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Creolizing Transylvania
Notes on Coloniality and Inter-imperiality

ABSTRACT This article analyzes the differences and overlaps between the dynamics of coloniality and inter-imperiality that have shaped Transylvania since the sixteenth century vis-à-vis neighboring European peripheries and shifting cores, zooming in on how the tensions between different modes of colonial and imperial rule play out in rural settings. We foreground the vantage point of the rural by focusing on a Transylvanian village in 1920 as a global countryside.

KEYWORDS Transylvania, coloniality, inter-imperiality, rurality, Liviu Rebreanu

Textbook knowledge of postcolonial theory typically posits the emergence of postcolonialism as both a descriptive term and an academic field of study as occurring in parallel to the creation of the Third World at the end of World War II. Chronologically as well as logically, the newly independent states that resulted from the administrative decolonization of European empires in Asia and Africa formed the object of what would later become postcolonial studies. This conceptualization has tended to neglect an array of world regions that—for very different reasons—did not correspond either to the category of the Third World or to the conventional postcolonial timeline. Among them were regions that had achieved independence long before the end of World War II and had therefore been postcolonial *avant la lettre*, such as Latin America; territories that were occupied in the immediate aftermath of World War II but were not perceived as Western colonial outposts because of a long history of ideological legitimation of Western control, such as Palestine; countries that profited from and participated in the Western colonial enterprise, yet only after having been themselves colonized, such as Ireland; and areas that continue to function as colonies today, such as Puerto Rico, the British Virgin Islands, and the French Antilles.

Shortly before 1990, Edward Said's plea for including Ireland—alongside India, Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, China, Japan, the Pacific archipelago, Malaysia, and Australia—on the list of world regions with a history of colonial domination failed to mention any part of East Europe, which continued to be relegated to Cold War area studies. It was only after the demise of state socialist regimes in Europe in 1989–90 that scholars started signaling the "Third-Worldization" of the former Second World in the European East as a form of colonialism in the region (Frank, "Nothing"; Vassilev). Almost immediately, debates about the adequacy of the category of the postcolonial for an analysis of the European East emerged among scholars of the region. Influentially, historian Maria Todorova, whose concept of Balkanism was intended as an explicit departure from—rather than a variant of—what Said conceptualized as Orientalism, objected to the application of the term *postcolonialism* to the Balkans. Since, in Todorova's words, "postcolonial studies are a critique of postcoloniality, the condition in areas of the world that were colonies," she argued against considering the Ottoman, Habsburg, or Romanov empires colonial formations. Todorova asked, "What are the benefits of comparison?" (*Imagining* 195) between postcolonial areas of the world and the Balkans.

The question has since received various answers, but remains largely unresolved. Latin American theorists of decoloniality have been among the first to offer both a systematic critique of the overgeneralization inherent in the postcolonial category and consideration for the historical heterogeneity of colonial experiences, including in Eastern Europe.[1] Rather than easing the way to cultural and epistemic decolonization, they argued, many self-designated postcolonial approaches risk revamping Western poststructuralist thought in the service of analyzing a limited constellation of colonial histories—mostly, the former British colonies. The restricted focus on British colonialism and Anglophone colonies results in primarily English-speaking postcolonial theory, reproducing one of the most enduring tools of empire. The Anglophone postcolonial perspective systematically leaves Iberian, French, or Dutch colonial endeavors and their legacies in Latin America and the Caribbean unaccounted for, as well as outside of the scope of the postcolonial thus defined (Boatcă, "Uneasy"; Karkov).

In recent years, scholars like Laura Doyle and Shu-mei Shih have called for complementary comparative work in postcolonial studies on non-European empires and, importantly, the spaces *between* various European and non-European imperial formations—Mughal, Ottoman, Russian, Japanese, Chinese. This shift in attention and historical scale renders various parts of the European East recognizable as inter-imperial spaces, and anti-

imperial themes and structures legible in relation to not one, but multiple, conflicting empires. Paradoxically, despite its embrace of a revised mode of comparatism, this shift resonates with Maria Todorova's own plea for "scaling the Balkans." Todorova calls for an analysis of world regions in light of their "historical legacies"—that includes, but is not limited to, the legacy of empires. Scaling allows us to see Europe as "a complex palimpsest of variegated entities—a palimpsest which not only reveals the porosity of its internal frontiers but questions the absolute stability of its external ones" (Todorova, *Scaling* 74). At the same time, this shift of emphasis echoes critiques of world-systems analysis such as Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony* (1989) and A. G. Frank's *ReORIENT* (1998), both of which called for a reconsideration of Asia in accounts of world-systemic expansion, yet in the process glossed over East Central Europe as a structural link between world regions even before the European colonial expansion. Collectively, these perspectives align with this special issue's project to off-center the history of comparative empires.

