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Interimperialism under Nationalist Communism. Transylvania in the Works of Marta Petreu and Ádám Bodor

Abstract: This paper revisits the concept of interimperiality as recurrently associated with Transylvania through the analysis of two novels set during the communist period: Ádám Bodor's *Zona Sinistra* and Marta Petreu's *Acasă, pe câmpia Armagedonului*. Focusing on a critical moment of identity formation, the study approaches Transylvania through the framework of assemblage theory. Within this perspective, communist rule does not erase interimperial legacies; rather, the socialist regime becomes another element within the Transylvanian assemblage. By juxtaposing a Hungarian and a Romanian perspective, the paper examines how communism attempts to suspend the region's interimperial character, yet ultimately becomes a new layer of the palimpsest of its historical legacies.

Keywords: Transylvania; Post-Communism; Interimperiality; Assemblage Theory; Self-Colonization.

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Introduction

In the context of discussions about Romania's status within the broader framework of postcolonialism/post-communism¹, Transylvania represents an atypical case. A region marked by its role as a space of identity and ideological projection for both Romanian and Hungarian communities, Transylvania has been claimed throughout history by each of these groups, despite being inhabited by a diverse range of ethnic groups. A comparative analysis² of the censuses realized at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in Transylvania by the Austro-Hungarian Empire shows that, consistently, the most numerous ethnic group was constituted of Romanians (around 55% of the total population), being followed by Hungarians (around 30%), as well as Germans, Serbians, Croatians, Jews and Roma people. To this is added Transylvania's condition of semi-peripherality, situated at the intersection of empires. Drawing on the study by Anca Pârvolescu and Manuela Boatecă, which proposes an interimperial framework for reading and

understanding this area, the present paper seeks to continue and further develop the analysis of Transylvania from said perspective, under the broader framework of assemblage theory, as a means of understanding the processual and socio-material mutations that shaped the region. Building on the arguments advanced by the study *Creolizarea modernului: Transilvania la răscrucea imperiilor* (2024) and drawing on a line of argumentation opened by Laura Doyle's work³ this paper will also explore the ground laid by research such as that of Bogdan Ștefănescu, which brings together the idea of post-communism with that of postcolonialism, Maria Todorova's research on East European nationalism and the concept of balkanism⁴, as well as the concept of self-colonizing nations discussed by Alexander Kiossev⁵. In addition, the study incorporates insights from affect theory in order to examine how historical legacies are not only reproduced through political and institutional structures, but also through affective attachments, memories, and atmospheres that shape everyday experiences of space and identity.

The present study starts from the premise that the evident interimperiality of Transylvania is in no way attenuated and/or annulled during the period of Soviet domination, but rather reconfigured under the pressure of a new type of centralized authority, as part of an assemblage. Although, in theory, the communist regime ideologically asserts itself as one based on equality and unity, these characteristics must be questioned in the context of interethnic relations in Transylvania, since the establishment of communism does not function as a complete rupture with the imperial past, but rather

as a form of internal hegemonic rewriting. In order to illustrate these dynamics, the theoretical approach is accompanied by an applied analysis of two relevant novels: *Acasă, pe Cîmpia Armaghedonului* (2011), by the Romanian author Marta Petreu, and *Zona Sinistra*, written by the Romanian-born Hungarian writer, Ádám Bodor. The selected texts offer distinct representations of the Transylvanian space during the communist period and implicitly preserve the imprint of sedimented identity and symbolic structures. The analysis of these novels will not focus on or be limited to close reading alone, as fiction analysis will be used as a means of rendering visible historical and identity-forming mechanisms⁶.

Consequently, the study is guided by the following research questions: how are interimperial dynamics reconfigured within the framework of Romanian nationalist communism? What role does the communist regime play in reshaping the relations of power, memory, and identity that constitute the Transylvanian assemblage? And how are these processes represented and negotiated in literary works that revisit the socialist period from the perspective of the post-communist present?

