Poetics of Denial
Expressions of National Identity and Imagined Exile in English-Canadian and Romanian Dramas

by

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Graduate Centre for Study of Drama
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Abstract

After the change of their country’s political and international statuses, post-colonial and respectively post-communist individuals and collectives develop feelings of alienation and estrangement that do not involve physical dislocation. Eventually, they start imagining their national community as a collective of individuals who share this state. Paraphrasing Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as an “imagined community,” this study identifies this process as “imagined exile,” an act that temporarily compensates for the absence of a metanarrative of the nation during the post-colonial and post-communist transitions.

This dissertation analyzes and compares ten English Canadian and Romanian plays, written between 1976 and 2004, and argues that they function as expressions and agents of post-colonial and respectively post-communist imagined exile, helping their readers and audiences overcome the identity crisis and regain the feeling of belonging to a national community. Chapter 1 explores the development of major theoretical concepts, such as...
nation, national identity, national identity crisis, post-colonialism, and post-communism.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 analyze dramatic rewritings of historical events, in *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt* by the theatre Passe Muraille with Rick Salutin as dramaturge, and *A Cold* by Marin Sorescu, and of past political leaders, in *Sir John, Eh!* by Jim Garrard and *A Day from the Life of Nicolae Ceausescu* by Denis Dinulescu. Chapter 4 examines the expression of the individual and collective identity crises in *Sled* by Judith Thompson and *The Future Is Rubbish* by Vlad Zografi. Chapter 5 explores the treatment of physical and cultural borders and borderlands in Kelly Rebar’s *Bordertown Café*, Guillermo Verdecchia’s *Fronteras Americanas*, Petre Barbu’s *God Bless America*, and Saviana Stanescu’s *Waxing West*. The concluding chapter briefly discusses the concept of imagined exile in relation to other investigations of post-colonial and post-communist dramas and reviews some of the latest perspectives of national identity, reassessing this study from a diachronic perspective.
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INTRODUCTION

Motto: Pierdut identitate natională. Ofer recompensă.
Lost national identity. Reward offered.

1. Personal Motivation, Play Selection Criteria, and Theoretical Sources

To be a post-colonial individual in search of a national identity is hard enough. To be a post-communist individual who immigrated to a post-colonial country and is still searching for a national identity might be hopeless. It is, however, from this ambiguous position that I have started my journey in Canada trying to answer some defining questions: “What kind of nation did I come from? What kind of nation did I come to? Who was I before I immigrated? Who am I today?” As finding these answers was proving more traumatic and difficult than I expected it to be, from social, professional and, most of all, psychological points of view, I was also discovering that even some of my Canadian fellow citizens were not always feeling at ease in their birth country. Some of their general concerns as well as the rather common self-mockery that satirizes and sometimes even completely denies the very existence of a Canadian national identity were amazingly similar to the attitudes I had previously encountered in Romania and to my personal feelings as a “new Canadian.” The idea that the senses of national identity in Romania and English Canada might have “something” in common was intriguing and asked for further clarification. However, a quick glance at the two countries’ political and economic situations seemed to render the similarities as very unlikely. A poor post-communist state, sometimes regarded as one of Europe’s “third-world countries,” could not have much in common with a former North-American British colony
and one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Furthermore, Canada, on one hand, which officially acknowledges its multicultural and multiethnic configuration, and will celebrate one hundred and fifty years since its formal act of creation only in 2017, can hardly be considered a nation in the traditional sense. Romania, on the other hand, claiming “2000 years of heroic history,” one of the most common stereotypes during communism, and ethnically “almost” homogeneous, since the communist state did its best to assimilate ethnic minorities in its “melting pot” for almost fifty years, would easily correspond to almost any modern definition of the nation. Nonetheless, I was living in Canada, I became a Canadian citizen, and my double immigrant perspective helped me see and feel in my everyday new life that English-Canadians and Romanians’ attitudes towards their national identities have had much in common. When the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies occurred, I decided to investigate the matter in a scholarly manner.

After extensive research, I have come to the conclusion that, despite their different histories, Canada and Romania share a number of historical and geographical characteristics, which have proven essential in each country’s nation-building process. From a diachronic standpoint, the two countries were the formal or informal subjects of colonial empires, the British and later the American, in Canada’s case, and, consecutively, Ottoman, German and Soviet, in Romania’s situation, while being situated in the proximity of the twentieth-century world powers, the U.S. and respectively the Soviet Union. From a synchronic viewpoint, both countries entered almost simultaneously post-colonial and post-communist transitions, considering the 1982 patriation of the Canadian Constitution and the 1989 Romanian anti-communist revolution as the landmark events. In between the expiration of a political system and the beginning of a new one, the official definitions of the nation, the collective value
scales, and even mundane elements of the everyday lives were continuously changing. Furthermore, some essential aspects of the ties with the national space, community, and history developed during more than one hundred years of colonialism and respectively more than fifty years of communism in Romania became unacceptable in the post-colonial and post-communist contexts. As a result, the so-called obsession with the national identity and the self-mockery were aggravated, while the most common state was of alienation and unease or, a more common term in the academic discourse, identity crisis. Each country’s characteristics under these circumstances have been explored in depth in recent studies of their history, politics, culture, arts and literature. In my dissertation, however, I am interested in investigating some of the common aspects of English Canada and Romania’s national identity crises during the colonial and respectively post-communist transitions.

Being a theatre artist by training and passion, I found it natural to combine my newly discovered infatuation with national identity with my first professional choice. Furthermore, the attempt to explore the nations’ self-defining strategies as reflected by scholarly and dramatic texts is consistent with the rather common opinion that intellectuals and artists are fundamental in the articulation of collective identities, as they “have proposed and elaborated the concepts and language of the nation and nationalism and have, through their musings and research, given voice to wider aspirations that they conveyed in appropriate images, myths and symbols” (Smith 93). Accordingly, although this dissertation relies on the theoretical discourse of the nation and on specific studies of each country, its main object of study is constituted by a small number of plays, which provide more personal and lively takes on the issues I explore, as, according to J. Le Goff, “artistic and literary works that represent an époque” (in Betea 8). In addition to my personal inclinations, the choice to analyze plays is
also justified by their almost general absence in the scholarly analyses of post-colonialism and post-communism. Theorists of post-colonial arts and literature, such as Homi Bhabha in *Location of Culture*, Margaret Atwood in *Survival*, and Linda Hutcheon in *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* have by and large overlooked theatre in relation to the national project. There are, however, a few who extensively acknowledged and analyzed it. For example, in *Post-Colonial Drama. Theory, Practice, Politics*, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins analyze post-colonial drama and theatre in general as “key sites of resistance to imposed values and practices” (54) with a major role in the nationalist discourse of the colonized people and, subsequently, in re-enacting and reflecting upon the “multiple and varied histories which circulate in post-colonial societies [and] overlap, intersect, and compete with each other” (160). In her study of post-independence Indian theatre, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker also asserts that, among other symbolic forms and fictionalized representations, “the nation is most easily recognizable on the stage, and the recognition is especially powerful when the stage seeks to enact the history of the nation itself” (221).

Some studies of Canadian theatre, such as Brian Parker’s 1977 essay “Is There a Canadian Drama?”, discuss the relationship between Canadian drama and “Canadian experience” (153) from a diachronic perspective. Parker notes the “combination of intense particularity with a sense of arbitrary pattern (which) is typically Canadian” (187) in drama, and emphasizes its involvement in a “shrill, self-conscious nationalism.” Alan Filewod more explicitly focuses on the relationship between English-Canadian nationalism and theatre in several articles, including his polemic essay “One Big Ontario,” in which he states: “Although most Canadians might dismiss theatre as an occasional pleasure and a marginal activity, it has always served as a site for the redefinition of the Canadian nation” (214). He
elaborates further on this topic in his in-depth study *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre*, which provided me with a model of understanding and analysing drama and theatre from the perspective of their role in the nation-building project, which was essential to my dissertation. His main claim, “Canadian theatre can as a whole be considered as a meta-performance that literally enacts crises of nationhood” (xvii), indirectly foreshadows my own exploration of the dramatic expression of the national identity crisis.

Romanian post-communist drama and theatre have not generated extensive theoretical analysis, but the few texts that review it emphasize the active past and present relation between theatre and politics. Alina Nelega’s comprehensive, though short study “Romanian Drama Today” traces major topics and stylistic trends in the works of Romanian playwrights in the first two decades after the 1989 revolution. Without any particular focus on the plays themselves, in *Romanian Theatre after 1989*, Marian Popescu discusses what happened after state censorship ceased to function, emphasizing the clash between the inherited and the developing politics and poetics of theatre production and describing in details some of the internal struggles in Romanian theatre companies and unions. Both texts provided me with a useful general frame of Romanian post-communist theatre, although they barely discussed the plays and playwrights I was interested in.

Much more helpful regarding textual analysis was Mircea Ghitulescu’s *Istoria Literaturii Romane: Dramaturgia* (*The History of Romanian Literature: Drama*, original title and book in Romanian), which discusses many of the playwrights and even works I analyze in this study. From a broad perspective, Ghitulescu explores the impact of the socio-political context at the individual level, structuring each chapter on a particular playwright and assembling them in bigger sections, which correspond to the major political eras in
Romanian history and respect the chronological principle from 1800 to 2008. In discussing Romanian drama between 1945 and 1990, Ghitulescu appears less judgemental than some of the other cultural and political analysts quick to dismiss everything that was created during communism. The decision to comment on the very best and the mediocre, the dissident and the propagandistic playwrights is justified by the fact that Romania is “a small culture that cannot afford the extravagance to forsake any types of values that might help it define its identity” (2008: 191), as he explains in the short introduction to this period. Unfortunately, the section that includes playwrights who started writing after 1990 is not accompanied by a theoretical review of the post-communist drama, and their personal profiles do not seem connected by a specific unifying perspective. On the book level, however, Ghitulescu’s belief in *drama as literature* as opposed to *drama as support of performance* unifies more than eight hundred pages of analysis. This perspective is rather common in Romania, whose playwrights traditionally consider their works as belonging to the national literature, hence their membership with the Romanian Writers’ Union. The tradition of dramatic literary contests is also strong, as well as the publication of plays, which have not been and sometimes will not ever be produced. Although their works are not the object of this study, it is worth mentioning well-established Romanian poets and/or novelists such as Liviu Ioan Stoiciu³ and Emil Mladin⁴ but also professional playwrights such as Iosif Naghiu⁵, who express themselves in the dramatic genre and publish collections of plays, which are not intended⁶ for production, as was the case of the nineteenth-century Canadian closet drama.

Although most if not all of the contemporary Canadian publishers accept a play for publication only after it has had at least one professional production, which they clearly see as the measure of the text’s literary and market value, several theatre critics and historians
acknowledge drama’s literary value in addition to its performance potential. Filewod reads plays as “cultural scripts” as opposed to “stage scripts,” that reflect and contribute to the historical meta-narrative of a nation and its collective identity. From this perspective, he coins the term imagined theatre, echoing recent nationalist theories: “It is worth bearing in mind that just as (Anderson tells us) a nation is an imagined community because no one person can know all its members, so too is the theatre an imagined medium because relatively few people see any particular performance. And only a very few see every show of a run” (Filewod 2002: 9). This concept allows him to re-evaluate the nineteenth-century closet dramas of writers like Charles Mair and Sarah Anne Curzon, which Filewod considers an important part of “a living literature of national dramas that enact the character of the new nation” (2002: 7). According to him, such nineteenth-century playwrights did not aim to have their plays produced. They consciously employed already outdated “literariness and lack of theatrical sophistication” as markers of “cultural authenticity that announced a refusal to participate in vulgar American theatre culture” (Filewod 2002: 8) and achieved their meaning in imagined performances (Filewod 2002: 9).

Whereas my understanding of drama is similar, theoretical stereotypes, which habitually associate drama with text and theatre with performance, made me prefer the concept of national dramatic literature. Created as a result of the nineteenth-century nationalist movements in modern European countries, as well as in the British North-American colonies, this concept expressed the elite’s desire to fuel nationalist feelings and assert theatrical nationhood through “its textualities—not as a systemic of production and consumption but as a living literature of national dramas that enact the character of the new nation[s]” (Filewod 2002: 7). The post-colonial and post-communist redefinitions of the
nation replicate after more than a century the identity search characteristic of the modern nation and, thus, recreate the conditions in which literature and particularly drama generally become instruments and mirrors of the nation-building process. Similar to their romantic predecessor, as Filewod describes it, post-colonial and post-communist dramas, or at least the plays concerned with national identity, are once again perceived as “reflective of the national character” (2002: 7) and as re-enacting and/or prescribing “national models” (Filewod 2002: 6).

The decision to focus on text implies that I address the practical aspects of performance and theatre politics only when they are relevant to the understanding of the dramatic text, exclusively using secondary sources not empirical observations. Also, I chose to analyze a number of published dramatic texts, regardless their being produced or not or being influential as performances. I discuss, for example, some plays that benefited from only one production, such as Judith Thompson’s Sled, Denis Dinulescu’s A Day from the Life of Nicolae Ceausescu, and Petre Barbu’s God Bless America. Denying the production as a principle of selection, I not only widened my selection criteria but also eluded what Filewod identifies as “the canonization of a theatre and drama that reflects the national ideals of the governing elite” (1996: 415), which financially supports them. Consequently, this study joins the numerous textual analyses written by authors, who did not see any productions of the plays they discuss, and in doing so I believe it re-affirms the dramatic texts’ ability to reflect and assert the imagined nation in the absence of performance.

In this investigation, my theoretical frame is based on a number of recent studies on nationalism, post-colonialism and post-communism, with an emphasis on Benedict Anderson’s definition of the imagined community, Anthony D. Smith’s concept of national
identity, Homi Bhabha’s perspective of post-colonialism, Katherine Verdery and Ewa Thompson’s views of post-communism, and Edward Said’s understanding of the relationship between exile and national identity. In addition, I will also use various studies that specifically discuss the topics addressed in each chapter, as well as analyses and theatre reviews of the plays under scrutiny. However, as most of the theoretical concepts I work with have undergone numerous theoretical re-definitions, Chapter 1 will consist of a short review of their histories and a clarification of my use of the terms in this study. Before I begin my theoretical preamble, let me note a taxonomic difference, which might be vital for this study. As Ewa M. Thompson argues in *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, “the English language barely distinguishes between state and nation, or citizenship and nationality. But in Asia, Latin America, and continental Europe it is assumed that nationality has to do with cultural habits and memories of a person, whereas citizenship indicates the civic condition (or choice, in case of naturalization) of being a citizen of this or that political entity” (3, original italics). In spite of its post-colonial status and multicultural policies, Canada officially equates the two concepts, as a quick look on a Canadian passport would easily prove. This study, however, shares Ewa M. Thompson’s point of view and uses the terms nation, nationality, and national identity in relationship to one’s belonging to a specific community within which one is generally born, although it admits synchronic and diachronic variations.

2. The Argument, the Method, and the Outline

According to my research and my empirical observations, political and social changes, such as the ones that occurred in English Canada and Romania starting in the late
1960s and continued until the late 1990s, alter the official definitions of the nation and, subsequently, the national culture, civic life, and even geography. Although the collective national identities of the two people undergo similar types of changes, the historical phenomena and social climate that determine them were fundamentally different. After the Second World War, the post-colonial transition was gradual and rather quiet in English Canada, while the Romanian post-communist period started abruptly with the bloody 1989 revolution and subsequently included several violent popular movements and repressive government actions. In both countries, however, minority groups, which previously were ignored, outlawed, or forcefully silenced, started asserting themselves and proposing competing definitions of the nation. Furthermore, the development of a post-modern type of society, the increasing role of electronic communications, and the frequent waves of economic migrants and political refugees changed the concept of the nation itself, which naturally influenced English-Canadians and Romanians’ self-defining strategies. As a consequence, identity crises occurred, as some individuals and ultimately entire collectives were torn among different definitions of the nation, including the former official versions. In parallel, while they stopped perceiving their national environment and community as familiar, although they did not leave their birth countries or belong to particularly ostracized ethnic minorities. As this state persists for longer periods, it gradually heightened the inherited collective insecurities and inferiority complexes, disrupted people’s sense of belonging, and made them feel strangers to themselves and to their fellow citizens. In time, however, the continuous aggravation of this state determined various forms of its personal and public acknowledgement, which paradoxically helped people regain the sense of belonging to a somewhat broken national community but a community never the less.
Echoing Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imagined community, I use the syntagm “imagined exile” to designate the act of imagining one’s national community as sharing a similar state of identity crisis and inner exile, which does not necessarily imply physical displacement. Temporarily, this connection compensates for the absence of a common definition of national identity and/or a shared will to nationhood, which is necessary in civic nationalism in order for a nation to exist. Let me specify, however, that imagined exile is determined by the pre-existence of inner exile at individual and collective levels but is not the same. Whereas imagined exile is a collective act and bond, inner exile is mostly a personal psychological state. As Sara Forsdyke explains in Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece, inner exile is historically conceived as “a way of describing the alienation of a writer or artist from his native community (...) due to their loss of certain abstract attributes of community membership. This condition may entail loss of belief in communal norms” (8). In time, the term starts being used to designate the experience of all types of individuals, who deny their belonging to any collective and perceive themselves as being exiled although they still live in their birthplaces. In the case of imagined exile, however, the individual not only acknowledges his/her own inner exile but also imagines his/her national community as experiencing a similar state and reconnects to it in this way. Because of its similar form and the frequent loose usage of the two terms, let me also distinguish imagined exile from “internal exile”, which commonly describes the experience of “an individual or group [that] is removed from the immediate surroundings but not expelled from the country altogether” (Forsdyke 7). The internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War, the forced enrolment of First Nations children in residential schools, and the compulsory relocations of the Romanian
citizens of German ethnicity during the Stalinist 1950s are some of the examples of internal exile that occurred in Canada and respectively Romania. In this study, however, I do not take into consideration this type of exile, as it conflicts with the concept of imagined exile. On one hand, internal exile implies an individual or collective physical displacement within the territory of the nation-state, which renders estrangement as a natural effect. On the other hand, it is practically impossible for this type of political penalty to affect simultaneously the majority of a national collective and, thus, to determine a specific way of re-imagining a national community.