In this essay, we build on the Latin American literature on decoloniality, with its roots in world-systems analysis, and on Doyle's notion of inter-imperiality, developed in literary studies in dialogue with world history. Our aim is to offer a framework for the analysis of world regions that have shifted between the control of several colonial and imperial powers throughout their early modern and modern history. A focus on such regions can shed light on situations of coloniality and imperiality in ways that off-center our understanding of empire and transform our assumptions about comparison and its benefits. We turn to Transylvania as an exemplary multiethnic, multilingual and multiconfessional region in order to argue that its unique predicaments at the crossroads of several imperial geographies are structurally comparable with those of other multilingual and inter-imperial locales such as Taiwan, the Philippines, the Caribbean, or India. We recover the vantage point of a small village in Transylvania in the year 1920, in order to stress the perspective of the rural in the making of imperial metropolises and dependent peripheries. In so doing, we aim to show that the relegation of the lifeworld of the village to tradition and backwardness constitutes the reverse of the inter-imperial dynamic that creates the urban as modern and progressive.

Our argument proceeds in three steps. We start by discussing the differences and overlaps between the dynamics of coloniality and inter-imperiality that have shaped Transylvania since the sixteenth century vis-à-vis neighboring European peripheries and shifting cores. We subsequently zoom in on how the tensions between different modes of colonial and imperial rule play out in rural settings. Finally, we foreground the vantage point of the rural

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by focusing on a Transylvanian village in 1920 as it has been captured in one particularly prominent Transylvanian text, Liviu Rebreanu's acclaimed novel *Ion*. We highlight how coloniality and inter-imperiality render the countryside global in a double sense—once by linking the village and the peasants' struggle over rights to the commons to a global market; and second, by positioning the lifeworld of the village on the periphery of the two asymmetric imperial centers, Vienna and Budapest, themselves part of a global center-periphery structure.

Coloniality and Inter-imperiality: A Necessary Dialogue

The fact that the world-systems perspective does not consider Western Europe as one world region among several but as the birthplace of the modern world-system, thus unduly privileging it, has constituted the main reason critics have considered the approach Eurocentric.[2] In response to this criticism, the centrality of the Americas for an understanding of both the geopolitics and the geoculture of "the modern/colonial world-system" started to come into focus in world-systems scholarship on modernity/coloniality.[3] The critically important conceptual change introduced by the notion of coloniality was the acknowledgment that, while colonialism as a formal administrative status had come to an end, the hierarchies established between Europeans and non-Europeans, that is, the coloniality of power, continued to underwrite social, political, economic, and cultural realities. Crucial dimensions of the process of decolonization thus remained pending. At the same time, the centrality conferred on the Americas in the creation of coloniality has come at a theoretical cost: by focusing on the impact of colonial power in the emergence of alternative modes of labor control, weak state structures, and subaltern epistemologies, which subsequent waves of decolonization have left in place, the modernity/coloniality perspective implied that the ongoing socioeconomic and epistemic colonial relation between the core and the non-core in other parts of the world was a later step within a postulated temporal sequence. As in the case of most Latin American countries, this linear sequence was supposed to run from colonial occupation to juridical-administrative decolonization and up to the postcolonial period. As a consequence, world regions that had been subjected to imperial or colonial control both before and concomitant with Western Europe's Atlantic expansion did not fit this revised timeline. Once again, histories of imperial domination and of anti-imperial struggle in Eastern Europe were omitted.