Applications and Extensions of Interimperialism to Transylvania

In order to discuss the ways in which the interimperial dynamics of Transylvania are transformed, this study starts from the analysis offered by Anca Părvulescu and Manuela Boatcă in *their study Creolizarea modernului: Transilvania la răscrucea imperiilor* (2024). By discussing the novel *Ion*, emblematic of Transylvanian modernist writing, as an "archive of the sedimented

legacies of interimperiality”⁷ the study critically and sociologically examines the manner in which the region’s position at the intersection of three major empires, the Habsburg, the Ottoman, and the Russian Tsardom, shaped relations and interactions both on a macro level (political, administrative) and on a micro level (within small communities, in the domestic sphere). As the authors argue in the *Introduction*, following an extensive overview of the region’s history, Transylvania should not be analysed merely because it is a historical province that successively was part of different empires or kingdoms before being incorporated into a nation-state, but because it is a space born from and shaped by interimperial dynamics that transformed it into a “terrain of territorial claims, religious and national tensions, and struggles over land rights and the legitimacy of political regimes”⁸.

Although Anca Pârvolescu and Manuela Boacã already apply an interimperial framework to Transylvania in their study, in order to examine the continuities of this framework beyond the dissolution of imperial hegemony, I will focus on the way Laura Doyle approaches the concept, as a theoretical framework that names „a political and historical set of conditions created by the violent histories of plural, interacting empires and by interacting persons moving between and against empires.”⁹ The term goes beyond a *post*-oriented perspective on hegemonic influence and instead foregrounds the dialectical nature of intersectionality¹⁰. More than a historical concept, interimperialism functions as a dialectical structure: empires do not just succeed and replace one another, but interact, overlap, and mutually shape each

other. Furthermore, interimperialism also implies a dual attitude towards the empire: accepting the empire as an identity-based constituent, while also rejecting it and trying to gain independence and autonomy. This attitude is grounded in the dialectical aspect of the concept, as Doyle puts it:

They are vessels of layered collective memory, replete with cultural resources, sustaining values, and seasoned forms of wisdom as well as with memories of betrayal, vying identifications, and defensive attachments to gendered forms of civilizationalism, all of which may be reenergized by particular events in the contemporary field of inter- imperial pressures.¹¹

This is also the case of Transylvania, which, due to its semi-peripheral location (within Europe, yet in the East in a borderland zone), emerges as a palimpsest of all the hegemonic forces that have influenced it¹². Consequently, the communist regime, although adopted nationalist, homogenizing, and egalitarian policies, and tried to erase the imperial past of the region, represents merely another hegemonic force superimposed upon the region’s already interimperial foundation.

A useful analytical lens in this context is provided by assemblage theory, which has been at the “forefront of the revalorization of the material or, indeed the socio-material”¹³ and which will be used from here on as an overarching theory, that has the means of unifying and organizing the theoretical framework of this paper. The concept of assemblage emerged from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), where it is

defined and redefined over and over again, but here, in this specific quote, it is done through the example of a book:

(...) in a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also, lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification (...) all this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an assemblage. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity.¹⁴

A simplified definition of the term is the one offered by Martin Müller in his study *Assemblages and Actor-networks: Rethinking Socio-material Power, Politics and Space* (2015), as a „mode of ordering heterogeneous entities so that they work together for a certain time”¹⁵. While for Deleuze and Guattari assemblage is only an analytical tool, Müller explains the way in which the concept proposed by the two theorists has been used and can be further extended towards the development and application of a theory that has it as its basis¹⁶. Due to the relationality that defines it, assemblage does not imply predetermined organizing principles or hierarchies, which is why it is applied in political science and in different types of geographies (political, feminist). In order to integrate assemblage theory into the discussion about Transylvania, I will follow the direction proposed by Müller, focusing on the characteristics of assemblages that make them relevant for the analysis of power dynamics and nuancing them in relation to the region. These are relationality, heterogeneity, dynamics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization and desirability. Relationality