To summarize, this dissertation argues that in Canada and Romania during the post-colonial and respectively post-communist transitions, the distortion of the individual and collective senses of belonging to a national community generates a collective state of inner exile and alienation in relation to the national metanarratives, which eventually evolves into a shared imagined exile and counteracts the identity crisis. The plays I selected as object of this study reflect, comment on, and/or challenge a specific aspect of this process, employing perspectives that supersede the local and individual differences and prove similar to the points of view expressed in some of the theoretical analyses of each nation. Furthermore, their authors have publicly expressed their desire to reflect and influence their countrymen’s self-defining strategies, addressing topics and facts that were still collectively underrated, avoided, or even denied. From this perspective, I see the authors I discuss as similar to silence-breakers in the cases of collective denial, “people [who] often try to break conspiracies of silence and make the open secrets around which they revolve part of the public discourse (Zerubavel 15-6). Accordingly, the plays I discuss can be placed in a larger category of awareness-raising works and acts, next to rallies, protest songs, antiwar exhibits,
and so on. However, I only talk about a small number of plays and do not claim that they are representative of the entire dramatic literatures of the two countries. As Stephen Slemon notes, not all literary writings, which emerge from colonial cultural locations, are to be understood ‘as carrying a radical and contestatory content’ (in Ashcroft et al 2006: 103).

Similarly, not all of the dramatic productions of English Canada and Romania address the issues of post-colonial and respectively post-communist identities and/or have political agendas.

My main methodology consists of analyzing and comparing the ironic re-enactment of particular aspects of national identity in ten English-Canadian and Romanian plays, written between 1976 and 2004. As this is an abstract multi-levelled concept, which I will define in more detail in Chapter 1, I decided to analyze its expression through the individual and collective attitudes towards national history, community, and territory, three of the main referents in civic and territorial types of nationalism (Smith 78). Although these aspects usually coexist in individual and collective self-definitions, each chapter will particularly focus on one of them, analyzing groups of two or four texts. Accordingly, in selecting and organizing the plays I followed thematic criteria. However, given the dates of their writing and the historical periods in which they are set, the overall progression of my argument follows three consecutive historical stages: the anti-colonial/anti-communist struggles, the post-colonial/post-communist transition, and the incipient stage of globalization. My analysis of each play will be two-fold. On one hand, I will discuss the plays’ treatment of political and social issues, from the anti-colonial and anti-communist discourses to the multicultural and exilic redefinitions of the national identity. In these sections, I will attempt to support the argument that post-colonial and post-communist experiences in English Canada and
respectively Romania influenced the definitions of each nation and their dramatic reflections in the similar ways. On the other hand, I will investigate how each play expresses and articulates imagined exile, which is the main object of my inquiry. I believe that, during periods of drastic political transitions, the existence of any type of shared experience may be eventually able to counterbalance the identity crisis. By re-enacting the collective inner exile, generated by the end of colonialism and respectively communism, playwrights draw their audiences’ attention to it and make its shared character apparent. Whereas this state is also reflected and commented upon in literary works, films, and daily newscasts, and analyzed in theoretical works, theatre benefits from its live and unmediated effect on its audiences. As spectators become conscious of their common state, they start re-imagining their national community not only as “inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 6), but also as temporarily alienated within its own borders. Imagined exile becomes a form of auto-ironic collective catharsis, which eventually solves the identity crisis. By initiating this process, theatre acts as an agent of the national redefinition, reinventing its social and political functions in post-colonial and post-communist societies.

Chapter 1 explores the development and clarifies my use of the major theoretical concepts, such as nation, national identity, and national identity crisis, colonialism and post-colonialism, communism and post-communist.

Chapter 2 analyzes two 1970 anti-colonial and respectively anti-communist attempts to counteract the official narrative through parodic rewritings of the past, which transparently address the present. The plays I discuss, 1837: The Farmers’ Revolt by the theatre Passe Muraille with Rick Salutin as dramaturge, and A Cold by Marin Sorescu, re-enact nineteenth and respectively fifteenth-century events that depict the ordinary people’s capacity to fight
and sacrifice themselves for their country’s independence and collective betterment. In addition to offering identity models, the plays also mirror the alienation of the twentieth-century spectators represented by the exilic feelings of their historical counterpart, and, as such, help them connect among themselves and enable imagined exile.

Chapter 3 continues the exploration of the history’s role in the nation-building project during the subsequent stage, the first post-colonial and respectively post-communist decades. The analyses focus on the ironic re-enactment of events and leaders that played a major role in enforcing and/or perpetuating the colonial and respectively communist dominations. The depictions of Sir John A. Macdonald in *Sir John, Eh!* by Jim Garrard and of Nicolae Ceausescu in *A Day from the Life of Nicolae Ceausescu* by Denis Dinulescu are discussed from the perspective of the reassessment of national histories. The focus is not on the huge differences between their political personalities, but on the dramaturgical devices the playwrights employ to assert their post-colonial and respectively post-communist political agendas.

After exploring drama’s treatment and re-enactment of the past, the next two chapters discuss plays with contemporary subjects, which express post-colonial and post-communist attitudes towards the national identity. Chapter 4 examines the expressions of identity crisis and imagined exile in the 1990s English-Canadian *Sled* by Judith Thompson and Romanian *The Future Is Rubbish* by Vlad Zografi. These plays re-enact the present in a magic realist style, mixing naturalistic, absurdist, and fantastic elements, but also openly challenge some of the political and social problems dominant in each country at that time and show how the consciousness of a shared estrangement becomes a strong, though negative connector of national communities.
Chapter 5 explores how physical and cultural borders and borderlands influence the construction of English-Canadian and respectively Romanian national identities and eventually determine the employment of imagined exile as a collective and individual defining strategy. The first two plays I discuss, Kelly Rebar’s *Bordertown Café* and Petre Barbu’s *God Bless America* address the borders’ effect on communities, from families to the entire population of a city, and are set in the proximity of physical inter-state borders. The plays I analyze in the second part of this chapter, Guillermo Verdecchia’s *Fronteras Americanas* and Saviana Stanescu’s *Waxing West*, focus on the individual immigrant experience and take place in cosmopolitan *urban borderlands*. In my analysis, I will focus on how living in a territorial or imaginary post-colonial/post-communist borderland forces the interrogation of the *us/them* dichotomy upon the characters, followed by the integration of *Otherness* and the employment of imagined exile as one of the main ways to imagine the self and the national community to which they belong.

The concluding chapter briefly reviews the main stages of my argument and attempts to resituate this study in relationship to other approaches of post-colonial and respectively post-communist drama and theatre. Lastly, it addresses some of the latest perspectives of national identity, in general, and of English-Canadian and Romanian national identities, in particular, re-evaluating this study’s approach on this issue. The numerous nations that had, after political liberation, to undergo similar processes of redefining their collective identities and overcoming the identity crisis, as well as the frequent acknowledgement of the national identity as “the dominant criterion of culture and identity, the sole principle of government and the chief focus of social and economic activity” (Smith 170) ensure the timely and justified character of this exploration.
NOTES

1 In my dissertation I will use the term “English Canada” referring to the English speaking part of Canada. I will not discuss French speaking population and playwrights, which would require a different approach and a special study.

2 Studies of nationalism are considerably more numerous in Canada than in Romania, where communist censorship did not allow any perspective that could have contradicted the official doctrine. Yet, either Romanian immigrant or foreign researchers working abroad such as Stephen Fischer-Galati, Vladimir Tismaneanu, Calin-Andrei Mihăilescu, Katherine Verdery, etc pursued some analyses of national identity.


5 Romanian well-renowned playwright Iosif Naghiu published several collections of short plays without any apparent intention to have them staged. His comment on the cover of the book Teatrul Scurt (Short Plays, original in Romanian, Eminescu, Bucharest: 1999) also refers to the act of writing itself without any particular allusion to drama and theatre: “I’ve never written to mirror reality, but because of an ironic necessity to dream, to believe that in life things are as they happen and yet different. ”

6 The so-called “lack of desire” to have the texts produced might also be determined by a more realistic attitude as Romanian theatres would be financially unable to produce all the plays written within its borders. Although the situation is quite common, the post-communist economical situation makes things worse.

7 In this study, I refer to Ewa Thompson using both her first and last names in order to distinguish my references from those to Judith Thompson’s texts whom I designate using only her last name.
1.1. Nation/Nationalism/National Identity

Whereas historical, political, and popular discourses generally accept Romania’s status as a nation-state and Romanians’ existence as a national people, the particular case of Canada as the continuation of a British North American settler-invader colony makes it hard to argue the existence of an English-Canadian nation. To find some relevant standards of comparison, I examined several theories and viewpoints of nationalism. Given the proliferation in Romania of political parties that use a nationalist doctrine, I need to specify that, in this study, I do not address nationalism as an ideology or doctrine of a particular political movement. Relying on several contemporary theories, I regard “nation”, “national identity”, and “nationalism” as cultural constructs. Their everyday actualization is the result of individuals’ subjective experiences, whose common denominators are represented in the collective’s attitudes towards territory, history, and community and usually legislated by the modern state.

In his 1991 book *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith address nationalism as the encompassing concept of a theory of nationhood, lists the most common of its frequent understandings, and reviews their histories. While even a short summary of his study would take up too much space, I think it is useful to mention that Smith defines nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity, on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’” (73, original italics). It is also important to emphasize Smith’s view that nationalism is not
necessarily conditioned by the existence of the state, as, historically, not “every nationalist movement made the acquisition of a state for its nation a priority” (74). From a similar point of view, anthropologist Katherine Verdery specifies that a nationalist movement, although it may consider the state among its core principles, could refer to “an existing state and its regime or […] some other state/regime, envisioned as more suited to the nation’s interests” (1996: 62). Starting with the French and American Revolutions and continuing with anti-colonial, anti-fascist, anti-communist, and other liberation movements, the collective values of a given people have often been invoked against a particular country’s political regime. In spite of potential political goals, nationalist movements are first and foremost cultural constructs founded on the same type of worldview, which “places the nation at the centre of its concern” (Smith 74). Accordingly, “a great deal of social effort has historically been expended on defining any given nation as distinctive by virtue of qualities all its members are presumed to share” (Verdery 1996: 62), as “a given ‘nation’ has no meaning except in a world of other, different nations” (Verdery 1996: 62, my italics), or, in Michael Billig’s terms, within “a world order of nations [whose] leaders can cite a world morality of national integrity” (4) and convince their people to fight in its name.

In contrast to pre-modern ethnic states, the nation as we know it today is deeply rooted in the people’s consciousness of sharing a common past and territory but also defined by modern concepts, such as “a unified legal code of common rights and duties,” “a unified economy,” “a fairly compact territory,” and “a single ‘political culture’ and public, mass education and media system, to educate future generations to be ‘citizens’” of the respective nation, at the same time homogenous and unique in comparison to the citizens of other countries (Smith 69). In spite of these similarities, nationalist theories and movements and
their corresponding definitions of the nation differentiate from one another according to
ethic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and ideological principles, which they hold at the basis
of their doctrines. Most of the time, some or all of these elements are combined to varying
degrees, although one of them is usually predominant. In all of them, however, the different
concepts of the formation of the nations play the most important role in distinguishing one
perspective from the others. According to Dan Dungaciu in *Natiunea si Provocarile
(Post)Modernitatii* (*The Nation and the (Post)Modern Challenges*, original title and book in
Romanian)\(^2\) the two main nationalist theses are *primordialist*, on one hand, and
*modernist/inventionist*, on the other (377-487). *The primordialist* theories of nationalism
agree that a nation’s formation is “a diachronic long-term process with successive
accumulations, although not direct and continuous” (Dungaciu 380), and sometimes
emphasize the biological aspects of ethnicity. Among the main advocates of the *primordialist
thesis*, Dungaciu mentions Clifford Geerz, Richard Lynn, Anthony D. Smith, Steven Grosby,
John Hutchinson, J. Llobera, John Armstrong, and Walker Connor. According to him, there
are some theorists, such as Pierre van den Berghe, Garry Johnson and W.D.Hamilton, that
support the biologic aspects of ethnicity.

The *modernist/inventionist* theories of Ernest Gellner, Elie Kedourie, Anthony
Giddens, Tom Nairn, Eric Hobsbawm, John Breully, and Anderson (Dungaciu 380), among
others, deny the importance of primordial bonds and imply that the formation of nations and
nation-states originated in the late 18th and 19th centuries, and was determined by the major
changes modernism brought. Accordingly, nationalism is considered to be the result of socio-
economic forces like the types of ownership, the relationships of production, and the
Industrial Revolution (Dungaciu 381). In his 1983 *Nations and Nationalism* book, Ernest
Gellner, for example, explains the formation of nationalism as a reaction to the homogenising imperatives of industrial society, while arguing: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (Gellner 168). Eric Hobsbawm rejects the primordialist theory of ethnicity and substantiates further the inventionist theory of nationalism when he argues in his 1990 *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* that the nation is the prominent result of invented traditions. In addition, he identifies two main criteria for defining the modern nation: citizenship, which emphasizes political participation and civic rights, and ethnicity, which stresses the communion of language, history, and culture (Hobsbawm 18-20).

Anderson’s 1982 study *Imagined Communities* is another major addition to the modernist/inventionist theories and most likely one of the most relevant to the perspective from which I will discuss post-colonial and post-communist national identities. Anderson identifies the factors that determined the creation of the national conscience: print-capitalism, which “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36); the impact of the Reformation, which he considers a “‘battle for men’s minds’ [resulting in] the creation of large new reading publics;” and, finally, the “slow, geographically uneven, spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization by certain well-positioned would-be absolutist monarchs” (40). Anderson concludes that “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation” (46). Subsequently, he defines the nation from an anthropological perspective “as an imagined political community, as both inherently limited
and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never
know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of
each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6).

1.2. Denial, Meta-Denial, and Imagined Exile

The concept of “imagined community” has further fuelled theoretical thoughts, such
as Said’s concept of “imaginative geographies” (Orientalism 1979: 49-73) and also helped
me define imagined exile.

From my perspective, modernist/inventionist theories can better explain the
foundation of Romania and Canada through the voluntary creation of both nation-states
through the union of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 and through the
adoption of the British North America Act in 1867, respectively, as the direct result of
political acts as opposed to a “natural” development into nations. It is worth noting, however,
that if judging the two countries separately, ethnic nationalism matches Romania’s case
somewhat better, while civic nationalism describes more adequately the current situation of
Canada. I was, however, interested in finding a common denominator for the two nation-
states, which I found in the inventionist theory and Anderson’s “imagined community.” The
latter concept is broad enough to accommodate many, if not all, contemporary types of
nations and nation-states without excluding the ethnic principle. The act of collective
imagining, however, conflicts with the frequent absence of the will to share a common
identity in the case of Canadians, and, more pragmatically, to live within the borders as the
nation-state, in the case of many Romanian-born people, as I will explain later.
Somewhat surprisingly, Ernest Renan’s nineteenth-century definition has proved more appropriate for my purpose in this study. Renan disregards race, religion and language as the foundational elements of a nation, and argues:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other is in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is a present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (Hutchinson 17)

In discussing this viewpoint, Bhabha emphasizes that Renan “argues that the non-naturalist principle of the modern nation is represented in the will to nationhood - not in the prior identities of race, language and territory. It is the will that unifies historical memory and secures present-day consent. The will is, indeed, the articulation of the nation-people” (229).

According to my theoretical research, the “will to nationhood” better describes the nationalist attitude in today’s era of international migration⁴, mainly because it implies a voluntary participation in a nation, not necessarily pre-determined by birth. The reasons for which the will becomes relevant in my case studies are paradoxically opposite. In Romania, the will to nationhood manifests itself in a negative way, in the case of many Romanians⁵ who decide to leave the country, while in Canada it is essential in the decision of more than 200,000 people⁶ who annually choose and are allowed to make it their adoptive country.