By contrast, work on Eastern Europe by world-systems authors in the 1970s (Wallerstein; Chirot), Eastern European historians since the 1980s (Berend and Ranki; Berend), literary and cultural theorists (Kovačević;

Parvulescu), and a growing body of recent decolonial and critical development studies (Boatcă, *From Neoevolutionism*; Böröcz; Karkov) has revealed that the economic, political, and ideological domination that different parts of Eastern Europe experienced at different times since the sixteenth century followed a sequence that went from protocolonial to the neocolonial, following a different pattern of colonization than that conferred either by modern Atlantic history or postcolonial studies.

Analyses provided by scholars of the European East foregrounded patterns that were typically linked to situations of imperial, not colonial domination. As late as the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire behaved more like a traditional world empire than like the expanding capitalist system, in that it exploited its colonies in order to finance luxuries, wars, and maintain imperial structures, but not in order to industrialize its economy (Chirot 61). Existing industrial developments in dominated territories were sometimes even reversed under imperial rule, as works on the deindustrialization of textile manufacture in the Ottoman Empire and India have shown (Pamuk and Williamson). The Habsburg Empire established a customs union for its territories that was meant to render it economically competitive with other world empires, but at the same time undergirded its participation in the capitalist world-economy. Taking place over about two hundred years, the dissolution of the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Tsarist imperial states often lead not to the liberation of the previously occupied provinces in the region but to a shift from imperial systems based on the exploitation of an unfree peasant labor force to systems functioning under the jurisdiction of the Western capitalist powers. These powers were interested in an increase of agrarian production and thus in the re-enserfment and overexploitation of rural labor. By the end of the nineteenth century, for the newly emerging states in the area, the terms of political discourse, national identity formation, and cultural change were accordingly transformed by the geopolitical reshuffling that made Western Europe a renewed metropolitan center. An off-center approach thus provides an important corrective to and a productive complication of the narrative of linear progress toward industrialization as a necessary or sufficient characteristic of capitalist economies.

The political, cultural, and economic legacies of inter-imperial conflict in Eastern Europe left indelible marks both on the socioeconomic organization and on the self-conceptualization of social groups, placing them in a different relationship to the Western European core than the American colonies. While the racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies erected in the colonies marked the *colonial difference* from the core (the colonizer/colonized dichotomy), the less overtly racial, more pronounced ethnic and distinct class hierarchies

accounted for the *imperial difference* among European empires and their former subjects (with language, religion, regional location, ethnic allegiance and economic status complicating the divide).[4] The construction of the colonial difference overseas thus went hand in hand with the emergence of a double imperial difference in Europe (stretching on to Asia): on the one hand, an external difference between the emerging capitalist core in the Iberian Peninsula and the existing traditional empires of Islamic and Eastern Christian faith—Ottoman and Tsarist; on the other hand, an internal difference between the new and the old capitalist core, mainly England versus Spain.[5] The myriad forms anti-imperial struggle took within these European empires—including anti-imperial nationalism—likewise attest to patterns in need of differential analysis. Elsewhere, the moment of divergence of the imperial from the colonial difference has therefore been discussed as the emergence of at least two types of European subalterns to the hegemonic model of power, as well as of the first imperial map of multiple Europes—with a self-proclaimed "heroic" Europe in the northwest, a "decadent" Europe in the south, and a permanently backward "epigonal" Europe in the east (Boatcă, "Europes").

In proposing the concept of inter-imperiality that points to a multiplicity of power sites and subject positions, Doyle also counters the assumption implicit in most postcolonial or world-systems theorizing that a region is either a postcolony of the West or it has not been colonized. Doyle highlights the dialectical role of vying empires before as well as after European hegemony in ways that account for both imperial and colonial differences. In what she terms "the inter-imperial method," where the "inter" refers "both to multiple interacting empires and to the multiple subject positions lived within, between, and against empires," the co-constitution of macro-scale politics emphasized in world-systems analysis and micro-level interactions and cultural production becomes legible:

> An inter-imperial method incorporates the insights of both transnational and world-systems analysis while aiming to supplement their insights. Our understanding of the conditions of diasporic displacement, economic exploitation, or international resistance changes, for instance, when we look not only at western European cores and peripheries, but also at these as they interact with Ottoman core and periphery, or Chinese core and periphery, or Russian core and periphery, or all at once. Each state's core-periphery policies and instabilities shapes that of others. And together 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. (Doyle, "Thinking")

We turn to such specific modes of inter-imperial positionality in order to assess the core-periphery—or center/off-center—dynamics shaping one of Europe's most undertheorized regions, Transylvania, both before and after the imbrication of inter-imperiality and coloniality.