is the essential characteristic for understanding Transylvania as an assemblage, as it is connected to the fact that Deleuze understands assemblages as being constituted as relations of exteriority¹⁷. This understanding concerns two aspects: both the autonomy of the terms from the relations in which they are or have been involved, and the difficulty of establishing links between the properties of the terms involved and the nature of the relations and of the assemblage they constitute. Seen as an assemblage and not merely as a geographical region, Transylvania is a collective entity composed of heterogeneous elements such as people, borders, memories, documents, etc., whose component parts are involved in these relations of exteriority. Thus, the sedimented legacies of empires, as parts of the Transylvanian assemblage, do not simply disappear, but are reconfigured within the new order of the communist regime, that restructures the dynamics of power. The conceptual pair deterritorialization – reterritorialization describes the movement between stability and change, which, in the case of Transylvania, can be understood as follows: (re)territorialization explains the efforts of the communist regime to homogenize and stabilize the assemblage, while deterritorialization manifests itself through all the forces that undermine uniformization, such as imperial legacies, interethnic tensions, or family memories that challenge homogenization and help maintain the hybrid character of the region. By using this framework, I argue that it supports the argument stated earlier, according to which communism is only an overwriting of the interimperial legacy.

In relation to Maria Todorova, who argues that Eastern European nationalism

is formed on the basis of a consciousness of backwardness in relation to the West¹⁸, which is why Eastern societies come to be *othered* from the perspective of Western discourse, perceived as incompletely European, Transylvania can be approached from a dual perspective. On the one hand, for a long period of time, as a borderland region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Transylvania was seen as a backward province, out of sync with the imperial capitals: Vienna and Budapest¹⁹. On the other hand, following Transylvania's integration into Romania, one can speak of a form of *othering* in relation to its position within Romania, due both to its distance from the metropolitan centre of the new nation-state, Bucharest, and to its ethnic heterogeneity. The approach to Transylvania through the lens of assemblages can be justified by understanding territorialization/deterritorialization in relation to the processes of coding/decoding, which rigidify and consolidate the identity of the assemblage²⁰. The awareness of backwardness in relation to the West functions as a discursive coding mechanism, as it solidifies Transylvania's status as a semi-periphery and subordinates it to various centers, representing a form of symbolic territorialization. Assemblage theory proposes a topological vision of space, in which metric distance is not what matters, but rather the density of connections between entities. Maria Todorova's analysis of the way in which Transylvania negotiates its relationship with centers of power aligns with the idea of crumpled space²¹, since, from a topological point of view, Transylvania may be closer to imperial codes and legacies than to the national center during communism. For the present study, the relevant focus is

on how Transylvania negotiated all these dynamics of *othering* and synchronization with the centre, especially once the influence of the communist regime was settled, being given that they can be perceived as discursive codes imposed by the centres of power, meant to stabilize the hierarchical structures of the assemblage.

One possible way of addressing these tensions could be the concept of *self-colonization*²² proposed by Kiossev. He argues that the term can be applied to "cultures having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the West without having practically been invaded and turned into colonies."²³ This is a characteristic feature of Eastern European countries, whose modernism was shaped through imitation and the importation of Western modernism (and, implicitly, of nationalism, as Todorova argues²⁴). Bringing this term into discussion in relation to Transylvania, however, can be complex. Being part of the Habsburg Empire, later the Austro-Hungarian Empire, one could speak of a colonization of Transylvania that allowed the importation of Western principles. Nevertheless, due to the anti-minority policies of the Tisza regime, beginning in 1875, access to education for Romanians was limited, and through enforced Magyarization, the ethnic character of the Romanian minority was intended to be suppressed²⁵. It could therefore be argued that Transylvania underwent a stage of colonization represented by the process of Magyarization. Yet Hungary itself was considered eastern and backward relative to the ideological and technological advancements of the West. It can be asserted that both Transylvania and Hungary engaged in a form of self-colonization with the principles of European

modernism. Beyond this initial process, a second stage of self-colonization can be identified with the establishment of the communist regime. It should be noted that the Soviet regime was imposed due to external pressures and influence, but with the rise of the Ceaușescu dictatorship, which sought to distance itself from the Stalinist past while perpetuating nationalist discourses, a new stage of self-colonization can be observed, aimed at aligning with the practices of other communist states visited by the Romanian dictator in the 1970s. Just as Todorova's theoretical framework can be integrated in the broader structure of the Transylvanian assemblage, self-colonization as a process in and of itself can be tied to both reterritorialization and coding. It is not to be seen as a form of reterritorialization imposed by the centre of power, as it was in the case of othering, but as a form of voluntary reterritorialization based on a western or socialist model, with the means of addressing a perceived lack of the local foundation. Self-colonization also works as a mechanism of coding, due to the import of western modernism and the way in which local elites try to impose it on the heterogenous materiality. By importing occidental or socialist models, a stabilization of the symbolic and institutional hierarchies happens, which is a form of reterritorialization. Simultaneously, these actions work as normative schemes that organize society, which ties to coding.