Some of the contemporary theorists of exile reach similar conclusions in their discussions of nationhood and citizenship although their grounds differ significantly. Said, for example, argues that nationalism has developed “from a condition of estrangement” of people struggling to win American independence, the unification of Germany and Italy, the
liberation of Algeria. A triumphant nationalism then “justifies, retrospectively and prospectively, a history selectively strung together in a narrative form” and defines itself within the dichotomy “us” and “outsiders’ (as in the rhetoric of capitalist versus communist, or the European versus the Asiatic)” (176, my emphasis). In doing this, all forms of nationalism base their ethos on similar components: “their founding fathers, their basic, quasi-religious texts, their rhetoric of belonging, their historical and geographical landmarks, their official enemies and heroes” (Said 176). These factors finally articulate, from Said’s point of view, “the coherent amalgam of practices linking habit with inhabitance” (176), which I consider today’s equivalent of Renan’s “will to nationhood,” Hobsbawm’s “invented traditions,” and Anderson’s “imagined communities.” Dungaciu also concludes that modernist and later post-modern theories reflect a “demythologizing project,” which has changed the attitude towards the nation by regarding it as “a ‘myth,’ a ‘construct,’ an ‘imagined community,’ an ‘invention,’ a ‘discourse,’ a ‘narration.’ A project designed by nationalist intellectuals and then delivered to the people through the nation-state’s organs/institutions” (Dungaciu 467).

In addition to the academic discourse, however, the concepts of the nation, nationalism, and national identity are now frequently invoked in international relations between states and also widely commented on in scholarly analyses, textbooks, newspaper articles, radio and television shows, public and even private discussions. Recently, more or less reliable internet sites have started hosting entries on nationalism, ranging from scholarly studies to personal points of view and awkward personal blogs. A specialized site such as *The Nationalism Project* presents itself as “the Internet’s leading resource for the study of nations and nationalism,” emphasizing that “[a]though it is not peer reviewed in the
and seeks social sciences and humanities scholarly submissions of any length. A quick look at the website’s Contributors and Advisory Committee seems to confirm its professionalism as most of them, starting with Eric G.E. Zuelow, the Webmaster/Site Creator, are university and college professors, research fellows and book authors. In addition to the few texts posted on its web pages, *The Nationalism Project* offers “a bibliography of over 2,000 journal articles,” and links to nationalism-related journals, courses/programs, associations, research centers/reading groups, conferences, etc., which I personally found useful. In his short “Introductory Page” to the “What Is Nationalism?” section, Zuelow mentions “four core debates which permeate the study of nations and nationalism,” that are related to the definitions of the terms "nation" and "nationalism," the nations’ so-called “birth” or creation, their further development and, finally, the relationship between western and non-western nationalisms. While his point of view seems somewhat questionable and its quasi-colloquial style reveals his attempt to reach a more general readership, the section itself consists of quotations from some of the most famous studies of nationalism and, subsequently, can be a brief, but helpful introduction to the topic.

Similarly, *Wikipedia*, one of the most popular, though not necessarily reliable online encyclopaedias at the beginning of the twenty first century, offers an even longer list of books, texts on nationalism and links to other related entries. The entry itself is more thorough, although anonymous. It distinguishes several types of nationalism, most of which are further analyzed in separate web pages on the same site. The main distinctions are determined by the principle regarded as defining the nations: “Nationalism may manifest itself as part of official state ideology or as a popular (non-state) movement and may be
expressed along civic, ethnic, cultural, religious or ideological lines” (Wikipedia). The Wikipedia entry briefly defines various types of nationalism. Civic nationalism (also called civil nationalism) is based on citizens’ voluntary belonging to a nation; ethnic nationalism (considered the dominant form, and often referred to as “nationalism”) identifies the nation in terms of ethnicity, shared culture and language; cultural nationalism defines the nation by the shared culture of its members, while religious nationalism relies on their shared religion. The combination of some or all of these elements may lead, however, to other types of nationalism, such as Romantic, liberal or state nationalism. Furthermore, the recent patterns of international migration and political asylum, internet, electronic banking, and cheap international travel have created a new type of diaspora nationalism or, in Anderson’s terms, long-distance nationalism, which he defines as “a nationalism that no longer depends as it once did on territorial location in a home country” (2001, 42).

From modernist and post-modernist perspectives, the habitual expression of the nation is national identity, which borrows from psychology the concept of an individual’s identity, “the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others” (Erikson 1959: 23). Whereas this concept is usually employed as part of studies of nationalism, Smith pursues its specific exploration in his 1991 book titled National Identity. The main thesis of his study is that national identity is a complex cultural construct that signifies “bonds of solidarity among members of communities” (Smith 15), in whose name “people have allegedly been willing to surrender their own liberties and curtail those of others (Smith 17), and even risk and sacrifice their lives. As such, it is “the most fundamental and inclusive … truly global… [and] also
pervasive… [as] it may also be said to pervade the life and individuals and communities in most spheres of activity” (1991: 143). Although its contemporary relevance and importance are usually accepted, national identity has also stirred countless theoretical and political debates because of its evasive character and the opposite perspectives from which it can be defined. It is worth mentioning Billig’s parodic response to these disputes, as it targets some of the most common challenges:

One might think that people today go about their daily lives, carrying with them a piece of psychological machinery called ‘a national identity’. Like a mobile telephone, this piece of psychological equipment lies quiet for most of the time. Then, the crisis occurs; the president\textsuperscript{12} calls; bells ring; the citizens answer; and the patriotic identity is connected. Actually, the notion of an ‘identity’ does not take the argument very far. It is seldom clear what an identity is. (7)

In spite of his ironic beginning, Billig pursues a thorough study, grounded on the premise that nationalism is more than “one form of identity among countless others […] it is a way of thinking or ideological consciousness” (10). Although national identity is not to be found “within the body or the mind of the individual” (Billig 7), he argues that “notions of nationhood are deeply embedded in contemporary ways of thinking” (11) and each collective is characterized by a quiet but solid “collection of ideological habits (including habits of practice and belief) which reproduce established nations as nations” (Billig 6). Consequently, “the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of its citizenry” (Billig 6), through countless everyday acts and small gestures, from casually passing by a national flag fluttering on a building and paying for bread with the national currency, to speaking a specific language and studying one’s national history, geography, and literature in school. Unless the status quo is
threatened, these personal and collective habits, activities, and occurrences are usually taken for granted. Billig, however, argues their importance in the process of contemporary identity construction, as part of a usually ignored type of nationalism, which he calls “banal nationalism” and which “seems to possess a reassuring normality” (7), even though it lacks the violent passions of extremist movements and situations, as well as the glamour of state-funded national holidays.

Albeit using different terms and from different perspectives, the coexistence of personal and official forms of nationalism and national identity is, however, commonly acknowledged. Verdery, for example, notes that nationality “exists not just at the level of political rhetoric, interest groups, and constitutionalism but as a basic element of people’s self-conception” (Verdery 1996: 95). According to this type of reading, each individual relates to his/her national community through a personal system of representations and symbols, of which s/he is conscious at various degrees (Kozakai 1997 in Betea 39). Consequently, as Lavinia Betea, among many others, argues, collective identity should not be perceived as a homogenous representation, but “as a dominant configuration, which results from the interactions of a community’s members and which is maintained only for a limited period” (39). Although necessarily fluctuating and despite the twentieth century grim predictions of “the end of nations” (Billig 11), national identity is still an active political principle, if we only recall the recent and current wars fought in its name (Billig 1-4).

At the end of this brief overview of some of the most commonly accepted theories of the nation and national identity, I will attempt to summarize which perspectives I find relevant for this study. On the macro level, I consider the national identity an abstract construct that designates a group of individuals, whose similarities are seen to overcome their
differences and legitimize the existence of a national community. According to Smith, for example, on the cultural level, national identity, as its everyday expression, is actively revealed in the collectively accepted and valued “myths, values and memories, as well as in language, law, institutions and ceremonies” (1991: 144), as well as the more official national flag, anthem, holidays, currency, and passports\(^\text{15}\). On the social level, the nation provides the most inclusive community whose members can interact socially as “‘nationals’ and ‘citizens’\(^\text{16}\)” (Smith 16) and through which Other members of Other nation-states are distinguished. On a political level, it “legitimates and often influences policy goals and administrative practices that regulate the everyday lives of each citizen” (Smith 144).

Finally, in a world of nation-states, national identity has become “the only recognized source of ‘inter-national’ legitimacy” (Smith 144) and it has given the “neglected, oppressed or marginalized ethnic communities or categories” the political frame to make their grievances heard (Smith 144). Furthermore, it has also enabled a state to assure its welfare and security, because, as Lowell Dittmer argues in his analysis of Chinese and Taiwanese national identities, “identifying membership in the national domain is preliminary to persuading a citizenry to pay taxes, serve in the armed forces, and otherwise contribute to nation-building” (674). If traditionally national collectives have been perceived as being linguistically and ethnically homogenous and located with the borders of a nation-state, there are now several multilingual and multiethnic states, as well as ethnic groups, which identify themselves as nations, although they do not reside within a specific nation-state or even an identifiable territory within the borders of a nation-state. In this context, the post-modern and post-colonial nation draws together people who are culturally and ethnically different, offering them a commonly accepted organizing principle.
Consequently, at the micro level, nation and national identity are actualized and redefined in each individual’s acknowledgement of his/her belonging to it. In this self-defining process, official symbols\textsuperscript{17}, whose perpetuation is usually endowed and financed by the state, as well as the collective territory, past, and culture, are re-evaluated from a subjective perspective and doubled by a network of personal symbols that help the individual define him/herself and feel anchored to his/her national community. In other words, the integration of collective symbols and the production of personal symbols create different images of the nation and its corresponding national identity, whose common denominators amount to a definition unanimously accepted at a given time by a given population. The perturbation of this status quo determines a crisis of the national identity, on which the next section will theoretically elaborate from the post-colonial and post-communist perspectives.

1.3. National Identity Crisis

The concept of “identity crisis” originates in psychoanalysis, starting with the work of Erik H. Erikson, a former student of Sigmund Freud\textsuperscript{18}, on the development and identity of children and teenagers. Initially, Erikson uses the terms identity diffusion and, alternately, identity confusion, “for experiences in which some boundaries of the self are expanded to include a wider identity” (163). Eventually, he coins the term “identity crisis” (Waxman, “Hegemony Lost”), which he describes as a necessary period in the teenager’s development of an adult sense of self and which can “occur within culturally sanctioned affiliations or in self-affirming groups usurping a place on the fringe of society” and can lead to positive or negative results, such as a “a potent new vision [of the self] or to a retrogressive delusion of acting meaning fully” (Erikson 163). This concept migrated from psychoanalysis to several
and often unrelated fields and now occurs more and more often in the academic, journalistic, and private discourses. Popular dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, define it as a “psychosocial state or condition of disorientation and role confusion occurring especially in adolescents as a result of conflicting internal and external experiences, pressures, and expectations and often producing acute anxiety” (“Identity Crisis”). In addition, a second entry confirms today’s wider applicability of the term in relation to an “analogous state of confusion occurring in a social structure, such as an institution or a corporation” (“Identity Crisis”).

In political sciences, the employment of “identity crisis” was triggered by the emergence of post-colonial states after the Second World War, in studies such as Lucien W. Pye’s *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building: Burma’s Search for Identity* (1962) and *Aspects of Political Development* (1966). Exploring Asian and African states’ attempt to build stable, modern nation-states, Pye argues that the “first and most fundamental crisis is that of achieving a common sense of identity” (1966: 63), next to the legitimacy, penetration, participation, integration, and distribution crises (1966: 62-7). From his point of view, identity crisis occurs because of the people’s lack of recognition of “their national territory as being their true homeland” and of the conflict between “traditional heritage and modern practices, the dilemma of parochial sentiments and cosmopolitan practices” (Pye 1966: 63). Pye also emphasizes that in the new states the “traditional forms of identity ranging from tribe or caste to ethnic and linguistic groups compete with the sense of larger national identity” (1966: 63). The idea of competing definitions of the national identity and of the state’s inability to enforce a dominant one prevails in some of the most recent revaluations of the concept. When comparing its forms in Israel and Turkey, Dov Waxman interprets the
national identity crisis as “a result of the gradual erosion of the state’s ability to define the national identity, and the consequent societal discord over its desirable definition […] which] stemmed from a change in the relationship between society and the state, with the society becoming increasingly autonomous from the state” (Waxman “Hegemony Lost”). Consequently, no single definition of the nation is able to dominate or exclude the others, and, thus, individuals and even entire national communities are torn by equally powerful and often contradictory perspectives and gradually lose their internal cohesion and will to nationhood and experience a national identity crisis. Pye identifies four “fundamental forms” of national identity crisis, based on conflicts concerning territory, class, ethnicity/nationality, and historical/cultural inclusion criteria (1971), according to which elements he considers fundamental at a given time in a given country. These conflicts may occur gradually or instantaneously, at the level of specific social groups or at the level of the entire national community. On one hand, the gradual emergence of a national identity crisis can be determined by the historical development of the modern state into a post-modern one. On the other hand, national identity crisis may also be the effect of the policies of an authoritarian state, such as colonial, communist, and other types of dictatorial regimes, that enforces a meta narrative that is in some way foreign to the nation. In contrast, its abrupt occurrence is generated by the sudden change of a country’s political and administrative forms of government, when the state’s attempt to change collective practices and the definition of the nation generates social conflicts and personal confusion. As English Canada and Romania experience both gradual and sudden identity crises, I will briefly elaborate on how each of these appear and manifest themselves.
Whereas the modernist perspective dominated the studies of nations and nationalism until the late 1980s, the larger employment of civic types of nationalism at the end of the twentieth century makes the continuous redefinition of the national identity theoretically and actually possible, because of its perception as “the constructed outcome of social, political and cultural practices [which are] never fixed but always subject to being reconstructed and revised” (Waxman, “Hegemony Lost”). Moreover, “contemporary globalization is eroding the power of states to define the national identity” (Waxman, “Hegemony Lost”), while the official and scholarly discourses on nationalism merge with more recent post-colonial, feminist, and queer theories, and further challenge the primordialist perspective and its accompanying binaries, including colonizer/colonized, indigenous/alien, us/Other, positive/negative, colonial/post-colonial, and communist/post-communist. As Dungaciu puts it, at the end of the twentieth century, theorists acknowledge that “Our reality is simply more complex than a dichotomy can express” (422). Among many scholars, Bhabha, Smith, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, and Linda Hutcheon, for post-colonial cultures, and Katherine Verdery, Ken Jowitt, Lavinia Betea, and Vladimir Tismaneanu, for post-communist cultures, redefine the vocabulary of nationhood, employing more fluid concepts such as political process, cultural paradigm, hybridity, and ambivalent signifying systems.

Bhabha, for example, in his essay “Dissemination,” denies the relevance of the historicist linear perspective that transforms an event into an idea, and proposes an “ambivalent signifying system of the nation-space” (209) and a subsequent concept of “ambivalent identification” (208). Furthermore, he argues the “cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation” (Bhabha 201), and discusses “the Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the locality of culture” (Bhabha
200), as he defines “the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narrative” (Bhabha 201). According to Bhabha, the “site of writing the nation” is enabled through the process of splitting between “the continuous, accumulative process of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative” that define “the conceptual ambivalence of modern society” (204). Consequently, the “circle of national subjects” is constantly enlarged at the prescriptive level of the state’s official policies, while the mundane and repetitive details of daily life still struggle to acquire the status of “metaphors for national life” and/or “signs of a coherent national culture” (Bhabha 209), at the performative level of the individual and the national community. This point of view is based on a twofold concept of the people. From a diachronic perspective based on a common and pre-established “origin in the past,” Bhabha defines national peoples as “the historical ‘objects’ of nationalist pedagogy” (Bhabha 209). From a synchronic point of view that “must erase” the past, he acknowledges the “living principle of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process” (Bhabha 209). Bhabha’s perspective on the nation-people takes into account the individual expressions of the nation as opposed to traditional more generalizing views: “The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address” (208, my italics). Furthermore, according to Bhabha, “the performative introduces a temporality of the ‘in-between’” (212) because the polarity of “the ‘self-hood’ of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations” (212) is replaced by an actual and conceptual
multitude of nations, each of which is “split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population” (212). This process is further complicated by the post-modern development of the nation-space, which now establishes itself as “a liminal signifying space that is internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural differences” (Bhabha 212). Each of these collectives, although officially part of the encompassing national community, employs a specific definition of the national collective to which it physically or administratively belongs. Subsequently, the essentialist perspective of Anderson’s homogenous “imagined community” becomes obsolete because it does not correspond to a new concept of human community itself (Bhabha 8). The recent and ever-changing perspectives of “sexuality, race, feminism, the lifeworld of refugees or migrants, or the deathly social destiny of AIDS” (Bhabha 8) require new models of cultural identification and political agency, which acknowledge that “the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of ‘other’ people. It becomes a question of otherness19 of the people-as-one” (Bhabha 215). During the transition to a definition of individual and collective identities, which would accommodate current and future mainstream and alternative variants, people become unsure of who they are and what are their roles in the communities to which they physically belong. To paraphrase Julia Kristeva’s title, they turn into “others” or “strangers to themselves,” and harbour individual and collective identity conflicts, as the inter-ethnic wars and conflicts going on within the borders of some nation-states attest. The process through which each national imagined community is generating its collective identity through its everyday life gradually becomes fragmented and even occasionally shattered. A similar development takes
place in countries with authoritarian forms of government where state oppression, overt or tacit, parallels or replaces the natural political and development of modern states.

As forms of subjugation at the national level, colonialism and, starting in the 20th century, communism impose on a national collective a foreign model that is meant to replace or at least to alter inherited traditions, habits, and value systems, and even to rewrite the national history. The individual and collective reactions to these changes differ from case to case, as some people tend to oppose quietly or openly or to accept the political oppression and also the foreign model of the nation. As a result, the citizens of the colonial/communist state experience specific forms of social and political doubleness, paralleled by the internal “dichotomizing of self against other” (Verdery 1996: 95), whose depth and form of manifestation varies from individual to individual and from group to group.