Transylvania's Inter-imperiality: A Sketch

As an exemplary multiethnic, multilingual, and multiconfessional world region, Transylvania is a particularly telling case in which an inter-imperial positionality is linked to the coloniality of empire in the European semiperiphery. Due to its inter-imperial condition, the history of Transylvania has been highly contested scholarly terrain for historians writing within national paradigms (Peter). Here, we retrace Transylvania's *longue durée* with a focus on migrations and empires.

Already in the medieval period, the layering of multiple migratory and imperial formations shaped what would become Transylvania—from Avars in the sixth and seventh centuries, Bulgars in the eighth and ninth centuries, Hungarians/Magyars in the ninth century, to German-speaking migrants invited by Hungarian rulers to occupy border regions in the twelfth century. The Mongol invasion passed through Transylvania in the thirteenth century, including the region within the global purview of the Mongol Empire, which extended from China to the Caucasus (Abu-Lughod). The Romani migration, which started in India and passed through Persia, Armenia, and the Byzantine Empire, occurred between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, resulting in some Romani communities settling in the region. Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in the fifteenth century arrived in Transylvania through the Balkans from the Ottoman Empire, adding to the Jewish population already in Transylvania. They were followed by Ashkenazi migrations. Short-distance migrations of Romanians between Wallachia, Moldova, and Transylvania occurred throughout the early modern period as well.

As these migratory waves put the region on a world map extending from India to China to Central Asia to West Europe to Northern Africa, Transylvania became an estate-based principality between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. There were "three nations" (in a premodern sense) in Transylvania within the estate system. One group was constituted by the Hungarian nobility, a fluid nonethnic category, anchored in noble privilege and land ownership. The other was made up of Szeklers, a Hungarian-speaking population in the Eastern Carpathians and closest to the Hungarian nobility. The third were the Transylvanian Saxons, German-speaking and increasingly urban. These three "nations" participated unequally in the exploitation of Romanian- and Hungarian-speaking serfs.

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As an estate-based principality, Transylvania was located at the intersection of a series of empires, each vying for dominance in the region. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Transylvania was situated at the literal crossroads of the three conflicting empires that dominated East-Central Europe: the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Poland-Lithuania. The Ottomans, under the rule of Suleiman I and in extended global conflict with the Persian Empire and the Spanish Empire in two parts of the world, conquered Buda in 1526. The Hungarian Kingdom, which at the time included Transylvania, was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. In an inter-imperial spirit, during this period the nobility of Transylvania maneuvered its claims to autonomy between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires. After the failure of the Ottoman siege of Vienna, the Habsburg Empire, a reduced version of the imperial power that a century earlier had colonized the Americas, occupied Buda and the pre-Ottoman territory of Hungary, including Transylvania. For almost two hundred years, Transylvania was administered by a governor sent by Vienna. As the eastern border of the empire, Transylvania would be both peripheral vis-à-vis Vienna and of critical importance to the management of the empire's eastern border (Parvulescu and Boatcă, "(Dis)Counting"; see also Judson).

Migrations continued throughout the history of Transylvania's early modern estate system. Armenians, who had arrived in neighboring Moldova in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, were violently persecuted and migrated west in the mid-sixteenth century (Lang 103–4). Some found refuge in Transylvania, where they enjoyed commercial privileges and established Armenian "colonies." The presence of Armenians in Transylvania included the region on another major global route, the Armenian diaspora and Armenian trading routes stretching from India and China to the Caucasus, Northern Africa, and England (Chaliand and Rageau 80). In the eighteenth century, like Romanians, Armenians in Transylvania unsuccessfully requested recognition as a fourth Transylvanian nation (Pál). Alongside this Armenian migration, there was a new wave of German migration, a population that came to be known as Swabians.