There is another characteristic of assemblages that has not been discussed yet, that of desirability. As Muller puts it, "Assemblages are desired (...) thus have a corporeal component"²⁶. This corporeal component can be understood through the concept of affect, which, in relation to

assemblage theory, is defined as "the tertium quid of the social and the material, making the socio-material hold together or fall apart"²⁷. Thus, affects are one of the main forces that make the heterogenous components of an assemblage stay together.

Even though Muller talks about emotions and affects as being coagulant forces, I will refer to Steve Piles' paper *Emotions and affect in recent human geography* (2009) to differentiate between the two terms. The key difference that he coins between emotions and affects is representability²⁸. While emotions are linked to the cognitive, being described as „ways of knowing, being and doing"²⁹, affects are hard to define, inexpressible and unrepresentable. Anderson defines affect as „transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect"³⁰. The study has also raised awareness about the ways in which affect might be actively engineered and the ways in which there could be such a thing as an „affectual mobilization of the masses by the powerful"³¹ possibly through consumerism, management techniques and media representation. Even so, there is no way of knowing this with certainty because affects are inherently non-representational³². The main issue with affectual theory, as Steve Pile puts it, is that „affectual geography can (ironically) only deal with its surface expression"³³.

Given affect's transpersonal nature, it means that it is perceived as universal and also prior to its constitution in social relations³⁴. However, this was contested by Divya Tolia-Kelly in her paper *Affect - an ethnocentric encounter ? exploring the 'universalist' imperative of emotional/affectual geographies*. Here, she draws attention to

the mistake of perceiving the way in which bodies might be able to affect and be affected through the universalist lens. She argues that

Various bodies through their racialised, gendered and sexualised markedness, magnetise various capacities for being affected; a slave and holocaust victim do not necessarily experience pain, suffering, anomie, in the same way due to their social positioning and „enforced” capacities of (im)mobility, experience and affecting the social space around them.³⁵

meaning that it is necessary to take into consideration the capacities for affecting and being affected and understanding that the difference in these capacities is due to each body's/community's access to social and/or geopolitical power. Once more, it all can be applied to the view of Transylvania as an assemblage, affect being the “glue” that holds the relations between its component elements. It is the affect that does not let the imperial legacy disappear, because it remains active on the affective level. Also, it must be considered that the capacity of each individual to affect and to be affected is marked by geometries of power, meaning that an ethnically or socially marked body, such as that of a Romanian in the times of the empire, does not have the same power to affect and influence the space around it. Self-colonization can also be reinterpreted through the perspective of affectual theory. Because affect can be engineered to serve political goals³⁶, self-colonization is not only an intellectual import, but it becomes a desire to synchronize with the center. It also ties in with Tolia-Kelly's geometries of

power, as Todorova's feeling of incompleteness or otherness is tied to the possibility of affecting or being affected generated by the hierarchical situation. Affect is the engine of the Transylvanian assemblage, ensuring the continuity of the historical palimpsest by transforming macro-political events into somatic experiences and social atmospheres that are lived on a daily basis³⁷. Even if it cannot be represented, it can be traced at the basis of imperial nostalgia, familial memories, or interethnic tensions.