In spite of the initial opposition, the imported definition of the nation gradually migrates from the public discourse into the private one and becomes integrated in the popular imaginary, given the intense and consistent official propaganda that supports it. In other words, some people become used to the imperialistic/communist definition of their nation and start supporting it or, in the case of long-term occupation regimes, are born into it and take it for granted. After political liberation is achieved, the state changes not only its role and status in relation to other states and to its own citizenry, but also the official definitions of the nation and national identity, which it disseminates through the establishment of national holidays, the production of official symbols, such as currency, the national flag, the anthem, the education system, as well as the modified constitution, and civic, citizenship, and immigration laws. Eventually, some of the main aspects of the national culture, civic life, and even geography are altered, in order to correspond to the country’s new official identity.
These changes usually reflect a set of post-colonial invented and/or at some point imported imperial traditions, in the case of former settler colonies, which do not have a pre-contact stage to return to, and respectively restored traditions, which predate the foreign domination, in the case of former occupation colonies and communist countries. Although beneficial in the long term, these drastic alterations have alarming immediate results because, as Pye noted in the early 1960s, “[i]n the process of political development an identity crisis occurs when a community finds that what it had once unquestionably accepted as the physical and psychological definitions of its collective self are no longer acceptable under new historic conditions” (1971: 111). Consequently, the end of colonialism and, according to Betea and others, the end of communism determine a psychological shock that should not be underestimated. The foreign model of the nation, be it imperialist or Soviet, and the previous regimes’ values and mentalities, which have been accepted for decades as the norm by large segments of the population, are now denounced as politically incorrect, historically unjust, and/or morally wrong.

In her politico-psychological analysis of the Romanian post-communist society, Betea uses the term “mentality” as “a particular cognition modality with the function to elaborate the behaviours and the communication among individuals” (Moscovici, 1976, p. 26 in Betea 29). Accordingly, a particular ideology, such as communism, produces, disseminates, and attempts to implement a specific set of cultural, social, and political representations. If their presence in the public discourse persists for long periods of time, they start operating as the unconscious subtext of collective behaviours and attitudes and eventually generate specific mentalities, which become deeply ingrained in the common value systems, traditions, and lifestyle. Consequently, in the case of major political changes,
these mentalities linger in the individual and collective self-identifications, surviving the reality that generated them, conflicting with the currently accepted ones, and making individuals and/or entire communities feel alienated. According to Betea, some psychologists estimate the remanence of social representations at ten years (C. I. Flament, 1995 in Betea 30), while others extend this period to three generations, taking into consideration “the unconscious residua” (Betea 30).

At the end of this section, I conclude that, as in the African and Asian countries Pye studied in the first decades after the Second World War, in post-colonial and post-communist states, in general, and in English Canada and Romania, in particular, at the end of the twentieth century, “people feel pulled between two worlds and without roots in any society” (1966:63). Whereas for the reading of the colonial cultural text, Bhabha proposes “a form of splitting - less than one and double,” I argue that, in the case of some post-colonial and post-communist definitions of national identity, the splitting becomes “less than one and multiple” and results in further, and most often paradoxical conversions of the cultural sign systems which intensify the post-colonial citizens’ estrangement. From Bhabha’s perspective, the process of colonial doubling is “a strategic displacement of value through a process of the metonymy of presence” (Bhabha 171), which asserts the imperial values in the colonized country. Paraphrasing this definition, I describe the subsequent and opposite process of *post-colonial multiplying* as a strategic displacement of colonial values through a process of the metonymy of absence, which structures the replacement of imperial values with pre-contact native national values and/or with recently invented ones. The former are characteristic of the newly liberated occupation colonies, whose native populations strive to reconnect to their previous value systems and national/ethnic identities. The latter are central in settler colonies
after their achievement of political independence. As the descendants of the white settlers cannot return to their pre-immigration value systems and life styles, which do not match the realities of their new countries, they can only rely on the hybrid traditions they developed in their new lands and further shape them to match their new independent status. Although they are not the subject of this study, it is worth mentioning that the small groups of aboriginal people that survived the imperial long-term destruction and assimilation policies in settler colonies eventually may attempt to revive their pre-contact cultures. During the transitional period, however, all types of values are still active in a specific society and some of the imperial metanarratives, such as language, education systems, mainstream cultural institutions, are preserved in the national cultures of the liberated countries as a result of hybridization or for reasons of administrative convenience. Consequently, they directly affect the way the post-colonial nation defines itself. The elusive character of post-modernism during which this decolonisation and decommunization take place in countries such as Canada and Romania further deepens the ambiguity of the transitional system of values and beliefs.

At the performative level, i.e. the everyday expression of nationalism, the previous definition of the nation, and the viewpoints of the political and academic elites and the newly acknowledged minority groups compete against each other. Furthermore, the resulting expression of the nation at the performative level conflicts with its expression at the prescriptive level, i.e., in Bhabha’s terms, the pedagogical level of the official metanarrative and the new model of the nation that are defined and actively disseminated by the state through its infrastructure. The conflict on each level and the conflict between the two levels are frequently addressed in both countries’ media and scholarly discourses, which commonly
perceive them as the expressions of a national identity crisis. To my knowledge, no specific research of post-colonialism and post-communism’s psychological impact on individuals and communities during the 1990s has been pursued. However, the results of the few ethnographic studies (Mackey 2002, Mungi-Pippidi 1995) attest to the existence of a collective national identity crisis at the level of the state institutions but also ordinary citizens, which the English-Canadian and Romanian artistic discourses mirror as a defining feature of the societies they re-enact. As I will show in the next section, this state is partly continued from the previous period and partly determined by the conflict between the remnant and the current definitions of the nation. I will now briefly review the concept of national identity in the English-Canadian and Romanian contexts.

1.4. A North-American Mythology of Dependence

One of the most common clichés about Canada is that the country is undergoing an identity crisis whose main causes are its special status as a former British settler/invader colony and the way the nation was created, on one hand, and the coexistence of multiple definitions of the nation at any given time, on the other. As in many other colonies, which artificially re-designed themselves as nation-states in regions to which they did not naturally belong, the Canadian Founding Fathers and nationalists invented a Western civic nation “where none existed” (Allan Smith 109). Consequently, the formal creation of the Dominion of Canada through the British North American Act of 1867 did not coincide with the birth of a Canadian nation. As a shared past, culture, and ethnicity were not available, especially because of the French-English doubleness, Canadian nationalism was rooted on the community of territory. According to Allan Smith, the basis of this type of commitment is “a
belief in the importance of residence and propinquity, as opposed to descent and genealogy. ‘Living together’ and being ‘rooted’ in a particular terrain and soil become the criteria for citizenship and the bases of political community” (117). In this context, the Canadian government approached the nation as “a political artifact whose construction takes precedence over all other political tasks,” in David Bell’s words (198), and consistently created national institutions and infrastructure meant to unite all Canadians. The Canadian Pacific Railway even became a condition for British Columbia’s entry into Confederation in 1871, and it was followed by the creation of the national healthcare system, unemployment insurance, broadcasting, airlines and so on, all of which have strived to create shared civic values.

However, the pragmatic and premeditated nature of this unusual nation-building process frustrated the young nation of a foundational mythology on which most of the European modern states relied in defining their collective identities. Although in 1960, Morton seems proud of his predecessors’ work, later historians, such as Donald Swainson, explain the English-Canadian sense of identity or rather the lack of it, from this perspective:

Unlike most other countries with whom we share a cultural affinity, especially Britain, France and the United States, we do not enjoy automatic definition through centuries of shared experience, revolutionary myths and heroic origins. Our country was created by straightforward and pragmatic politicians whose strength lay in negotiation and compromise. (Swainson 21).

At the extreme, the lack of a heroic history would eventually foster views such as Seth Feldman’s, who asserted that “the question now is not so much who shall tell Canada’s story as whether Canada’s story is a story at all” (in Wernick 297). In the 1960s, although
Canada was not even granted the right to its own Constitution and, thus had not yet become a modern country in the traditional sense, historians such as George Grant start lamenting the disappearance of the nation and claimed the “Defeat of Canadian Nationalism.” In his essay “Made in America: The Problem of Mass Culture in Canada,” Paul Rutherford acknowledges the predominant bleak image of Canada dominant in that period as “a victim, a vassal state, a perpetual colony, an imaginary nation or non-nation” (Rutherford 279), and the untreatable pessimism with which some of the English-Canadian cultural elite addresses the national issue. In his view, the so-called “mythology of dependence” was first constructed by conservatives like Harold Adams Innis, in *Strategy of Culture*, and later picked up by radicals like Dallas Smythe, in *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*, in order to justify their hostility towards economic and cultural imperialism, in general, and towards the American influence, in particular (Rutherford 187).

According to Rutherford, at its extreme, this concept leads to the assumption that Canada’s national identity is “purely fictional,” designed to hide the fact that “we are colonized - historically, economically, socially, politically, and personally” (Rutherford 280) or, at the best, a bad copy of foreign models.

Some theorists argue that the country’s national identity was defined in Britain, while others claim that the geographical position, population movements, and North American attitudes have made Canadians “American” and fundamentally imprinted their national identity. In *Canadian Identity. Major forces Shaping the Life of a People*, Robin Mathews identifies these two approaches with the “evolutionary” argument and with the “anti-colonial” argument, respectively. In his view, the “colony to nation” thesis refers to Canada as “a country that acts in concert; we care about community; we bind ourselves together; we
believe in compromise, organic growth, development from roots” (Mathews 9), while maintaining the monarchy as the unifying principle. The influence of the British nationalism is historically justified. Montreal’s *Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal* confirms in 1824 the special character of the British American provinces, which is derived from the fact that they were almost entirely inhabited by natives of Great Britain or their direct descendants. Thus, they shared “the same domestic and national feelings as their fathers and their ancient kindred” (Allan Smith 30) and “did not regard themselves as Canadians, but as Englishmen living in a new land. The sense of history of this first generation of immigrants is the sense of history of the mother country, not of Canada” (Arnason 54). The influence of British Loyalists coming to Canada at the time of American Revolution further enforced the values of the British Empire and generated “a peculiar form of coattails imperialism” which substituted for a long time for what could have been a Canadian nationalism (Hutcheon 1991: 77).

Furthermore, Canada still acknowledges the British Queen as the head of state, a political status that demands subjects but does not call for their ethnic uniformity. In this context, Conservative historians argue that there is no pressure for conversion to a normative “Canadian way of life,” which actually does not exist, and that any one, “French, Irish, Ukrainian or Eskimo, can be a subject of the Queen and a citizen of Canada without in any way changing or ceasing to be himself” (Morton 85). Accordingly, the *melting pot* metaphor of the American people is joyfully opposed by the Canadian *mosaic*, a grand design consisting of many different elements, each of which retains its own character and quality while simultaneously contributing to the whole. According to Allan Smith, the term was first used in 1922 by Victoria Hayward, who “described the Canadian West with its peculiar
architecture and its polyglot population as ‘a mosaic of vast dimensions and great breadth’” and contrasted it to the American society (138). However, this seemingly inclusive perspective of the nation was in fact founded on the implicit belief that immigrants would be more than willing to adopt the British identity. As early as 1937, Stephen Leacock, a Conservative critic of inassimilable foreigners, sarcastically predicted, “Leave them alone, and pretty soon the Ukrainians will think they won the Battle of Trafalgar” (159).

The “anti-colonial” argument, however, dismisses Canada’s loyalty to its imperial mother and claims that the country was “kept back by the British, fettered from adopting its true, North American nature” (Mathews 9). John W. Dafoe’s 1935 statement is characteristic of this perspective: “Canada is an American country by virtue of a common ancestry with the people of the United States. Along the Atlantic coast, cut off from people with the aristocratic point of view, they developed an indigenous civilization, now the common inheritance of Canada and the Unites States” (11-12). From this point of view, Canadians are seen as true Americans, although they do not share their neighbours’ beliefs that private enterprise can best serve the country’s needs and that public enterprise has only protected the weak, the incompetent, and the mediocre at the expense of the successful citizens. Mathews ironically describes the never-ending conflict between the two perspectives, which praise the British and, respectively, the American influences: “People who support the first view of Canada are called, condescendingly by their opponents, old-fashioned, out-of-date, living in the past, unrealistic, hopelessly idealistic. Those on the other side are described, equally condescendingly, as sell-out, greedy, ahistorical, anarchistic, opportunistic, and continentalist” (Mathews 9-10). The coexistence of several definitions of the Canadian
identity as well as its simultaneous denial and affirmation have fuelled the inherited identity crisis up into the twenty first century.

Starting in the late 1970s, however, English-Canadian historians, political scientists, and cultural theorists have come to recognize and to theoretically justify the paradoxical character of their nationalism. At the end of his essay “Metaphor and Nationality,” Allan Smith, for example, ironically concludes that the absence of a monolithic Canadianism has actually become the basis for a specific kind of neo-nationalism, which in fact proved to be non-nationalism, since Canada proved to be a non-nation. Marshall McLuhan, in “Canada: The Borderline Case,” also acknowledges the non-traditional history of the Canadian identity: “Canadians never got ‘delivered’ on their first national identity image in the nineteenth century and are the people who learned how to live without the bold accents of the national ego-trippers of other lands” (227). Actually, he argues that not having “a sharply defined national or private identity” becomes an advantage in the era of “electric information” (246), i.e. radio and television in 1970s, when McLuhan wrote this essay, and even more so the internet at the beginning of the twenty first century, which has “the effect of depriving people of their group identities” (247), especially in the case of nations with a strong sense of self. As identities become porous and centralism impossible, the English-Canadian people finally have the opportunity to feel comfortable, as “having learned to live without such strongly marked characteristics, begins to experience a security and self-confidence that are absent from the big-power situation” (McLuhan 247).

Some commentators, such as Paul Berton, Hutcheon, Robin Mathews, and Rutherford, begin to argue that Canadians’ continuous self-mockery and denial of their
national identity are the most eloquent proofs of its existence. Hutcheon explains that irony has become in fact a “mode of self-defining discourse used by English-speaking Canadians” (Hutcheon 1991: 3), as it fulfills the role of an “accessible” way to cope with a conflicting national identity and a rhetorical weapon with which to “address and at the same time to confront any ‘official’ discourse” (Hutcheon 1991: 1). Furthermore, she argues that the doubleness of irony as a trope corresponds to the doubleness of the country, which consisted from the beginning of two societies with their own values, traditions, life styles, and languages, one French-speaking and Catholic and the other English-speaking and Protestant.

Other 1990s historians and researchers, such as Charles Taylor, Allan Smith, J. L. Granatstein, and Eva Mackey, reaffirm the national identity crisis, although with some differences of opinion. In Reconciling the Solitudes, Taylor, for example, distinguishes between the firm assertions of English-Canadian nationalism on the regional level in opposition to its ongoing questioning at the country level. According to him, along with the French-Canadians, many of Canada’s English speaking provinces or regions, including Newfoundland, British Columbia, and the Maritimes, have a strong sense of self, and “[t]he problem of identity arises only for the whole enterprise of which all these are parts” (Taylor 26), which still lacks a “strong sense of common fate and common belonging” (Taylor 27). In the same period, Allan Smith notes the somewhat common perception of a diffident Canadian nationalism, forced to recognize “how fragile and uncertain the structure it tries to celebrate [is], and how delicate must be the touch of they who would work all its parts into a cohesive whole” (128).

Initiated in 1971, after the adoption of the Lester B. Pearson Commission’s Report, Trudeau’s policy, “Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework” (Mackey 64), is one of
the active forms of state intervention meant to solve the national identity crisis. As Mackey explains in her study *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, “‘Multiculturalism’ replaces Britain as a central symbol of Canada” (65), officially shifts from English-French biculturalism to multiculturalism and confirms the concept of the “cultural mosaic,” in contrast to the American “melting pot,” as the essential nation-building strategy. However, from Mackey’s post-colonial 1990s perspective, the new policy also “defines acceptable forms of difference” (66), which simultaneously recognize and limit diversity. As one of the most obvious homogenizing strategies, the state’s support of the minority groups’ cultural activities is limited to helping them “participate in and contribute to Canadian society and Canadian unity” (Mackey 66, original emphasis), which maintains the idea of Anglo-Saxon Canadians as the ‘norm,’ in relation to ‘multicultural’ Canadians” (67), including the French ones. Similar to their parents and grandparents, who arrived before the Second World War, the second- and third-generation Canadians might be easier to convince to follow this model, as most of them speak English, not their parents’ mother tongues, and regard the correspondent Old World Culture “as something to be brought out and dusted off, rather self-consciously, on special national occasions” (Allan Smith 130). However, the twentieth-century immigrants have different attitudes. In *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies*, Hutcheon explains that their relationships to Canadian identity depend on their previous experiences and countries of origin. The ones coming from countries that have never been colonized see their immigrant experience as a conscious decision to change cultures, contrary to the colonization experience, and thus they embrace their new identities, without feeling obliged to deny their previous one. The immigrants who come from post-colonial countries have an acute sense of colonialism and thus also reject the
imperialism of their adoptive countries. However, most of the so-called *New Canadians* eventually adopt the Canadian accepted civic and cultural values, while changing themselves in the process and adding to the collective identity’s “surprisingly unexpected clauses and interjections” (Mathews 22).