The year 1848 was paradigmatically inter-imperial in Transylvania. Hungarians claimed 1848 as the moment when they asserted their independence from the Habsburg Empire. They demanded the union of Hungary with Transylvania. Transylvanian Saxons initially supported Hungarian revolutionaries, but turned against them once they realized Hungarian independence in Transylvania did not include rights for minorities, especially linguistic rights. Transylvanian Romanians supported class-based revolutionary projects, but resisted the Hungarian national project. With the

help of the Russian Empire, itself vying for increased influence in the region, the Habsburgs squelched the Hungarian revolution and returned the region to absolutism. The year 1848 thus became a moment when the three large ethnic groups of Transylvania, each now developing its own nationalism, were reminded of the might of the two conflicting empires currently dominating the region. By this time, Hungarians and Szeklers, both Hungarian-speaking, formed one group, so the three Transylvanian nations, now claiming nationality in a modern sense, were Hungarian, German, and Romanian. The year 1848 also turned into a symptom of a problem that would haunt Transylvania: How would the question of national self-determination be played out in a region with three cohabitating nations (Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons) and at least three additional minority groups (Jewish, Romani, Armenian)?

In 1867, Transylvania became part of the Hungarian portion of the newly constituted dual monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Hungary's claim to equality with Austria was one for equality with European imperial nations. Hungarians became the "political nation" of a multiethnic, multilingual, and multiconfessional Transylvania. Against the perceived effort to Germanize Habsburg bureaucracy, Hungarian slowly became the language of state education in Transylvania. The other "minorities," strategically named since together they constituted the majority, were given nominal educational and religious autonomy, which in practice was selectively implemented. A largely unsuccessful process of enforced cultural and political Magyarization followed. This period saw a large migration wave from Transylvania toward Romania, which had been constituted as a state in 1859, and toward the United States. Four major empires dissolved at the end of World War I. The Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist in November 1918. Transylvania gained its independence—for a month. The Transylvanian Romanian gathering in Alba Iulia/Gyulafehérvár on December 1, 1918, voted for Transylvania's union with Romania, giving voice to an anti-imperial majority. The Treaty of Trianon in 1920, aiming to give each ethnic group of the multiethnic and multilingual ex-Habsburg territories the right to self-determination, recognized the incorporation of an enlarged Transylvania into Romania. With this union, Transylvanians came to partake of Romania's inter-imperial history, which involves the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and a colonial cultural relation to France. The interwar period saw an attempt to assimilate Transylvanian ethnic groups to the Romanian population. Hungarian was replaced with Romanian as the state language. It was a period of growing anti-Semitism, which took three interrelated forms—Romanian, Hungarian, and Saxon (Gidó). Between 1940 and 1944,

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Transylvania was reincluded into Hungary. A period of Soviet administration of Northern Transylvania followed at the end of World War II (Bottoni). Transylvania was then reannexed by Romania in 1945. From 1945 to 1989, Transylvania, now a "historical province" within the Socialist Republic of Romania, was, like the rest of Eastern Europe, under unevenly distributed Soviet hegemony. Post-1989, the region entered a neoliberal period, becoming the periphery of the European Union. Historical anti-imperial sentiment was now often marshaled toward conservative, nationalist goals. This period has seen a large wave of migration toward Western Europe, the United States, and Canada.

Transylvania has thus long constituted a spatial node of inter-imperial relations, with the empires of the region in tension with other world empires on a global scale: the Hungarian Kingdom at odds with Bohemia-Moravia and Venice; the Ottoman Empire in global conflict with the Persian Empire and the Spanish Empire; the Ottoman Empire at odds with the Habsburg Empire; the Habsburg Empire facing the Russian Empire; Austria and Hungary in tension within the Austro-Hungarian Empire; Austria-Hungary and Romania in conflict within the global conflagration of World War I; Hungarian and Romanian nationalisms struggling over the region; Jewish, Romani, and Armenian minorities negotiating their position within a series of imperial formations. These scalar imperial layers coexist, with various degrees of impact at any given moment: the narrative of resistance to the Ottoman Empire does not disappear when the Habsburgs dominate Transylvania; the conflict between Vienna and Budapest over Transylvania continues to inflect Hungarian claims to the region; Romanian nationalism cannot erase centuries of Hungarian and Saxon presence. The racialization of both Jewish and Romani minorities straddles these imperial and national shifts. As this historical sketch suggests, coloniality constitutes a late moment in a larger inter-imperial configuration of power that does not end with the emergence of the Western Atlantic expansion. Just as coloniality represents the carryover of colonial hierarchies into post-independence times and thereby both parallels and outlives colonialism, inter-imperiality both precedes coloniality and coexists with it, while it outlasts imperialism.