At this point, I return to the central premise of the study: the persistence and transformation of interimperial logic in the post-communist context, inside the assemblage framework. From this perspective of communism as a form of self-colonization, the terms post-communism and postcolonialism can be reconsidered. Bogdan Ștefănescu comparatively analyses these two terms and reaches the following conclusion: the cultural identity of post-communist countries is constructed in a much more nuanced way compared to that of postcolonial countries, since post-communism relies on liminality and on the negotiation of the condition of *alterity* within the European continent³⁸. This concept functions as a re-signification of interimperial identity, insofar as, if the communist regime is understood as a form of hegemony, then post-communism represents the stage of renegotiation of the centre in relation to the periphery. Furthermore, Transylvania is also undergoing a process of renegotiating its persistence of adherences to imperial forms that were suspended during communism. The entire process of recovering and understanding the hegemonic influences and powers that

have left their imprint on the region can be undertaken through the lens of assemblage theory, which provides the appropriate framework for understanding and reconstructing a century of history obscured by institutional rewritings.

Thus, Transylvania's interimperial condition is not abolished with the dissolution of empires or at the moment of its integration into the modern Romanian state; rather, it remains a living and formative characteristic of the assemblage that it is a part of. Communist homogenization becomes another factor engaged in inter-imperial dynamics, another element engaged in the relations of the assemblage, while the post-communist period is merely a new stage in the reconfiguration of the assemblage, that offers the position from where it is possible to critically assess the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that the region underwent. This framework makes it possible to understand Transylvania as a palimpsestic construction that has a history of tensions and superimpositions. Viewing it as an assemblage, it means that the process that it is involved in continues to shape contemporary imaginary. Consequently, post-communism does not signify the disappearance of interimperial dynamics, but rather their transfer from the field of politically instituted power to the discursive, narrative, and affective realms. In this context, literature becomes an essential space for observing how memory, identity, and hegemony are reconfigured³⁹, and the novels by Marta Petreu and Ádám Bodor offer two distinct yet convergent ways of articulating these transformations. On the basis of the theoretical framework outlined above, the following analysis will examine

how these dynamics become visible and meaningful on the literary level, through two distinct modes of representation: absurd dystopia in Bodor's case, and confessional realism in Petreu's.

Acasă, pe Cîmpia Armaghedonului and Zona Sinistra: A Comparative Analysis

The selected texts are relevant for several reasons: both works engage with the Transylvanian space and depict it during the communist period; they originate from different literary traditions; and each proposes a distinct mode of representing hegemonic legacies, as well as different types of memory and spatiality. Both texts revisit the communist period from within the post-communist era, which allows for a critical distance from the past.

In *Zona Sinistra*, Ádám Bodor constructs a dystopian, absurd universe. The chronotope is not clearly defined, yet there are textual references that help clarify the correspondence between *Zona Sinistra* and Transylvania, as well as its chronological placement within the communist period, through the use of the appellation "to-varăș"⁴⁰ or other practices associated with life under this regime. *Zona Sinistra* designates a vague, liminal space located near the border with Ukraine, marked by uncertain toponyms such as *Dobrin City* or *Baba Rotunda*. Through these spatial demarcation practices, imperialist imprints can be observed, as *Zona Sinistra*, much like Transylvania, functions as an assemblage. Even though *Zona Sinistra* designates a region that is described in the novel, it is not limited to its vague geographical coordinates, but acts, indeed, as an assemblage,

integrating the space and geography, the people, the laws, the borders. Due to the constant reshaping of power dynamics, relations between its component entities are constantly being renegotiated. This is the reason why the reality of the characters is constantly restructured – they are not just inhabitants of a region; they are parts of a multiplicity that is constantly reshaping.

The border with Ukraine plays an important role in the novel, as it represents both the point of entry for conspiratorial information from the outside and the place where the possibility of leaving the country is imagined. The border is also important as part of the assemblage, being both an element of reterritorialization and deterritorialization, because it is shaping the space where power is perpetuated, while also allowing escape, via Mustafa Mukkerman's truck. It is also tied to affect, being associated both with desire and fear. The resemblance between the assemblage in the novel and the Transylvanian assemblage also derives from the ethnic diversity of its people: the characters bear both Romanian and Hungarian names, mirroring the most numerous ethnic groups in Transylvania, while figures of Saxon or Armenian origin are also shown to interact within *Zona Sinistra*. Another reference to the communist regime is the forced transfer of population: Coca Mahmudia Mavrodin is brought from Tulcea to assume the position of colonel. Mavrodin's arrival is also tied to a form of reterritorialization imposed by the power regime.