1.5. Romanian Definitions of the Nation

Born as a result of the Roman Empire’s takeover of the kingdom of Dacia in 105 CE, Romania inhabits a territory that has always been perceived as being at the edge of the European continent$^{23}$ and the crossroad of the Roman, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and subsequently Soviet Empires. When its more powerful neighbours did not physically dispute its territory, the country had its national culture dominated by the major European civilizations, which shattered the belief in the existence of a genuine Romanian culture and nurtured a continuous state of identity crisis. In the mid-nineteenth-century, for example, Alecu Russo voiced these collective fears, wondering if “Romanians are a nation or a modern cosmopolitan colony” (in Mihailescu 2002: 96). The denial of a specific national identity and culture is simultaneously noted and opposed by local and foreign historians and political analysts. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), one of the foremost Romanian historians, tragically executed by the Nazis, deplores this state and sets out to “easily prove something different than what is commonly being said about us, that our life is nothing else than the result of other peoples’ actions, that we were just a mass unable to have its own soul, to create and develop its own culture, that all we have comes through the grace of someone else” (Iorga in Dungaciu 277). From a geopolitical perspective, he argues the Romanians’ vitality as a nation in most of his subsequent
academic courses and studies, including *The Danube Issue* (1913) and *The Development of Contemporary Imperialism* (1940s). Romania achieved its short-lived political independence after participating in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 only to enter under Soviet dominance after the Second World War, which fundamentally altered the official nationalist ideology and self-defining strategies.

Analyzing the communist redefinition of the Romanian nation, Verdery identifies “a third form of cultural relation between state and subject, the form attempted under socialism—in Romania, frequently using the expression ‘socialist nation’” (1996: 63). According to her, the main characteristic of this type of community, in general, and of the Romanian nation during the five decades of communism is the duplicity of its members. To ensure the complete manipulation of its citizens, the Communist Party, which in socialist countries coincides with the state and the government, institutes what Verdery calls “socialist paternalism” (1996:63). The nation is regarded as an extended family, in which the Party assumes the role of a patriarchal authority, responsible for the well being of all his *children*, and, thus, the only one qualified to assign social functions, coordinate the distribution of the social product, reward, and punish. At one extreme, the main communist dictators, including Stalin, Ceausescu, and Kim Ir Sen, endorse their public denominations as “fathers” of the nation, while their local representatives perpetuate similar self-images. At the other extreme, ordinary citizens are stripped of political rights and individual agency and subjected to moral persecutions that link and subordinate them to the Communist Party in unchallengeable ways. Consequently, they are “presumed to be grateful recipients—like small children in a family—of benefits their rulers decided upon for them” (Verdery 1996: 63). As Verdery explains, all of the ordinary citizens are equally dependent on the state for the fulfillment of
their basic needs, as communist parties level the individuals’ income, decrease gender and ethnic-based inequalities, and “narrow both the gaps and the sources of antagonism among social groups” (Verdery 1996: 92-3). The final stage of this so-called “collectivist syndrome” was the redefinition of the national identity and the formation of a new type of citizen, the “new man,” “homo sovieticus” or “homo communistus” (P. Vayssière in Soulet 158). Its creation remained a general goal in the Soviet Union and its satellites, including Romania, in spite of Ceausescu’s continuous declarations of independence from Moscow. In Chapter 2, I will explain in more detail how abusive economical measures were paralleled in Romania by the local version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which was implemented starting in 1971. The latter required writers and artists to intensify the propaganda of the RCP’s doctrine (Soulet 159), its main purpose being to enlist them as some of the agents of the standardization of Romania’s national culture and, implicitly, of its citizenry. Furthermore, Ceausescu engineered “the redesign of the Romanian territory, reassigning rural and urban habitats, communication networks, and economic activities” (Soulet 158), which attempted elimination of the differences between rural and urban populations. Its immediate result was, however, the destruction of “the individual and collective cultural roots” (Soulet 158) for large masses of people, who lost their traditional homes and communities and experienced acute feelings of alienation.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the second source of the collective identity crisis during communism was determined by the strategies, which people employed to preserve their personal freedom and safety, and by their duplicity. From an anthropological perspective, ethnic identity is considered the result of “an attribution of difference that yields opposed status groups” (Verdery 95). The communist doctrine attempts
to homogenize ethnic differences and denies the division of society into specific groups, although it relies on the organization of people in hierarchical collectives. Conversely, it employs social and political binaries through which it opposes “the representation of the People-as-One” (Claude Lefort in Verdery 1996: 93) to the representation of its internal and external enemies, dissidents and respectively capitalists. From the beginning, the communist universe is articulated along rigid axes, such as us/them, good/evil, black/white, which do not tolerate any exceptions and/or intermediate categories. After a while, a privileged communist elite appears, whereas the common people are gradually alienated from its leaders and their official policies. These new social relationships paradoxically re-assign the status of the Other from the Party’s enemies to its very representatives: “‘They’ were always doing something nasty to ‘us’: ‘we’ suffered hardships while ‘they’ wallowed in privileges and luxury goods” (Verdery 1996: 94).

According to Verdery, one of the consequences of this special type of dichotomy was “social schizophrenia” or “duplicity” (1996: 94) that defined most of the citizens of East-European communist countries. Her field research confirmed that, like in any other family, the “children” of the socialist nation used deceit to evade the patriarchal authority of the Party and the state. In this context, one of Verdery’s subjects recalls, “you developed a public self that could sit at interminable meetings and read aloud the most arrant inanities (even while covertly signalling distance from these inanities as you read), and then at home or among close friends you revealed your ‘real’ self—a self that was, of course, relentlessly critical of what ‘they’ were doing” (Verdery 1996: 94). With rare exceptions, people did not express their disagreement with the official policies in public but in private. Consequently, they accommodated two simultaneous and contradictory definitions of the self, a silent
public one and a vocal private one, whose clash generated unease and, eventually, identity crises. This state was further aggravated by most people’s choice to ignore each other’s duplicity. Although they are first employed as a collective survival strategy, conspiracies of silence eventually have negative effects, among which Eviatar Zerubavel mentions the people’s decreased trust in one another and the loss of self-esteem: “By promoting some discrepancy between what we actually experience and what we publicly acknowledge, they [conspiracies of silence] can also be morally corrosive” (16). In communist Romania, this state of duplicity and denial had two main social and political expressions. On one hand, it generated collective passivity, which, according to historian Florin Constantiniu, played a major role in the maintenance of Ceausescu’s dictatorship for such a long period (488). On the other hand, it led to the development of a “false elite” (Tismaneanu 252) that openly and consistently supported Ceausescu’s dictatorship, influencing the less educated masses and gaining their trust and admiration. In this context, the general perception, widely accepted, was that Romanians are a morally flawed and deeply conflicted people, unable to liberate themselves because of their nature. In 1985, Ana Blandiana, a well-known writer, evaded the censorship and published in the student magazine Amfiteatru several anti-communist poems, including “I Believe” (Rad 3). This negative self-image, which simultaneously explained and denied the national identity crisis was dominant in 1989 and greatly influenced the country’s social and political life of the first post-communist decade.

Another type of identity crisis inherited from the communist period lies in the paradoxical dependence of the private unofficial self to its public official version, as the former appeared and was structured only in relationship to the latter. Consequently,
“people’s sense of identity and personhood required the ‘enemy’ Party, the collective Other, to complete it. Bipolarity, in short, became constitutive of the social person” (Verdery 1996: 94, Mungiu-Pippidi 1995: 122). Paradoxically, liberation brought “a psychological shock hard to estimate” (Betea 31) and the necessity “to adapt to the post-communist realities” (Betea 50) and, thus, it aggravated the inner split. On one hand, the way in which an individual identified him/herself “in strict relationship to unacceptable others whom one excludes from one’s moral community” (Verdery 1996: 95, my italics) was still dominant. One the other hand, it abruptly dissolved the opposition between us, the people, and them, the communists. When the RCP was declared illegal and its almost 3.8 million members mysteriously vanished from the public eye (Tismaneanu 2005: 277-9) and, thus, stopped fulfilling the role of the Other. In support of this observation, Verdery mentions the candid declaration of a group of East European social scientists, who openly deplored their imperious need to replace the absent term of the collective us/Them dichotomy: “We had to find a new enemy” (Verdery 1996: 94). From this perspective, Verdery argues that the ethnic conflicts, which erupted in many former communist countries, expressed an attempt to fulfill this need through the re-actualization of dichotomies that played a fundamental role in the collective self-defining strategies before the communism. Although ethnic conflicts did not reach the level they had in former Yugoslavia, for example, and did not lead to the dismemberment of the national state, as in former Czechoslovakia, Romania also experienced them, especially in Transylvania. The sudden disappearance of a collectively accepted Other after the fall of communism unbalanced the people’s sense of self.

The last source of the Romanian post-communist national identity crisis I want to discuss in this section is the development of competing definitions of the nation. Although
initially rejected, “canonized by decades of propaganda” (Betea 29), communist mentalities and systems of values had been imprinted in the collective imaginary and, thus, survived the 1989 revolution (Mungiu-Pippidi 1995: 108). Consequently, remnant social representations and behaviours were in opposition to the principles of Western democracy and market economy the state started implementing, unexpectedly generating a new conflict between the performative level and the official policies. Analyzing post-communist Romanian mentalities, Betea acknowledges the post-communist consequences of people’s duplicity in words that closely recalls Pye’s conclusions almost thirty years earlier: “The gap between behavioural acts and inner convictions, on one hand, and verbal declarations, on the other hand, is also a premise of the discomfort and high stress experienced after the collapse of the personal and social universe in which the individuals of post-communist societies were born, educated, and lived” (Betea 65). In addition to these sources of inner conflicts, social expectations also changed. For the first time since the rise of communism after the Second World War, moral doubleness was condemned as hypocritical, while breaking the law in the attempt to increase the family income and fulfill its basic needs stopped being tolerated. Some of the opinions Mungiu-Pippidi recorded in her field research pointed out how people who came into adulthood after 1989 were appalled by the perpetuation of communist-style lies in the post-communist society and considered them immoral. Next to their outdated everyday habits, many of the Romanians who spent their formative years in communism still relied on the concept of a patriarchal state, responsible for all its “children”, during the first post-communist decade. As Betea notes, “people wait[ed] for economic solutions through political practices and decisions” (129), attempted to break new and old laws, supported by a state that they still perceived as an internal Other.
The paradoxical result was the emergence of large masses of citizens, who were unable to take care of themselves and adapt to democracy and a market economy, and associated the old regime to “better times” (Tanase and Hodos 1999 in Betea 129). In this context, the results of Mungiul-Pippidi’s field research, coincidentally done in the same year as Mackey’s, confirm the dominant pessimistic perception of the post-communist transition and the older generations and the less educated masses’ inability to redefine their Romanian identity: “‘before I knew what that meant but now I don’t know what to think’ (retired women, 1992)” (129). In addition to the conflict between the socialist and the post-communist definitions of the nation, minority groups, such as the sexual minorities, start asserting themselves and demand to be included in the new concept of the Romanian identity. Although homosexuality was decriminalized only in 2001, the identity problems of this specific community, for example, were brought into the public discourse after 1989 and affected the collective self-definitions.

Like some of the post-colonial English-Canadians, some post-communist Romanians felt estranged in a time and a society they did not understand or they did not accept. Split between several definitions of national identity, both people experienced an acute collective identity crisis, during which shared flaws, shortcomings, and failures, as well as confusion and alienation, became more powerful than the positive common denominators. Among them, imagined exile had the capacity to act as a coping mechanism and as an efficient negative connector in the process of imagining the nation.

1.6. Post-Colonialism and/or Post-Communism

Although a fairly recent term, post-colonialism, also written postcolonialism, has stirred many passionate political and cultural debates, starting with its definition and ending
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with its applicability to particular national contexts. Among others, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins define post-colonialism as a politically motivated cultural movement that is not “necessarily determined by temporal constraints [such as] the time after colonisation has ceased, or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state” (2). From a similar point of view, in her “Introduction” to the 2003 collection of essays *Is Canada Postcolonial?*, Laura Moss notes a current broad and somewhat timeless understanding of the term postcolonial, as “some of what is now carried under the umbrella term of postcolonialism, in fact predates the term” (9). Furthermore, Moss notes the taxonomic “distinction between ‘post-colonial’ as a chronological marker and ‘postcolonial’ as a reading strategy or a set of issues” (11) that is made in literary studies. In this study, I use the hyphenated spelling, “post-colonialism” and respectively “post-communism”, because it better represents my understanding of the concepts. First, I do not consider the hyphen as a marker of temporal delimitations but rather of the relational character of the two terms. As etymology readily suggests, “post-colonialism” and “post-communism” gain meaning only in direct relation to the specific forms of colonialism and respectively communism they challenge and deconstruct. Moreover, the differences between particular experiences of colonialism and communism result in distinct types of post-colonialism and respectively post-communism, which sometimes coexist in one society without excluding each other or are specific to one country or a group of countries.

Second, I address post-colonialism and post-communism from a dialectical perspective, identifying colonialism and respectively communism to the thesis, the anti-colonial and anti-communist reaction to the antithesis, while post-colonialism and post-
communism correspond in my view to synthesis. This approach helps me define the terms as political, cultural and psychological movements that incorporate the preceding two stages, instead of passing over or, from some extreme perspectives, erasing them. Consequently, the hybridity postulated by many theorists appears not only as the natural result of the interaction between the colonial/communist metanarrative and the local one that occurs during the colonization/communization, as Bhabha explains in *The Location of Culture*, but also of the contamination between the colonial/communist and anti-colonial/anti-communist discourses. Furthermore, the dialectical understanding also allows me to transcend historical periodization and to identify the post-colonial/post-communist features of a literary text according to the degree to which they represent the achievement of the synthesis, even if it was created before the official end of the colonial/communist domination or after the ensuing transition expires. This viewpoint justifies my inclusion in this study of two plays written before the events that marked the beginning of the historical post-colonial and post-communist periods, the adoption of the Constitution Act of 17 April 1982, which transferred formal control over the constitution from Britain to Canada, and respectively the 1989 December Revolution, which ended the Soviet-style communist regime and Ceausescu’s dictatorship. I will also analyze plays from the late 1990s and early 2000s, which already express the influence of globalization and transnational cultural and economic exchanges, while still retaining some of the post-colonial/post-communist characteristics.

The third and last taxonomic clarification I need to make is that this study addresses post-communism as a form of post-colonialism, based on communism’s enforcement of a foreign system of values and a Stalinist identity project in the countries occupied or only dominated by the Soviet Union. This perspective of post-communism raises, however, a few
theoretical problems. Although the analysis of post-communist is far from being as
developed as the discourse on post-colonialism, several theorists, mostly Western or working
in Western countries, argue the former communist European countries’ post-colonial status.
The topic was debated, for example, at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of
Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages in Washington DC, in December 2005.
Among other participants, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak proposed the rethinking of the post-
colonial frame to include post-communist nations because “[w]hen an alien nation-state
establishes itself as ruler, impressing its own laws and systems of education and rearranging
the mode of production for its own economic benefit, “colonizer” and “colonized” can be
used” (828). In support of the same idea, Spivak asserted the similarities of “scientific
socialism” and the imperialistic “civilizing mission” and noted the “epistemic change” both
brought (829). Similarly to the distinctions among different types of colonialism, there are
also different types of communization, which the participants in the 2005 debate noted. In
her response to Spivak, Nancy Condee distinguished between “Soviet colonialism” and
“Soviet occupation” and reached an “affirmative, but still unsatisfying, answer” to the
question posed:

If we are speaking of Central Europe, the countries that—some would argue—had a
status analogous in certain respects to that of Britain’s white colonies, the answer
initially, of course, is yes, we are postcolonial. That affirmative is tempered, however,
by an awareness that “postcolonial” might be an unlikely choice by, for example,
most Czech citizens. (830)

As I will explain, the reaction Condee attributes to Czech citizens is also common in the case
of the Romanians. In New World Disorder, Ken Jowitt elaborates more extensively on the
relationship between colonialism and communism and strongly affirms most communist countries’ statuses as colonies of the Soviet Union, at least in the first decade after the Second World War:

The presence of Soviet troops, advisers, and secret police officials; and the imposition of Soviet political and economic models meant direct Soviet domination, with a significant impact on a whole range of immediate- and long-term conflicts, from intra- and inter-Party conflicts to issues of national legitimacy for each of these regimes. (44)

Although he admits that the “Soviet colonialism under Stalin was ‘colonialism of a new type’” (44), Jowitt demonstrates its imperialistic essence, given its impact on the East European communist countries, where it “transformed their domestic social order and international position under the deliberate organizational auspices of a great power” (48).

Furthermore, the Leninist party’s insider-outsider strict division restructured social relations within each communist country but also changed power relations and alliances on a global level, hence the Cold War, as “under the aegis of the Soviet Union, the Soviet bloc was a political entity of insiders versus outsiders” (Jowitt 44-5), with the latter being all of the Western democratic countries. For each of the European communist countries, this enforcement of imaginary external enemies aggravated their inherited alienation on the continent.