Rurality, Modernity, and (De)Coloniality

Many places around the world—Taiwan, the Philippines, India, the Caribbean, or South Sudan—can be described in relation to an inter-imperial predicament. They challenge scholars to reframe the unit of analysis of regional comparisons in the context of colonial and imperial patterns of rule. In the case of Taiwan, the exercise of situating a small island nation globally,

comparatively, and relationally as the site of crossings of colonizers, settlers, merchants, and global commodities has been described as "comparatizing Taiwan" (Shih and Liao). While Transylvania's inter-imperial, multilingual history and present invite a similar exercise, its location on the European continent, yet at the periphery of several of Europe's imperial powers, renders it a suitable candidate for the decolonial project of creolizing Europe. The project contests the prevailing notion of a geographically, culturally, religiously, and racially coherent Europe by creolizing one of its subaltern formations, Transylvania.[6] Both projects—comparatizing and creolizing— are ultimately contingent upon creolizing theory by retrieving subaltern histories and experiences both in colonial and imperial situations and reinscribing them into literary and social theory. Such creolized theories are instances of what Lionnet and Shih have called "the becoming theory of the minor" (21)— thinking through and with invisibilized, peripheral, or subaltern formations.

There are three levels at which the minor becomes theory in our project of creolizing Transylvania: first, by rethinking "the world" through the prism of one of its peripheries; second, by theorizing capitalism from the vantage point of the village and Western modernity from Eastern rurality; finally, by engaging the literary production of a "minor literature" in the region. Through these three levels of off-centering, the peripheral is revealed to exist in relation to not one, but several centers. In order to capture Transylvania's unique yet structurally comparable predicament at the intersection of several empires, we deem it indispensable to place the region in "the world" of both the humanities and the social sciences—straddling world literature and the world-system. Experimentally, in the following, we reflect on this phenomenon from the vantage point of a small village in Transylvania in 1920. We do so through a multilayered reading of one document, Liviu Rebreanu's novel *Ion* (1920). Considered the first modern novel in the Romanian language, *Ion* encodes questions related to modernization and the world-system, empire/inter-imperiality and anti-imperialism, nationalism and its myths, vernaculars and multilingualism, secularization and religious institutions, race and ethnicity. Stylistically a hybrid of realism, naturalism and modernist experimentation, the novel opens these theoretical debates anew. If we retrace Transylvanian history as world history, we read *Ion* as world literature.

Contrary to the conventional interpretations of Rebreanu's biography and the novel's reception in the context of Romanian Transylvanian's claims to national sovereignty, we analyze *Ion* as an example of an inter-imperial text emerging in multiple languages (Hungarian, Romanian, German, Romani, Yiddish, and French), and incorporating translation and future circulation

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into its production.[7] After initial translations in Czech (1929), Italian (1930), Polish (1932), German (1941), Slovenian (1943), and Croatian (1943), *Ion* was translated into French, English, Russian, Turkish, Persian, and Japanese. While translation is usually taken as evidence of a text's transnational destiny, the translation of "minor literature" often results in what we call "minor translation"—one that, eloquently, does not succeed in saving a text from the sanctioned or asymmetric ignorance reproducing the core-periphery divides of knowledge production.[8]

The "minor formation" at the heart of *Ion* is a village named Pripas, modeled after one of the villages in which Rebreanu grew up, Prislop/Priszlop. The "world" of both world literature and the world-system comes into view differently from the perspective of rurality. Conventional accounts most often trace the coming together of the world through capitalism from the perspective of urbanism, with cities as motors of modernity, trade, and increased communication. The challenge is to trace world integration from within the dynamic of what Raymond Williams calls "the country and the city." The country makes the city, by supplying it with food and by offering itself as a foil for its modernity. The country thus always shadows the story of globalization as the story of city growth. Working with this dynamic is crucial in an inter-imperial predicament, which creates imperial metropolises in the same breath as it relegates whole regions, urban and rural, to the position of "the country." The Transylvanian village in Rebreanu's novel constitutes "the country" in a double sense, as a dually off-center site—once by being a village with an agricultural economy; and second on account of its peripheral inter-imperial position vis-à-vis Vienna and Budapest.