Space and historical time are alienated, and the novel leaves little room for an easy or straightforward understanding of the action or the events it presents. Through its liminal character, *Zona Sinistra* functions

as a palimpsest of interimperial legacies, in which historical influences overlap and shape collective behaviours, in an assemblage-like manner. These narrative strategies operate as a form of re-signification of interimperial and communist legacies from the standpoint of post-communist revisit.

Characters' identity is also filtered through the lens of the absurd, as, in the absence of official documents, each person's name is assigned by means of a metal tag worn around the neck. The name tags might be viewed as a coding mechanism, through which identity is controlled and administrated. They are not just symbols, but material components that reshape the reality and the relations, being the elements that allow or deny a body's agency. The protagonist integrates into the community and receives a new name on a metal plaque, yet he is constantly threatened by the local authorities with the possibility of exclusion or renaming. This is the fate of all inhabitants, whose lives are governed by the claims and orders emitted by the power structures. The actions of the authorities are most often devoid of meaning, yet regardless of how incoherent Coca Mavrodin's demands may be, they play a formative role in generating and restructuring reality within *Zona Sinistra*.

An important role is also played by affect, given the fact that the characters do not experience emotions that can be understood or named, but rather brutal intensities, connected to the feeling of absurdism, that are not conscious. Even before or without experiencing something, the characters are presented as filled with guilt, fear, anxiety or hunger. These affects are engineered by those in power, with the means of controlling those who live in

Zona Sinistra, so that they remain obedient. The totalitarian regime is manipulating the affective flux of the assemblage so that they can remain in control.

The author renders hegemonic dynamics, intersectional space, and the hybrid identity of the inhabitants of *Zona Sinistra* by employing absurdity and arbitrariness as narrative tools for examining mechanisms of power. Beyond the elements related to interimperialism and communism, the issue of self-colonization can also be raised, as the characters adapt to the regime's absurd rules, internalize them, and ultimately perpetuate them. Ádám Bodor's novel is not merely a stylistic exercise in revisiting the power dynamics of communism through the lens of the absurd; rather, it brings to light the palimpsestic character of Transylvania, which, once subjected to Soviet domination, becomes a *Zona Sinistra* in which local specificity is suspended.

In *Acasă, pe cîmpia Armaghedonului*, Marta Petreu adopts a substantially different approach from that of Bodor. If in the case of *Zona Sinistra*, the mechanisms of the assemblage were made visible with the help of the absurd lens, in Petreu's novel the way in which the mechanisms are exposed is through micro-historiographical narratives. The action presented is coherent and even realist; spaces are not distorted but can be located on a map. Instead, the conflict shifts from the exterior to the interior. The imprint of interimperialism is examined at the level of the family and the individual rather than at the level of society, as is the case in *Zona Sinistra*. The chronotope is firmly anchored in reality, and the Transylvanian space, materialized through the Transylvanian Plain, plays a central role in the narrative. This novel focuses

on the chronological palimpsest, which is held together by memory. The past is not only remembered, but it is used to redefine the present, organising not only the way in which characters interpret reality, but also the relations between characters. Memory is, thus, a coding mechanism, alternative to that of the state, that shapes the relations between the elements of the assemblage.

The novel is an evocation of the protagonist Tabita Vălean's past, triggered by the death of her mother, Maria. Not only Tabita's own life is narrated, but also that of her mother, thus constructing a history of Transylvania as it unfolds across different historical contexts, overlaid with events from family life. While Ádám Bodor's novel does not explicitly reference the empires that preceded the communist regime, Marta Petreu's work can be read as a relative monograph of the region's political fluctuations, superimposed onto family history: the grandfather wounded by Hungarian officials during the Austro-Hungarian period, and the father who, fearing communist repression, conceals his identity in order to avoid deportation. In this way, interimperial legacies are no longer merely abstract social structures but become visible within family relationships, in the way Tabita perceives authority, traditions, and the values transmitted by her parents. This can also be analysed from the perspective of affect theory, because said family relationships are embedded with feelings of guilt, fear or resentment. They are not truly affects, as they are often named, thought of and analysed in the novel, but they do fall in the range of emotions. Given that affects are tied to the domain of non-cognitive and *Acasă, pe cîmpia Armaghedonului* has somewhat of the character of a memoir,

because the protagonist is also making links between the past and the present, it is only reasonable that they fall within the range of emotions, given the fact that the past is thought of, in this form of writing.