In her anthropological study, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*, Katherine Verdery notes the shared theme of victimhood that dominates the official histories and popular mythologies of East European countries: “All across the region, local historiographies represented the nation as an innocent victim, victimized nearly always by
other nations rather than by its own members” (1996: 96). Among other examples, Verdery mentions the Poland metaphor of the “Christ of the nations,” the Czechs’ image of their nation as martyr, and the Hungarians and Romanians’ depiction of their countries as the saviours of Western civilization and Christendom (1996:96). From this viewpoint, Verdery explains that communization is perceived as another form of victimization and, implicitly, colonialism: “In every East European country, most people saw the Communist regime as the imposition of a foreign power, the Soviet Union. For those who suffered under Party rule, this was merely the latest in a long series of victimizations by other nations” (1996: 96, my italics).

In *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, Ewa M. Thompson reaches a similar conclusion, uncovering a series of inherited and contemporary misunderstandings. On one hand, she notes the states’ lack of resource to fund the official study of post-communism: “When the Red Army left Central Europe, the liberated countries turned their attention away from Russia, while the former Soviet republics are too busy picking up the pieces of their economies and societies to afford investment in postcolonial discourse” (2). On the other hand, Russia’s self-produced image, which was collectively adopted by the West, is that “of a victim that has been tremendously creative, a magnificent and geographically boundless country beset by misfortunes” (Ewa M. Thompson 40), which made it hard to associate it with a colonizer. Furthermore, in the early 1990s, “the process of partial decolonisation was generally perceived as decommunization, a view that allowed the colonial nature of the metropolitan centre to slip away from sight” once again (Ewa M. Thompson 40).
In contrast to this rather general Western ignorance, Ewa M. Thompson states, “[n]ot only Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe have been subjected to Russian colonialism but also Siberia, the Caucasus and the Far East” (1). Based on the distinction between the Russian coexistent types of defensive and aggressive nationalism, she explains that, in contrast to the more formal British imperialism, which usually led to “treaties acknowledging dominion status” (Ewa M. Thompson 2000: 1), “[i]n the Russian case, territorial conquests were followed by incorporation into Russia or imposition of governments subservient to Russian interests” (Ewa M. Thompson 2000: 1), which were not officially acknowledged as colonization. Consequently, Ewa M. Thompson argues the “white-on-white colonialism of modern European empires, Russian colonization in the Caucasus, the Black Sea region [where Romania is situated] and Central Asia” (40) and deplores its ignorance in the post-colonial discourse, while explaining the causes of its ignoring by local scholars and politicians. The post-colonial status of East-European countries is, however, still passionately debated and even denied.

Some of the East-European scholars and most of the ordinary citizens still reject the post-colonial paradigm when applied to ex-communist countries outside the former Soviet Union. In her study *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova revisits the historical development of *Balkanism* and its present day definitions from several perspectives, including class, race, and religion. According to her, the European geographical position and the “free state” or “autonomous state” designations dissimulate the Balkan countries’ subaltern position in relation to Western states, the century-long colonial status within the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian Empires, followed by the decades of Soviet domination. However, Todorova declares it impossible for her to use “the methodological contribution of
subaltern and postcolonial studies (as developed for India and expanded and refined for Africa and Latin America)” (16) in analysing the Balkan states, whose status she considers “semicolonial, quasi-colonial, but clearly not purely colonial” (Todorova 16). Although I agree with Jowitt, who rejects these and similar terms, which he considers “too charitable”, I also find interesting that their ambiguous character matches the concepts used in the denial of the post-colonial character of former British settler colonies.

To my surprise, determining Canada’s post-colonialism has been as challenging as asserting Romania’s. According to my research and empirical observations, it appears that Romanians, on one hand, regard being “post-colonial” as implicitly having been colonial, i.e. a Soviet (semi) colony. Thus, they are reluctant to admit it. On the other hand, English-Canadians who acknowledge themselves as post-colonial, take the term at face value and proudly state that they have stopped being colonial, i.e. a British colony. This claim allows them to position themselves as colonized, not colonizers, in spite of their contribution to the colonization of the First Nations people.

To them, post-colonialism also marks the expiration of a subaltern position in relationship to the U.S., which historically replaced England in the symbolic system of nation, dependence that still concerns Canadian artistic, intellectual, and governmental agencies at the beginning of the twenty first century. The comparison of who denies and who accepts the post-colonial status of the two countries leads to some interesting observations. Romania’s post-colonialism is usually denied by the Romanian scholars writing from within the country, while accepted by most Romanian-born and foreign theorists who analyze it from abroad, as I will show at the end of this section. In contrast, the majority of the scholars residing in Canada agree on its post-colonialism, while the answer to this issue of “those
writing *from outside Canada*, but certainly not limited to them, is emphatically ‘no’” (Moss 14, my italics). Moss’s explanation of this phenomenon points out some stereotypes that determine the latter’s point of view:

Broadly speaking, Canada is simply too rich, too white, and too strong to be considered beside other postcolonial locations or in the same politicized terms as other “actual colonies,” to use the term suggested by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. They maintain that there is no need for a reconstitutive project in Canada and that a literature of resistance is out of place in such a comfortable society. (4)

As a counter-reaction to this type of exclusionary views, several Canadian scholars have placed under scrutiny the theoretical concept, exploring its applicability to Canada’s politics, culture, and arts. In her essay “Circling the Downspout of Empire,” Hutcheon, for example, addresses the specificity of English-Canadian post-colonialism from a post-modern perspective and distinguishes not just *between* but *within* post-colonial societies. According to her, English-Canadian culture referred to as “post-colonial” is in fact the culture of the colonial settlers, in contrast to the cultures of the colonized Third World Developing Nations because in countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which she identifies as settler/invader colonies, the English language and culture were transplanted to a foreign territory “where the indigenous inhabitants were either annihilated or marginalized” (Hutcheon 1990: 173). Starting their North American history as British settlers, many Canadians also thought of themselves as colonized people. Thus, as Hutcheon argues, they developed a post-colonial culture that stood counter-discursively against the imperial culture, perceived as “the other,” although it did not subsequently produce a national identity based on shared traditions and values. In spite of a real obsession to articulate their national
identity, Canadians are also defined by a self-deprecating irony on the same topic, whose most accurate representation is the statement of an anonymous responder to *The Canadian Forum*’s 1988 survey: “As Canadian as possible under the circumstances” (Hutcheon 1990: 1).

In contrast, Diana Brydon, in her contribution to Moss’s collection, “Canada and Postcolonialism: Questions, Inventories, and Futures,” discusses the country’s post-colonialism from a similar settler-invader perspective but denies the Canadian settlers’ status of the “colonized.” In her argument, Brydon uses W. H. New’s classification, which distinguishes among “four types of participation in the articulation of colonial culture, the colonist, colonial, colonizer and colonized” (75) and argues that the Canadian settler “might more properly [be] termed the colonist, a mediating figure between colony and empire” (Brydon 2003:57). To the same purpose, Brydon mentions Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson’s disavowal of settlers’ cultural nationalism as a “strategic disavowal of the colonizing act. In this process, the ‘nation’ is what replaces ‘the indigenous’ and in doing so conceals its participation in colonization by nominating a new ‘colonized’ subject—the colonizer or settler-invader” (Brydon 2003:57). She also acknowledges “residual colonialisms still dominant in Canadian society” (Brydon 2003:49) and still active “‘relations of privilege and penalty’ that colonialism has constructed for us […] in a settler state that has not addressed the full implications of its invader status” (Brydon 2003:62). From this perspective, Brydon pleads for “a politics of accountability before we can speak of Canada as a decolonized space” (51) and quotes Sherene H. Razack who similarly explains, “[a]ccountability begins with tracing relations of privilege and penalty. It cannot proceed
unless we examine our complicity” (Brydon 2003:61). Consequently, Brydon defines

postcolonialism as the survival of the past into the present:

The “post” does not refer to the end of colonialism, but rather to what was formed
under colonialism and remains after official colonialism is abandoned and
colonialism begins to be recognized as a major component of modernity. The “post”
in “postcolonial” refers to the survival of certain ways of seeing and not-seeing from
the past into the present.

(Brydon 2003:56)

Brydon’s conclusion reiterates in fact the impossibility to provide a definite answer to
the question “Is Canada postcolonial?” and echoes the common English-Canadian auto-
irony. As she puts it, Canada is “[p]ostcolonial if necessary, but not necessarily postcolonial,
as both Mackenzie King28 and Linda Hutcheon would have it. […] This is not a bad answer
and may be the best we can provide” (Brydon 2003:49). Her final plea is for the
reassessment of cultural and political issues “from alternative cultural frameworks of value”
(Brydon 2003:69) and for “the need to move beyond a politics of representation toward a
politics of accountability” (Brydon 2003:73). Consistently, her essay “Is There a Politics of
Postcoloniality?” reviews some of the most recent and/or famous theories of post-
colonialism, and argues the necessity of rethinking the post-colonial studies from the
perspective of globalization. Brydon addresses some of the “limiting standpoints that inhibit
the productivity of a politics of postcoloniality - the “politics of blame;” strategies of “them
and us;” the assumptions behind “speaking truth to power,” and the now misused phrase,
“the personal is political” (Brydon 2006). She also points out alternative concepts, such as
Dipesh Chakrabarty’s “politics of despair” and James (Sakéj) Youngblood Henderson’s
metaphorical concept of “postcolonial ghost dancing” (Brydon 2006). Eventually, she reiterates Bonnie Honig’s argument for expanding “the dilemmatic spaces” of endeavour and Chakrabarty and Etienne Balibar’s emphasis on the current need to think beyond the nineteenth-century notion of the citizen (Brydon 2006).

The redefinition of the post-colonial paradigm is also undertaken in some mainstream studies, some of which make direct references to the Canadian experience. In their 1989 seminal study *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft *et al* challenge the traditional dichotomies of “social alienation such as master/slave free/bonded; ruler/ruled” (9), which exclusively explain alienation as a result of “overtly oppressive forms of colonization such as slavery or conquest” (9). They argue that, beyond historical and cultural differences, the “alienation of vision and the crisis in self-imagine” which the displacement produces in the case of enslaved populations transported to other countries, can also be found in the accounts of all categories of post-colonial individuals, including the “Canadian ‘free settlers’” (Ashcroft *et al* 1989: 9), despite the latter’s status as free citizens. Drawing on D. E. S. Maxwell, among others, Ashcroft *et al* explain that different strategies of colonization may have similar effects:

> A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (1989: 9, my italics)

Many scholars, writers, and theatre professionals now agree that excluding Canada and the other former settle/invader colonies from post-colonial studies would be a “remarkably purist
and absolutist” (104) understanding of the term, as Slemon argues in his article “Unsettling the Empire.”

Regarding Romania as a post-communist country was a matter of simply acknowledging the historical timeline but arguing its post-colonial status has indeed proven a difficult task. Whereas Canadians participated in global and local theoretical debates to claim their post-colonial status, most of the Romanians theorists seem, however, ready to do exactly the same for the opposite result. During communism, the struggles against consecutive foreign occupations prior to 1945 have been overtly praised, but the country’s subaltern status in relation to the neighbouring empires and subsequently to the Soviet Union was tacitly ignored by historians and stridently denied by Ceausescu through his nationalist discourse and external policy. Subsequently, the country’s post-colonial status has also been generally ignored, and, on the rare occasions when the issue was addressed in historical or literary analyses, the concept was more often than not discarded as inappropriate. This phenomenon appears more general. Although she does not elaborate on this issue, Ewa M. Thompson also notes that “the white Europeans subjected to Russia’s or Germany’s (or imperial Turkey’s, in centuries past) colonial drive are dead last in coming to a realization that they were in fact colonial subjects. They have looked at their Russian or Turkish or German occupiers as the people who won a war against them, not as those who engaged in a long-term colonist project” (40).

Literary theorist and historian Ioan Bogdan Lefter has one of the few open perspectives on the issue of Romania’s post-colonial character. In an article whose titles closely recalls Moss’s collection of essays, “Poate fi considerat postcommunismul un post-colonialism?” (“Can Post-communism Be Considered a Post-Colonialism?”), original title and
article in Romanian), Lefter confesses his astonishment when he learned that his text about
the Romanian post-communist book market was commissioned by the Canadian Review of
Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Litterature Comparée for a 1995 issue
dedicated to post-colonialism. He retroactively explains that his reaction was determined by
the concept’s almost complete absence in the cultural and literary discussions of the time:
“Here [in Romania, my note], such a thing was unheard of– and the term isn’t used today
either. Maybe because it wouldn’t suit us –would it?– to regard ourselves as ‘post-colonial’”
(23). After he ironically acknowledges Romanians’ collective perception of the term as an
inferiority label, Lefter attempts a more academic, though brief, analysis in which he
assumes the role of the Devil’s Advocate and convincingly argues the two opposite positions.

In contrast to the “colonized” Soviet Republics, he first demonstrates that
communism was not a form of colonialism in Romania. Among his main arguments, he
mentions the country’s official independent status, the power of the local “national-
communism,” and the preservation of the national language: “In truly colonial countries,
empires imposed their languages and cultures […]]. Neither Romania nor other Central
European countries didn’t become Russophone during the decades of communist
‘occupation’” (Lefter 25). Lefter then argues that communism was a form of colonialism in
Romania because the country’s most praised political independence was de facto a form of
“dependence of a colonial (or, let’s admit it, semi-colonial) type” (25). Starting with the
severe domination in the first decade after the Second World War, continuing with the lighter
political control in the 1970s-80s, and ending with the direct influence of glasnost and
perestroika at the end of the 1980s, Romanian internal and external politics was actually
determined by Moscow, and even enforced by the Red Army until 1957. In support of this
argument, he even recalls a Romanian joke from the 1950s that speaks of the country’s complete subordination at that time: “When someone coughs in the Kremlin, someone catches cold in Bucharest” (Lefter 25). Regarding the national culture, Lefter is firmer when he describes the Soviet colonizing strategies: “The empire used all means to impose its culture: soviet propaganda, socialist realism, And Quiet Flows the Don, and many other things were “exported” to us” (26, my italics). Although he does not highlight this aspect, let me note that these cultural “imports” have come together with their Russian denominators, which were adopted by Romanian language and some of which remained in use after 1989.

In arguing the colonial thesis, his most interesting observations are, however, on Romanian collective psychology, which Mungiuk-Pippidi investigates in her in-depth ethnographic study Romanians after 1989. The Story of a Misunderstanding, published in 1995, the same year when Lefter was surprised to find out that Canadians regarded him as post-colonial. Among many other theorists, Lefter and Mungiuk-Pippidi consider the fear of responsibilities and, implicitly, of personal independence, which is still a common characteristic in the first decade after 1989, as the direct result of Romanian communist government’s paternalist attitude and military-like dictatorship. Similar observations are quite frequent in Western studies of communism, which cite them as proof of the communist parties’ imperialistic strategies. In his investigation of the “communist extinction,” American professor Ken Jowitt emphasizes the role of the communist dictatorship in generating a state of collective dissimulation, which “reflected the fear and avoidance responses of a subordinate population: the need to deflect the Party’s attention from possible or real underfulfillment of tasks, and its unchecked penetration of one’s private’s life” (288, my italics). Vladimir Tismaneanu, a Romanian-born American professor, describes the collective
alienation determined by communism in a way that reminds of the colonized populations, isolated by the invaders in ethnic reserves or remote locations, when not exterminated or forced to leave their territory: “Confronted with increasing repression, outrageous economic mismanagement, and social and political paralysis, Romanians had to choose between internal exile –silent survival in their homeland– and emigration” (2003: 217). Lefter also sees in his fellow citizens the state noted by the American professors and explains it in the same way: “the passive attitude of many of your contemporaries can be read as the expression of the collective psychology of a people ‘under siege’” (25). At the end of this article, he admits the existence of “some colonial (or semi-colonial) aspects” and the post-colonial model’s value in analyzing and understanding recent history. However, Lefter firmly rejects the post-colonialism of Romania and the other East-European ex-communist countries, which did not belong to the former Soviet Union because he considers that “the profile of our societies and countries cannot be defined in post-colonial terms” (26).

Adrian Otoiu has a position more open and in many aspects similar to my standpoint. In his essay “An Exercise in Fictional Liminality: the Postcolonial, the Postcommunist, and Romania’s Threshold Generation” (Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 2003), he argues the applicability of the post-colonial concepts in the analysis of prose written in the 1980s in communist Romania and explains the challenges he encountered in his research. According to his empiric observations, although most of the post-colonial scholars are aware that they belong to a more general discourse, the post-totalitarian legacy did not produce a “common theoretical ground” (Otoiu 89) among the scholars from post-communist countries. Thus, they do not attempt to overcome the language barriers and read each other’s works. At “The Translatability of Cultures” conference he
attended in Stuttgart in 1998, Otoiu observed first hand the contrasting behaviour of Western and East-European scholars when meeting in person: “while the former colonizers and colonized were discussing postcolonial matters over a glass of Swabian wine at ‘Mon Repos,’ the few postcommunist fellows sat isolated from one another on park benches and drank nothing but thin air” (Otoiu 88). Otoiu gained the same impression during the 2003 summer course “Cultural Diversities East and West: Postcolonialism, Postcommunism, and Ethnicity,” he and others organized at the Central European University in Budapest. Even worse than ignoring each other, as it happened in Stuttgart five years before, this time the Russian theorists “felt incriminated when we [the participants] tried to describe the U.S.SR as an imperial and possibly colonial power” (Otoiu 89).