At the time of Rebreanu's plot, this village rests on the eastern border of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In a conventional modernizationist reading, it is a "traditional village." We argue, however, that, rather than finding themselves at opposite ends of a continuum ranging from tradition (associated with rurality, the periphery, and the past) to globalization (associated with modernity, the present, and core power), both the rural and the modern are inherent to and heirs of colonial and imperial matrices of power and of the configurations of national space derived from them.

Inter-imperiality and the Commons

In this last section, we offer a brief encounter with one node in Rebreanu's novel that exemplifies the interplay between the coloniality of Europe in relation to its non-European colonies and its enduring inter-imperiality in Eastern Europe. This node involves the formalization of peasants' collective rights in the land in the nineteenth century, retrospectively traced by Rebreanu's 1920 text.

"The land problem," for Edward Said the central concern of postcolonial studies, appears in the novel as a side story involving villagers' efforts to acquire or maintain rights in the commons—forests and pastures. We understand this fictional scene as belonging to a global history of land imbricated with coloniality. In Rebreanu's novel, the character of Titu discovers a conflict over the use of the commons, played out between Romanian and Saxon peasants, after his move to the fictional village Lușca, modeled after the historical village of Nepos.

This fictional account echoes nineteenth-century debates concerning two kinds of Transylvanian commons. One was the commons belonging to former serfs, who had the right to use pastures and forests formerly owned by nobles. The second, in the Năsăud/Nassod/Naszód region, where the conflict occurs, concerns the commons held by former soldiers on the Habsburg imperial border. A process of "modernization" attempted to formalize and legally encode both sets of peasants' rights to the commons. Formalization was enforced by the imperial state through a complex bureaucracy populated largely by Hungarian-language functionaries, who regulated land owned, individually and collectively, by Romanian, Hungarian, and Saxon peasants. The same bureaucracy regulated the inclusion/exclusion of Jewish and Romani ownership from the institutions of formalization. Far from being a strictly economic development, formalization was deeply politicized in an inter-imperial key.

Paramount to the process of formalizing rights to the commons was the surveying of land, its measuring and quantification into modern units, and its subsequent writing into administrative documents (Vasile). The modernization of land meant that individual and state papers now mediated between peasants and the land on which their livelihood depended. In order to receive shares in the commons, peasants had to prove their ancestral ownership in the land. A tension ensued between a modern legal concept of proof and a folk concept anchored in collective memory. Everybody in the village knows that a certain peasant owns a certain parcel of land, the memory of which is secured through a complex and nuanced toponymical practice that records ownership as well as use—in the peasant's language.[9] The Romanian peasants depicted by Rebreanu had to navigate a bureaucratic system functioning in imperial languages (first German, then Hungarian). Judges, most often Hungarian-speaking, became arbiters of formalization laws—in the case of the dispute described by Rebreanu, adjudicating between Romanian and Saxon peasants. In this inter-imperial predicament, an offshoot of the inter-imperial history sketched above, new forms of inequality were produced, intersecting with entrenched forms of injustice. Often, land ended up in the hands of old and new owners of large

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land estates, who could purchase small parcels from peasants in times of crisis (Vasile 179). Ownership in forests, in particular, was adjudicated to the benefit of owners of large properties (Csucsuja; Georgescu).

Romanian Transylvanian peasants resisted what they perceived as the injustice of formalization. In Rebreanu's novel, the struggle over the ownership of the pastures in Lușca/Nepos is said to have lasted fifty years. Historically, it was documented in the Transylvanian press (*cearta de hotar*), which debated it extensively. The line separating the commons belonging to four villages had been drawn at the time the villages were militarized and redrawn in the 1830s. Villagers on both sides fought this line. The charge on the Romanian side was that the Saxons had moved the signs delineating the border between the two commons, thus claiming a large surface that historically belonged to the Romanian villages. In order to argue their cause, Romanian peasants sent numerous petitions as well as representatives to Vienna (Șimon). They had the matter discussed in the Transylvanian Diet. And they fought for it, sometimes violently.[10]