The novel depicts Transylvania through successive geographical configurations, reshaped by each political regime. The recollection of the customs checkpoint at Căian during the Horthyist period exemplifies this dynamic. Space is neither alienated nor dystopic, nor does it bear a visible imprint of interimperial dynamics; instead, it is palimpsestically mapped within the characters' memories. Similarly, conflict is internalized, as characters negotiate their identities in relation to family history and historical inheritance. The hegemonic past manifests itself not only through official history, which Tabita confronts with the familial version of her father's flight from the Russians, rewritten after August 23 ("telling me several times how he fled from the Russians... and my voice contradicting him, telling him that it was not true, that on August 23 Romania allied itself with the Soviet Union"⁴¹), but also through its interventions in everyday life. The story of Mica, kept at a distance from a Hungarian boy who courted her because of the new political realities, illustrates how the historical palimpsest becomes lived experience. Through the institutionalization of the past, the issue of self-colonization can also be raised, as younger generations are taught a counter-history that is contested by older generations but cannot be challenged in the minds of the young due to the imbalance between institutional authority (school) and family. This imbalance is generated by the elders' inability to contest rewritten history as a result of their lack of intellectual authority. This is also a situation in which the processes

of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are made visible. The official history presented in school is a mean of reterritorialization, a way in which the regime asserts its power by reshaping the opinion and the knowledge of the youth and turning them against their parents. The deterritorialization is represented by the history told at home, by those who lived it, as a form of resistance in the face of the socialist system.

By focusing on the family microcosm, the novel highlights the ways in which hybrid identity is negotiated between past and present, across generations, and how self-colonization becomes a subtle mechanism of transmitting and contesting history. Unlike Bodor's absurd and dystopian universe, which offers a *macro* perspective on the ways in which power mechanisms fluctuate and change in the assemblage, Petreu offers a form of critical realism, a micro perspective in which personal and collective memory becomes a tool for understanding and translating these legacies. *Zona Sinistra* analyses the political structure of the assemblage, while *Acasă, pe câmpia Armaghedonului* casts light on the lived experience of it.

Conclusion

The major difference between Ádám Bodor's and Marta Petreu's representations of the Transylvanian space in post-communist literature lies in the narrative mechanisms through which hegemonic legacies are rendered visible and meaningful within the Transylvanian assemblage. In *Zona Sinistra*, Bodor constructs an absurd, dystopian universe in which space, identity and authority appear unstable, reflecting the palimpsestic layering of hegemonic legacies.

Through the arbitrariness of bureaucratic power, the novel exposes the dynamics of de-territorialization and reterritorialization that structure the assemblage, revealing how relations between bodies, institutions and space are constantly reorganized. By contrast, in *Acasă, pe Cimpia Armaghedonului*, Petreu employs narrative realism and familial memory to foreground the micro-historical processes through which these legacies are internalized and negotiated across generations.

Although both texts engage with the persistence of interimperial dynamics, they expose different parts of the assemblage. Bodor's approach emphasizes the collective and abstract dimensions of hegemony, and how it tries to place order in an unstable system, whereas Petreu explores its concrete, internalized effects on the individual and the family. The comparative analysis of the two novels illustrates different aspects of the same configuration. One reveals the external configurations of power that organize the assemblage, while the other focuses on the familial and personal ways in which the relations within the assemblage affect those who are a part of it.

Approached through the theoretical framework developed in this study, that combines assemblage theory with concepts of interimperialism, self-colonization and affect, the comparative reading demonstrates that the communist period does not erase or suspend the imperial legacy, but instead becomes another layer on the palimpsest of the Transylvanian assemblage.