In addition to the inherited tensions and barriers on the continental level, the expected “trial of communism” (Otoiu 89) and the re-evaluation of the recent history did not happen on the local level. These facts prevented the apparition of post-communist studies as a discipline with a specific critical paradigm, which could have encompassed the individual experiences and paralleled the post-colonial discourse. The few studies that dealt with post-communism addressed only the situation in a particular country or a geographic region, as in the case of Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, which I already mentioned. Paradoxically, Romanian post-communism seems to have benefited from the least theoretical attention, as it falls out of the interest of post-Soviet studies, which omit the entire Eastern Europe, but also of Balkan and South-Eastern European Studies, which ignore everything North of the Danube river, and also of the Slavic Studies, as the Romanian language belongs to the Romance group. Consequently, as Otoiu’s findings and my own research confirm, the attempt to assess the Romanian post-communism is further complicated by small number of
studies that address it and by its almost complete absence in more synthetic overviews. As I have found his article after most of my dissertation was already written and incorporated his observations in my theoretical chapter in the final stage of revising it, it was interesting to discover that Otoiu and I shared some common beliefs. As we both think that “different historical forces may end up producing similar effects” (Otoiu 91), we also considered it justified to “borrow postcolonial terminology and even to adapt it to our needs as long as it casts a new light on the realities we scrutinize [because] if two diseases happen to produce the same symptoms, we tend to describe those symptoms in the same terms” (Otoiu 91). In his doctoral dissertation, whose theoretical frame is described in this article, Otoiu demonstrates the relevance of post-colonial concepts, such as hybridity, ambiguity, double-codedness, and liminality, when applied to the Romanian context during and after the end of communism. He also notes the similarities of Romanian and Western self-defining strategies: “Just as in the case of postcolonial nations or of diasporic groups, postcommunist identities are often painfully dilemmatic, fragmented and inevitably hybrid” (Otoiu 94). Accordingly, he feels entitled to use post-colonial concepts in his analysis of the so-called “1980s Generation” of Romanian writers’ prose.

The term “post-colonialism” remains, however, in much dispute in English Canadian academic studies, which are now fragmented into several distinct disciplines - Canadian, Indigenous, Post-Colonial, Diasporic, Cultural, Intercultural, Transnational, Literary, Immigrant, Women’s, Queer Studies, etc. The argument that has emerged questions an essentialist construction of “Canada,” on which a concept such as post-colonialism must rely, as some people believe that the country is not any longer united from sea-to-sea through an nation-building project, if it ever was. However, others re-affirm the existence of a Canadian
nation. These contradictory feelings were already strong at the end of the 1970s, when the first plays I analyze in my dissertation were written. In “A Summary of the ‘Options’ Conference on the Future of the Canadian Federation, 15 October 1977” (Northrop Frye on Canada, 532-40), Northrop Frye states “Canada seems to have moved from a prenational to a postnational phase of existence without ever having been a nation” (532), echoing similar opinions. However, Frye also mentions that some of the other participants at the same conference had opposite views. For example, he quotes Richard Lipsey, a Canadian economist and academic, who is now an Officer of the Order of Canada and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, to have said “that Canadian identity is an obsolete problem, being already there” (Frye 534). Twenty years later, a similar belief structures W. H. New’s 1998 Borderlands, in which he explicitly states “I see the reality of ‘Canadian culture’ as a given, not as a feu-follet whose existence needs to be argued; it is the outward expression of the working principles of Canadian social values, which repeatedly undergoes change because the ‘values’ themselves (neither fixed nor universal, except, perhaps, in theory), also undergo change” (40).

Whereas I acknowledge the coexistence of several diachronic and synchronic definitions of the country, I believe that the ongoing denial of a Canadian nationhood paradoxically re-affirms it although in new terms. Beyond Canada’s obvious and formal participation as a nation in a world of nation-states, the world itself is changing. The twenty first-century “global village” and electronic communities resemble Canada more and more and make the stereotypical binary systems “of Europe and its Others, of colonizers and colonized, of the West and the Rest” (Slemon 2006: 104) appear outdated, while simultaneously reinventing and reinforcing the national paradigm, together with passports,
currency, *no-flight* lists, inter-national competitions, and ethnic jokes. The recent acknowledgment of the communization of Central and Eastern Europe as a form of Soviet imperialism makes it possible for me to employ post-colonial concepts in addressing post-1989 Romania. Furthermore, contemporary redefinitions of the national and post-colonial paradigms allow me to argue the post-colonial status of both Canada and Romania and its role in generating the collective identity crisis and the subsequent imagined

Although many of the secondary sources I researched proved the validity of this argument in the cases of other former settler colonies and communist countries, this study only explores a few particular aspects of post-colonial and post-communist paradigms as expressed in a small number of English Canadian and Romanian plays. However, it might be later developed to look at more plays and/or more aspects of post-colonialist and post-communist transitions, in Canada, Romania, and elsewhere from the perspective of imagined exile. At the present stage, however, the post-colonial argument helps me theoretically justify my comparison. In addition, on the national level, as I will explain in each chapter in more detail, in spite of the obvious historical differences, there are a number of similarities of the specific experiences of colonialism and respectively communism that in turn have subsequent similar consequences on the people’s self-defining strategies. For example, the English-Canadians’ relation to the British Imperial centre and the Queen and later to the Americans is similar, as a subaltern condition, to the Romanians’ relation to *Mother Russia* and Stalin, the Father of the People, and later to Ceausescu, who overtook this symbolic position in the country’s official discourse. Also, the two countries share a second world status, which was heightened during the twentieth-century Cold War, given their
geographical proximity to the main world powers, the U.S. and respectively the Soviet Union.

The individuals’ personal experiences of colonization and respectively communization also share some common traits. For example, in both countries some people have the double status of agents and victims of the imperial project. The Canadian settlers are “complicit in colonialism’s territorial appropriation of [First Nations’] land, and voice, and agency” of (Slemon 106) while in turn feeling colonized and being exploited by the imperial representatives and local elite. Similarly, the Romanian workers and peasants who voluntarily contribute or tacitly benefit from the expropriation of lands, factories, and homes, are in fact actively participating in the communization of the country. At the same time, however, the aggressive collectivization of the farming lands and the Russian domination in the 1950s-60s, followed by Ceausescu’s cult of personality after 1968 make most of them develop the mentality and behaviour of colonized people. These ambiguous statuses lead, in both countries, to the comparable absence of “a stable self/other, here/there binary division” and the “internalization of the self/other binary of colonialist relations” that Slemon argues when discussing Canada’s post-colonial status (2006: 106).

Most of all, however, Canada and Romania hold in common the process of transitioning from a subaltern to an independent status, which determines the coexistence of several definitions of the national identity and, implicitly, of specific types of identity crisis and imagined exile, which constitute the main object of this study. Similar to any other cultural identity and activity, national identity is also “constructed by multiple agents in varying contexts and places” (George Marcus in Mackey 6) and can, thus, be analyzed diachronically and/or synchronically at the personal and local levels, as well as the state and
inter-state levels. This study explores, however, the dramatic re-enactment of what I could call, echoing Billig’s concept, the banal crisis of national identity, as it occurs in the dramatic re-enactment of ordinary people’s everyday struggle to come to terms with the inherited denial of the very existence of their national identity, or, at the very least, its mockery, and the revaluation of the individual and collective relations to national symbols, such as history, territory, and community. My hope is that the analysis of a number of English-Canadian and Romanian plays will reveal interesting aspects of post-colonialism and post-communism and also of people’s struggle for cultural and psychological self-determination in the contemporary world.

NOTES

1 This exclusively political perspective has, however, become rather common to the extent that a popular encyclopaedic site such as Wikipedia defines nationalism as: “Nationalism is an ideology which holds that the nation, ethnicity or national identity is a "fundamental unit" of human social life, and makes certain cultural and political claims based upon that belief; in particular, the claim that the nation is "the only legitimate basis for the state", and that "each nation is entitled to its own state". […] Nationalism also refers to the specific ideology of nationalist movements, which make cultural and political claims on behalf of specific nations“ (<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_nationalism>, 12.03.2006).

2 Unless otherwise specified, all translations of Romanian texts into English are mine.

3 Partha Chatterjee’s essay “Nationalism as a Problem in the History of Political Ideas” is a very interesting critique of the theories of Elie Kedourie, John Plamenatz, Ernest Gellner, and Benedict Anderson. The novelty of his approach consists in arguing the substantive similitude between Anderson’s and Gellner’s positions, usually perceived as being in a conceptual opposition: “What … are the differences between Anderson and Gellner on 20th century nationalism? None. Both point out a fundamental change in ways of perceiving the social world which occurs before nationalism can emerge…” (21).
On the UNESCO website it is noted: “In 2000, there were 175 million international migrants in the world, that is, one out of every 35 persons in the world was an international migrant. This total represented more than a twofold increase from 76 million in 1960. By comparison, the world population only doubled from 3 billion in 1960 to 6 billion in 2000. As a result, international migrants represented 2.5 per cent of the world population in 1960 and 2.9 per cent in 2000” (“International Migration”).

In 2003, Romania’s population was estimated by the United Nations at 22,334,000 (“Romania,” Encyclopedia of the Nations, <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Europe/Romania-POPULATION.html>). In addition to this, more than 10 million Romanian-born people are estimated to live abroad, both legally and illegally. (“Milioane de romani”.

According to the World Migration 2005 report, “By 2000, Canada was hosting 5.8 million foreign-born residents [...] in 2000-2002, immigration to Canada rose above the previously recorded levels to an annual average of 238,000 (i.e. above the planned range of 200,000 - 225,000).” (“International Migration” 11). Canada’s 2002s Immigration and Refugee Protection Act modernizes the immigration policy and increases the annual immigration rate: “The government's long-term objective is to move gradually to immigration levels of approximately one percent of Canada's population, while bearing in mind Canada's absorptive capacity. For a variety of reasons -- primarily Canada's popularity as a place to live -- the number of people who want to come to Canada is much greater than the number of foreign nationals Canada plans to admit in a given year (“Managing the volume of immigration.”).

Searching for “nationalism,” google.com found 15,400,000 web pages on which there is some kind of definition for nationalism in 0.03 seconds. Google, <http://www.google.ca/search?hl=en&q=nationalism&meta=>, 20.01.2007. I find this relevant for the current infatuation with nationalism.

According to his short biography on the Nationalism Project web site, Eric G.E. Zuelow is Assistant Professor of European and World History at West Liberty State College, WV, co-editor of Nationalism in a Global Era: The Persistence of Nations (forthcoming from Routledge, March 2007) and author of Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War (currently under review). For a complete list of past and present contributors, please go to < http://www.nationalismproject.org/contrib.htm >.

Zuelow strives to explain nationalist phenomena in a simple way, as is readily apparent in the following explanation: “ Nationalists argue that nations are timeless phenomena. When man climbed out of the primordial slime, he immediately set about creating nations. The next major school of thought is that of the perennialists who argue that nations have been around for a very long time, though they take different shapes at different points in history” (Zuelow).
In his selection of definitions of the nation, Zuelow mentions the viewpoints of Benedict Anderson, Richard Handler, Ernest Gellner, John Breuilly, Miroslav Hroch, Ernest Renan, Michael Billig, Rogers Brubaker, and Michael Hechter.

Smith mentions, however, that there are records of nationalist movements “among populations with little or no national consciousness or sentiment” such as the ones of the British African colonies of Ivory Coast and Nigeria (72). Moreover, his definitions of the “nation” and “the national identity” appear to overlap, as both are identified as the production of nationalist movements and promoters.

Billig refers to the public reaction to George W. Bush’s official discourse before the beginning of the Gulf War and Margaret Thatcher’s position regarding the Falkland Islands crisis as his main examples in the introduction.

Billig, however, makes it clear that banal nationalism is neither innocent nor harmless, as in Western states “it is reproducing institutions which possess vast armaments” (7), ready to be used with the public support and approval in the name of a politically bound ideal of nationhood, as the Gulf and Falklands wars have proven.

Exploring Chinese and Taiwanese identities, Dittmer also states, “‘national identity’ is not a fixed attribute but the result of a process of identification, the substantive outcome of which varies over time” (675).

Until the introduction of the euro, currency was also accepted as one of the symbols and unique characteristics of a nation. There are, however, members of the European Union, such as Romania, who still use national currencies on the internal market.

It is interesting to note that theorists and scholars from other parts of the world than North America distinguish between “nation” and “citizenry” but not between “ethnicity” and “nation”. That makes it possible for Flahive, a student in Law/Asian Studies at Australian National University, to state that “[s]ome nations, like the Hmong, are spread across numerous nation-states” (149). A North American text would most likely consider such a population an ethnicity. That is not to say that Flahive does not explore the different ways of defining the nation according to the ethnic or civic criteria.

Smith argues that national symbols are “the most potent and durable aspects of nationalism. They embody its basic concepts, making them visible and distinct for every member, communicating the tents of an abstract ideology in palpable, concrete terms that evoke instant emotional responses from all strata of the community” (1991: 77).

In the essay “Nationalism as a Problem in the History of Political Ideas,” Chatterjee has another take on the issue of “Otherness.” As he establishes a new theoretical frame for his analysis of Indian nationalism, Chatterjee replaces the concept of “Otherness” as a central factor in defining a national identity, with the concept of “Elsewhere,” in terms of both time and place, by which he identifies everything that is non-Indian. Thus, according to him, Indian nationalism is the expression of an unconscious and somewhat passive opposition to an ambiguous and general external force only indirectly represented by the colonial power (Chatterjee 1-53). Although I find Chatterjee’s point of view very interesting, I do not consider it relevant to my own analysis because my attempt is to identify the internal factors that play a role in the definition and crisis of Romanian and English-Canadian nationalism.

I define the metonymy of absence, as the process by which a word, a phrase or an object is used to represent the absence of something it is closely associated with.

The exact statement is: “Canada is not the creation of a covenant... It is the product of treaty and statute, the dry legal instruments of the diplomat and the legislator. It is the pragmatic achievement of the little-regarded labours of clerks in Colonial Office and obscure provincial politicians, still unknown to the world” (Morton 85.)

In referring to Allan Smith, I will use both his first and last names to distinguish him from Anthony D. Smith, identified only as Smith.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Simion Mehedinți, one of the first Romanian geopoliticians, analyzes the country’s geopolitical status in Europe in a study entitled Romania on the Edge of the Continent: An Romanian and European Geopolitical Question (1914). I will explore these aspects in Chapter 5, which focuses on borders.

Please see below Blandiana’s poem, Eu cred, “I Believe,” in the original and in English translation:

Eu cred ca suntem un popor vegetal. / De unde linistea / În care asteptam desfrunzirea? / De unde curajul / De a ne lasa pe toboganul somnului / Pâna aproape de moarte / Cu siguranta / Ca vom mai fi în stare sa ne nastem / Din nou? / Eu cred ca suntem un popor vegetal – / Cineka vazut vreodata / Un copac revoltandu-se?

I believe that we are a vegetal people, / How could we otherwise account for the peace / In which we are awaiting the defoliation? / How could we account for the courage / Of coming down the sleep slide / Down near death / Having the certainty / That we shall be able to be born / Again? / I believe that we are a vegetal people / Who has ever seen / A tree rioting? (Rad 3)

RCP was one of the largest communist parties relative to Romania’s population. The U.S. Library of Congress’s entry on “The Communist Party” notes that “by March 1988, the PCR [the acronym of the “Partidul Comunist Roman,” the RCP’s designation in Romanian] had grown to some 3.7 million members--more than twice as many as in 1965, when Ceausescu
came to power. Thus, in the late 1980s, some 23 percent of Romania's adult population and 33 percent of its working population belonged to the PCR” (“The Communist Party”).

26 According to John Stephens metanarrative “is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience”(*/*).

27 When discussing the concepts of Ewa M. Thompson I will use her entire name in order to distinguish my references to her work and respectively to the work of Judith Thompson, which I only mention using her last name.

28 Brydon refers to Mackenzie King’s ambiguous resolution in the Conscription crisis during the Second World War, when the Prime Minister refused to enforce compulsory overseas service until 1944, stating “Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription” (“William Lyon Mackenzie King”)

29 Although this necessitates a separate discussion, some theorists such as Verdery make the distinction between post-communism and post-socialism, which cannot be ignored if we take into account, for example, Romania’s former official name as “The Socialist Republic of Romania.” Given, however, the communist designation of its ruling party, the Romanian Communist Party, and the communist ideology and principles that united all countries from the former European Eastern Block, I consider the term post-communism as appropriate for the purpose of this study.


31 Part of his doctoral research, Otoiu organized the summer course “Cultural Diversities East and West: Postcolonialism, Postcommunism, and Ethnicity” at the Central European University in Budapest in 2003. The teaching team and the students were from different post-colonial and post-communist countries. The course syllabus is accessible online at <http://www.ceu.hu/sun/SUN%202002/>.