For their part, Saxons (Siebenbürger Sachsen in German) had arrived in Transylvania in the early modern period, invited by local rulers to "colonize" border regions of Transylvania. They enjoyed significant economic and legal autonomy through the period of Ottoman dependence and in the Habsburg empire. The terms of Saxon autonomy in Transylvania were renewed no less than twenty-two times (Evans 213). At the time of Rebreanu's plot, Saxons also claimed ancestral rights in the commons. The courts deciding formalization conflicts at the end of the nineteenth century were tasked to adjudicate which notion of ancestral rights was more forceful than the other. In Rebreanu's scene, when granted the role of mediators between Saxons and Romanians in the conflict over the commons, Hungarian authorities side with the Saxons. One can see how the dispute over commons, involving as it does the juridical invocation of ancestral rights to the land, overlaps with anti-imperial nationalism, itself ideologically anchored in a primordial right to land.

We retrace this dispute here in order to place the predicament of the Transylvanian villagers in a world historical framework, whereby native populations of all backgrounds claim ownership in the land based in oral knowledge, whereas an imperial administration attempts to formalize it into modern administrative documents. Formalization involved common land being divided into shares, according to an algorithm that translated serfdom-based servitudes into rights to land that could subsequently be sold as a commodity. Prices varied widely, according to the use to which the land could be put (Onofreiu 77–79). With this increased financialization, peasants entered a property regime in which they could sell and thus lose their rights

to common land, a situation previously inconceivable (Vasile 195). The value of land changed irrevocably. "The land problem" is thus dramatized in Transylvania in an inter-imperial key, a function of Transylvania's inter-imperial history, but in a legible relation to a global process, itself anchored in coloniality, which saw the transformation of land into a capitalist commodity.

Conclusion

In this article, we proposed a framework for the analysis of world regions that have shifted between the control of colonial and imperial powers throughout their history. Our aim has been to complement the spatial and temporal scope of the notion of coloniality—which extrapolates on the basis of Western Europe's Atlantic expansion—with the help of the concept of inter-imperiality, anchored in the historical experience of Eastern empires. Using the example of Transylvania, we argued against a linear narrative that relegates Eastern empires to remnants of precapitalist, precolonial Western modernity. Inter-imperial regions reveal situations of coloniality and imperiality to have been coconstitutive of both modernity and capitalism. Through the lens of a novel whose plot develops while Transylvania gains independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and becomes part of Romania, we offered an entry point into Transylvania as an inter-imperial case study. As a multiethnic, multilingual, and multiconfessional world-region situated at the crossroads of plural and conflicting imperial histories, Transylvania constitutes a minor formation in European history. Its analysis can contribute to the larger project of the creolization of Europe alongside other minor formations such as the Caribbean or the Mediterranean. Rebreanu's novel *Ion*, which places the Transylvanian village within political, financial, and cultural global networks, is instrumental to the realization that, in 1920, Transylvania is fully—if asymmetrically—integrated into the capitalist world economy. Its "backwardness" constitutes a design of inter-imperial "integration." The project of creolizing Europe through the creolization of Transylvania thus operates a shift in the unit of analysis available for regional comparisons, highlighting the benefits of understanding Western modernity from Eastern rurality and Europe from its margins. ■

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NOTES

1 See Mignolo, "Darker Side"; Coronil; Grosfoguel; and Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui.
2 For this critique, see Abu-Lughod; Frank, *ReORIENT*; and Anievas and Nisancioglu.
3 On the place of the Americas in the history of colonialism, see Quijano and Wallerstein; Mignolo, *Local Histories*; and Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar.
4 On the colonial/imperial distinction, see Mignolo, "Colonialidad." For a detailed analysis of the dynamics of racialization in the European East and the Caucasus, see Tlostanova. One salient modality of racialization in East Europe is anchored in the enslavement of Romani populations; see Parvulescu and Boatcă, "*Longue Durée* of Enslavement." For an account of the racialization of religion in the region, see Rexhepi.
5 See Mignolo, "Islamophobia."
6 On creolization, see Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Tate; Boatcă, "Inequalities" and "Caribbean Europe."
7 We analyze the novel's multilingualism in Parvulescu and Boatcă, "(Dis)Counting."
8 On this mode of ignorance, see Chakrabarty.
9 On toponyms, see Rețegan.
10 Documents pertaining to the dispute are reproduced in Buta and Onofreiu.

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