organizing Economic Growth: Romania and Transylvania on the Eve of the Great War,” *Acta Musei Porolissensis* 42 (2020): 16–30.
6. Clemens Jobst, “Market Leader: The Austro-Hungarian Bank and the Making of Foreign Exchange Intervention, 1896–1913,” *European Review of Economic History* 13, no. 3 (2009): 287–318; Barry J. Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, 1919–1939* (NBER series on long-term factors in economic development, 1996); Steven Bryan, *The Gold Standard at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Rising Powers, Global Money, and the Age of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
7. Matthias Morys, “Discount Rate Policy under the Classical Gold Standard: Core Versus Periphery (1870s–1914),” *Explorations in Economic History* 50, no. 2 (2013): 205–226.
8. K. Gündisch and M. Beer, *Siebenbürgen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen* (Bonn: Langen-Müller, 1998); Glynn Custred, “Voluntary Associations and Ethnic Survival among the Saxons of Transylvania,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 9, no. 2 (1990): 47–55.
9. David Prodan, “The origins of Serfdom in Transylvania,” *Slavic Review* 49, no. 1 (1990): 1–18. Sorin Mitu, “Local Identities from Transylvania in the Modern Epoch,” *Transylvanian Review* 22 (2013).
10. Valer Simion Cosma, “Virtus Romana Rediviva: Latinitatea naționalismului ardelean între identitate națională, strategie politică și loialitate dinastică,” *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2022): 26–39.
11. Levente Nagy, *Reforma la români. Un fenomen de transfer cultural în secolele XVI–XVII* (Bucharest: Ratio et revelatio, 2021).
12. Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: a new history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
13. Cosma, Valer Simion. “Imaginea „neamțului” în sensibilitatea intelectualității năsăudene.” *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică* 12–13 (2008): 187–207.
14. Berecz, Ágoston. “The languages of village governments in the eastern stretches of dualist Hungary: rights and practices.” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 99.1 (2021): 1–30.
15. See how Costi Rogozanu analyzes these readings in Costi Rogozanu, “Rebreanu, creatorul reprezentării literare mic-burgheze a țărănimii,” *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2022): 40–45. He describes the “nationalist lingering” as a “simplistic interpretation, often encouraged by Rebreanu himself in several public interventions.”
16. Described by Ștefan Baghiu as *static inter-imperiality* in comparison to the *exploratory inter-imperiality* of Romanian feminist author Sofia Nădejde’s novels. See Ștefan Baghiu, “Liviu Rebreanu și Sofia Nădejde ca world literature: geopolitică, interimperialitate și descoperirea lumii în romanul modern,” *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2022): 46–54.
17. See also Larry Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*; Máté Rigó, *Capitalism in Chaos* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2022); Steven Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1815–1918*, vol. 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

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