At the same time, the analysis has brought to light literature's capacity to reveal the interplay between history, memory and the structures of power. Through this study, I have sought to contribute to the field of research on identity and historical memory in Transylvanian literature, a field that remains at an early stage in terms of interdisciplinary methodologies combining literary studies, history, and political theory. Finally, drawing on the notion of an identity palimpsest and on interimperial approaches, I argue that Transylvanian post-communism cannot be discussed without considering the ways in which history and identity are negotiated across generations, spaces, and hegemonic regimes, as parts of an assemblage.

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NOTES

1. See Bogdan Ștefănescu, *The postcommunist supplement: The revision of postcolonial theory from the East European quarter in American, British and Canadian Studies*, nr. 38, 2022, p. 139–162.
2. Mircea Brie, *Identitatea etnică în Transilvania (a doua jumătate a secolului XIX – începutul secolului XX): repere metodologice*, in Istoriografie și politică în estul și vestul spațiului românesc, coord. S. Suveică, I. Eremia, S. Matveev, & S. Șipoș, Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2006, p. 174.
3. See Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2020.
4. See Maria Todorova, *The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism* in Slavic Review, nr. 64, Spring 2005, p. 140–164.
5. Alexander Kiossev, *The Self Colonising Metaphor*, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/index.html>, last visited in 19.11.2025, at URL: <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>.
6. Doyle, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
7. Anca Părvulescu, Manuela Boacă, *Creolizarea modernului, Transilvania la răscrucea imperiilor*, translated by Ciprian Șiulea, Sibiu, Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2024, p. XI: „arhivă a moștenirilor sedimentate ale interimperialității”.
8. *Ibid.*, p. XXIII: „teren al pretențiilor teritoriale, al tensiunilor religioase și naționale, și al luptei pentru drepturile funciare și legitimitatea regimurilor politice”.
9. Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Dialectics in Postcolonial World History* in Interventions, nr. 2(16), 2014, p. 2.
10. Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2020, p. 26.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 5: „If we understand hegemony, as I do here, as a near monopoly of the power to name relations and “identities” – a wish to control the terms of relationality”.

13. Martin Müller, *Assemblages and Actor-networks: Rethinking Socio-material Power, Politics and Space* in Geography Compass, nr. 9/1, 2015, p. 27.
14. Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 4.
15. Martin Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* p. 28
18. Maria Todorova, *op. cit.*
19. Anca Pârvolescu, Manuela Boatcă, *op. cit.*, p. XIX.
20. Jason Dittmer, *Geopolitical assemblages and complexity* in Progress in Human Geography, nr. 38(3), 2014, p. 388.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
22. Alexander Kiossev, *op. cit.* p.1.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Maria Todorova, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
25. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Londra & New York, Verso, 1991, p. 105.
26. Martin Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
27. *Ibid.*, p.36.
28. Steve Pile, *Emotions and affect in recent human geography*, in Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, nr. 35(1), 2010, p. 7.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
30. Ben Anderson, *Becoming and being hopeful: towards a theory of affect*, in Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, nr. 24(5), 2006, p. 736.
31. Steve Pile, *op. cit.*, p.13.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
34. *Ibid.*, p.11.
35. Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, *Affect – an ethnocentric encounter? exploring the 'universalist' imperative of emotional/affectual geographies*, in Area, nr. 38(2), 2006, p. 215.
36. Martin Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
37. Jason Dittmer, *Geopolitical assemblages and complexity* in Progress in Human Geography, nr. 38(3), 2014, p. 394.
38. Bogdan Ștefănescu, *Postcommunism / Postcolonialism: Siblings of Subalternity*, București, Editura Universității din București, 2013, p. 214.
39. Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2020, p. 25.
40. Ádám Bodor, *Zona Sinistra: capitolele unui roman*, Cluj-Napoca, Koinonia, 2005, p. 112.
41. Marta Petreu, *Acasă, pe Cimpia Armaghedonului*, Iași, Polirom, 2011, p. 80: „povestindu-mi, de mai multe ori, cum a fugit el de ruși... și vocea mea, contrastându-l, spunându-i că nu este adevărat, la 23 august România s-a aliat cu Uniunea Sovietică”.