32 Frye also explains that in 1977 many already believed that “there is no monolithic English Canada, though there may have been a monolithic English Ontario a century ago (… and) that the Anglophone Canadian think of their country as multicultural, and certainly a resident of Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, or Vancouver would have to be remarkably introverted to be unaware of the multicultural character of those cities” (537).
CHAPTER 2
Granddaddies of Post-Colonial and Post-Communist Histories

“Live land defending itself. That’s what we are.”
(Marin Sorescu, A Cold

2.1. Re-Defining History and Re-Writing Histories

Among many other theorists of nationalism that share a similar perspective, Anthony D. Smith explains the capacity of the shared past “to provide a strong ‘community of history and destiny’ to save people from personal oblivion and restore collective faith” (161). To this end, the nationalist discourse consistently returns to history in search of “myths of origins and descent, of liberation and migration, of the golden age and its heroes and sages” (Smith 66), which can help people imagine their national community and act as mobilizing examples when the nation is threatened. History’s participation in the definition of the national identity and, thus, in the ongoing nation-building project, is also acknowledged in Canada and Romania. In Who Killed Canadian History (1994), Granatstein, for example, explains:

History is important, I believe, because it is the way a nation, a people, and an individual learn who they are, where they came from, and how and why their world has turned out as it has. We do not simply exist in a contemporary world. We have a past, if only we would try to grapple with it. History teaches us a sense of change over time. History is memory, inspiration, and commonality - and a nation without memory is every bit as adrift as an amnesiac wandering the streets. (Granatstein 1997, XVIII)

In Romania, post-communist historians and political analysts, such as Betea, also acknowledge that “[t]he representation of the past is a constitutive element of individual and
collective identity” (Betea 11). This traditional perspective is, however, complicated by the contestation of a linear and unique depiction of the past. In the last couple of decades, the frequent statement that there is no “objective” history has not questioned its participation in the definition of national identities but drawn attention to the different types of metanarratives it is being used in. Starting with studies such as Hayden White’s *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, history is regarded as an intellectual construct of representations created and propagated through analyses, discursive arguments, presentations and interpretations of historical documents and evidence, which are unavoidably biased, as they are usually ordered and funded by the political force in power. In other words, if history is written by the winners, as the old saying goes, an *objective* history becomes theoretically impossible. Accordingly, the historical text is no longer considered an unquestionable record of the past, but “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and process in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them” (White 2). Drawing on Foucault’s theories in *The Order of Things* (367-73), White considers the historical consciousness that informs those representations as little more than “a theoretical basis for the ideological position from which Western civilization views its relationship not only to cultures and civilizations preceding it but also to those contemporary with it in time and contiguous with it in space [...] a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated” (2).

Post-colonial\(^1\) theorists such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin among many others, share this perspective and argue that the rise of history as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century is in fact simultaneous with, if not determined, by the
beginning of modern colonialism and its need to assert the invaders’ difference and
superiority: “what it means to have a history is the same as what it means to have a legitimate
existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates ‘us’ and not others”
(2006: 317). Consequently, in the process of negotiating political agency at the level of
national collectives, colonial and, in my view, communist regimes as well, enlist history as
“a prominent, if not the prominent, instrument for the control of subject peoples” (Ashcroft
2006: 317). Among many others, Indian-born theatre scholar Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker,
also emphasizes “the complicity between historical discourse and colonialist strategies of
cultural domination and self-legitimation because the production of ‘official’ histories in the
colonial world is almost exclusively the prerogative of the colonizer” (219). The domination
of a nation-state over another nation-state is often justified through “a closed narrative
designed to remove traces of alternative histories” (Gilbert 1996: 1016), and imposed as “a
coherent, unmediated, and authoritative form of knowledge about the past” (Dharwadker
218), which attests to the inferior status of the oppressed Others.
Whereas theorists seem to agree that this has been the case in most occupation colonies,
making the distinction between the histories of the invaders and the invaded is more
complicated in the former settler/invader colonies of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand
and also in the former satellites of the Soviet Union. As Slemon notes in his article
“Unsettling the Empire,” in these so-called Second-World countries “the illusion of a stable
self/other, here/there binary division has never been available” (in Ashcroft 2006: 106). In
settler colonies, the official metanarratives asserted the inferiority not only of the native
population, but also of the working-class settlers, who gradually developed the consciousness
of colonized people. In communist countries, the majority of the population was assigned a
similar subaltern position in relationship to the local political elite and the foreign oppressor. Specific variations of this process and its long-term consequences are recognizable in both countries whose dramatic expressions of national identity I explore in this study. Until the end of the twentieth century, the English Canadian official and textbook versions of political and cultural history generally ignored the history of First Nations and immigrants, diminished the problems of the lower classes, and disseminated the perception of the past as being dull and uneventful. Up to the December anti-communist 1989 revolution, the past was aggressively altered in Romania in order to validate the leadership of the Communist Party and especially of Nicolae Ceausescu, its General Secretary, in the later decades of his dictatorship. Although in the name of different political agendas, both English Canadian and Romanian peoples have been denied access to an accurate historical metanarrative that would have given them a sense of their own value and identity.

As numerous historians and theorists argue, during colonialism, fictional works, in general, and drama, in particular, are often the only venues that can attempt to “neutralize or repudiate the figurations of institutional history and serve as alternative sources of historical knowledge for audiences ideologically resistant to the dominant narratives” (Dharwadker 222). The same can be argued for communist states, although a strong censorship and the drastic state control over what is published and produced only accidentally allow for works that employ anti-official perspectives. After the formal liberation, theatre is unanimously considered the most appropriate artistic medium to initiate and carry on the re-evaluation of history as an essential part of the decolonising project. For example, Gilbert and Tompkins investigate how post-colonial histories are “re-evaluated and redeployed in post-colonial drama” (1996: 107) through strategies of selection that are similar to the writing of the
historical text itself, by revealing some things, while suppressing others by simply ignoring them. Furthermore, as Dharwadker states, historical drama involves its audiences in a live and often critical re-enactment of the past because it “creates ambivalence by collapsing the nation’s past into its present, and its narrative unfolds not only as text but as performance” (225). In other words, the stage becomes a site of individual and collective struggles for self-legitimation through the competition between official and alternative versions of the shared past. Given history’s major role in defining a nation and its collective identity, it becomes implicit that “dramatizing the history of the nation on stage subjects the nation itself to particularly acute scrutiny” (Dharwadker 221).

In spite of the obvious differences between English Canada and Romania’s political developments and current states, the dismantling of official colonial and respectively communist historical metanarratives and historiographies undergoes similar stages and employs similar strategies. During the anti-colonial/anti-communist stage, the state-enforced misrepresentations of the past, or, in Anderson’s straightforward formulation, “lies” (*Imagined Communities* 161), are slowly replaced by alternative histories of intentionally ignored and/or collectively forgotten heroes and events. These narratives contribute to the construction/re-construction of popular myths, which help people regain their dignity and their sense of community, while carrying an anti-colonial/anti-communist message. This chapter will analyze and compare *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt*, a documentary collective creation of Theatre Passe Muraille with Rick Salutin as writer/dramaturge and the historical parody *A Cold* by Marin Sorescu, which I consider relevant for this type of subversive recuperation of history. Anticipating the post-colonial attitude, as Gilbert and Tompkins describe it, both these plays try “to re-establish traditions, to lay claim to a heritage or
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territory, and to recuperate various forms of cultural expressions (1996: 110). During the ensuing political stage in each country, the treatment of history includes the critical re-evaluation of the propagandistic stereotypes created by the imperialist policies and of the role ordinary people played during the occupation. In the next chapter, I will investigate two examples of this type of dramatic synthesis of the colonial and anti-colonial and respectively the communist and anti-communist historical narratives, whose ideological purpose is to reconcile a nation with its colonial/communist past. In this chapter, however, I am interested in dramatic alternative histories, which coexist with the colonial/communist official discourse and are articulated in spite of it.

As its title suggests, Salutin’s play re-enacts the 1837 Upper Canadian popular rebellion led by William Lyon Mackenzie. A Cold depicts a 1462 episode from the fight against the Ottoman Empire of Wallachia, an autonomous Southern Romanian province until 1859, at that time under the rule of voivode Vlad Tepes. Although in different genres, both plays emphasize the tragic fate of ordinary people who are the victims of imperial projects enforced by the local ruling classes with external help, in historical times re-enacted on stage and also in the present to which the plays ironically allude and subversively deconstruct. In the attempt to empower their audiences, Salutin and Sorescu propose identity projects different from the official ones. On one hand, they re-enact the ordinary people as models of heroism in the fight for independence, restoring their place in the two countries’ collective past. In doing so, 1837: The Farmers’ Revolt and A Cold anticipate the more general tendency of post-colonial histories, which, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, “are not always concerned with constructions of history per se but with constructing the self in history” (109). At the same time, the two plays employ a diminishing perspective of the
colonizers and the local elites, which represented and respectively sided with the imperial force, reducing them to defeatable adversaries and grotesque figures. On the other hand, both plays emphasize nineteenth-century English Canadian farmers and respectively fifteenth-century Romanian peasants’ shared alienation, which mirrors the inner exile of the twentieth century spectators and, as such, helps them reconnect to each other. If both dramatic characters on stage and spectators in the audience acknowledge that they do not feel safe and “at home” in Upper/English Canada and, respectively, Wallachia/Romania, then they may also have a chance to understand that those feelings unite them. Thus, 1837 and A Cold take part in asserting historical and twentieth-century inner exile as a shared experience, helping people regain the consciousness of belonging to a national community and imagine it as “inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 6), but also as collectively alienated despite and respectively because of the foreign domination. As I explained in my introduction, I identify this type of negative, though restorative connection as imagined exile. This chapter will first analyze the plays’ anti-colonial message conveyed through the contrasting portrayals of ordinary people and colonizers and second the expressions of historical inner exile and the enabling of the twentieth-century imagined exile. In addition, special consideration will be given to the plays’ parodic styles, which simultaneously counteract and reinforce the mockery and denial of national identities and values, perpetrated by the imperial forces.

In countries such as Canada and Romania, where the search for national identity and the fight for political independence entered new stages towards the end of the twentieth century, the anti-colonial and respectively anti-communist attitudes were synchronized with the post-modern ones. Among other theorists, Hutcheon actually argues that English-
Canadians are “post-modern by birth.” As such, their ironic attitude towards their national history may be considered the effect of a more general tendency, concisely described by Umberto Eco in his “Postscript to The Name of the Rose - Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable:” “The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognising that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its deconstruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently” (73). In addition, irony and especially self-irony seem a more general characteristic of Romanians and English-Canadians, as I showed in Chapter 1. The two peoples have long chosen to belittle their national histories in the same way they belittle their national identities. In the 1970s, however, despite the auto-irony, recuperation of the past was an essential element in the anti-colonial/anti-communist survival and subsequent redefinition of the nation, which intensified during the post-colonial/post-communist transition.

Selecting which plays I would analyze and compare in this first analytical chapter of this study focused on dramatic re-enactments of the past with an anti-colonial/communist character was initially determined by factors beyond my control. As I will explain later in more detail, whereas subversive theatre productions based on politically correct texts were accidentally approved, Sorescu’s A Cold and A Third Pole were some of the very few, if not the only, Romanian plays which evaded censorship, even though they mocked the communist regime. Any theatre professional and aspiring theatre professional would have read and/or seen them, as the plays and their author, a famous playwright and a poet, were also widely perceived as a symbol of the scarce Romanian dissidence. In the subsequent and final communist decade, the number of subversive literary works, which made it into the public eye, further decreased until discouraged writers stopped writing them altogether.
Explicitly propagandistic and occasional politically neutral philosophical or experimental plays, such as Romulus Guga’s *The Middle Ages, by Accident* and Dumitru Solomon’s dramatic portrayals of Greek philosophers, remained the only ones published and produced. In this context, it proved impossible to find other plays written and produced before 1989, which would openly engage political issues without being slavishly propagandistic. In other words, if I wanted to discuss even briefly Romanian drama’s subversive encounter with communism, Sorescu’s historical parodies seemed my only choices. Although it also re-enacts the same period and alludes to the communist regime, *The Third Pole* is, however, a play, which focuses more on a leader’s inner conflict and less on the people’s role in asserting national independence and identity. Given the larger perspective employed in *A Cold* and also its similarities to *1837*, it felt more appropriate to select it as the object of my analysis in this chapter.

English Canadian drama in the late 1970s and 1980s presented many more plays on Canadian topics than in the previous years, especially among the collective creations of alternative theatre companies. However, only a few of them seemed interested in issues related to Canadian identity and even less in Canada’s independence. I discovered *1837* while working on a paper on Canadian Docudrama for Professor Plant’s *Canadian Theatre* course at University of Toronto in the 2003 Winter term, when I was exploring collective creation devices. Not only this particular production, but also the establishment of Passe Muraille company itself was part of the Alternative Canadian Theatre movement, which started in the 1970s. Its main purpose was to counteract the “colonialism of contemporary Canadian theatre” (Wood 165) and the “Canadian appetite for American mass entertainment” (Brown 540), which meant not only the perpetuation of conservative values but also fewer
jobs for Canadians working in the arts. By the 1970s, most English Canadian theatre professionals and “much of English Canada’s artistic community had become ardent Canadian nationalists” (Conrad 331), relying on local topics in their works. Consistent with this tendency, the Passe Murraille company under the direction of Paul Thompson created a series of collective documentary dramas, meant to motivate and help their fellow citizens imagine themselves outside an imperial paradigm. Their creations remained the landmarks of the new style, incorporating “local speech, customs, and traditions into plays that attempted to create a Canadian mythology and retell Canada’s history” (Benson 87). The Farm Show (1971) was one of the first and most famous boosts of Canadians’ confidence in their national value and identity. Re-enacting the everyday life of an Ontario farming community, it became a model for a form of community documentary theatre based on the actors’ personal response to the resource material, and inspired numerous imitations across Canada. When striving to re-evaluate Canadian history from a more explicit anti-colonial perspective, Salutin and the company chose the 1837 popular movement, “the one time we had a mass movement for independence” (Zimmerman 165), as the subject of their collective re-enactment.

Although I was at the time less interested in the nationalist message of the plays under scrutiny, the similarities between Salutin and Sorescu’s use of history struck me and eventually led to the topic of this dissertation. Even the fact that they were written and produced in the same period, 1837 in 1974 and A Cold in 1977, helped me set up the chronological boundaries of this study. Furthermore, I established several sets of specific similarities between Salutin and Sorescu’s plays, which theoretically justified my decision to compare them. From a thematic point of view, 1837 and A Cold re-enact episodes from the
past fight for independence in order to restore national myths, address present problems, and, implicitly, re-assert the national identity of the people they represent and of their audiences. From a literary perspective, both employ non-traditional dramatic structures and alternate parodic and highly emotional tones. Also, both authors articulate each scene like an independent mini-drama with its own beginning, climax, denouement, and even a title. Whereas Salutin gives more explicit names, some times indicating the setting, other times summarizing the action, Sorescu only identifies each scene as a tableau, numbered from one to twenty seven. In both plays, however, transitions are abrupt and often the tension accumulated on stage is simply cut off by a blackout. In 1837, performers sometimes announce the time and place of a scene as they begin it, heightening the play’s non-realistic style. Before discussing the plays in detail, I am going to give a short synopsis of each of them and then briefly describe the political and cultural contexts in which they were created, which I consider essential for their understanding.

1837 chronicles the events that spurred the early citizens of Upper Canada to fight against colonial authorities. Although the role of some politicians and especially of William Lyon Mackenzie in the events is consistently emphasized, the collective of ordinary people is the play’s main character. Act 1 introduces several farmers and their families through “vignettes, some serious and some hilarious [so that] when the revolt comes you [the audience] can recognize” (Conolly 1987: 161) them and, thus, empathize with their plight. The focus is on the farmers’ difficult working and living conditions. In the first scene, for example, Thomas Bench, a Scottish immigrant, arrives at his land after a three-day walk only to start immediately clearing it. Among other similar chronicles, Salutin enacts the story of the Steadmans, who lose the land they homesteaded, while Fred Bench cannot get past the
long line to buy a lot from the Land Office, as per the government’s promise, refuses to purchase it on the black market, and spends the little money he saved at the tavern with his friends. In parallel, *1837* presents Upper Canada’s politicians and satirically portrays the Family Compact and “its acts of tyranny and oppression” (Salutin 1976: 216). The depiction of the 1836 elections includes excerpts from actual political speeches, including that of Sir Francis Bond Head, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, re-enactments of documented street fights, but also the fictional story of Robert Davis, who is assaulted during the campaign and travels to the U.S., eager to see if they do things better there. The romanticized imperial perspective of Upper Canada is parodied in the scene in which Lady Backwash’s coach gets stuck in mud on the way from Toronto to Niagara.

The second act focuses on the preparation and development of the rebellion itself, emphasizing Mackenzie’s chief role in mobilizing the farmers and some members of the upper classes. Using again the vignette-technique, Salutin alternates verses from the satirical song “Across Toronto Bay” with six very short scenes that show the farmers we met in Act 1, now going to battle (1976: 247-51). Their genuine enthusiasm ironically conflicts with the miscommunication and the lack of weapons and military experience, which determine the general panic and the quick defeat. Mackenzie and some rebels flee to the U.S., while the government forces arrest the ones who remain in Canada. The play ends with two of the patriotic leaders, Peter Matthews and Samuel Lount (Salutin 1976: 247), awaiting execution in their cell and symbolically restating the need to achieve the country’s independence.

Similar to *1837*, *A Cold* does not have a traditional storyline, but consists of “a series of autonomous scenes, linked by common viewpoints, not plot” (Ghitulescu 311). With thirty-three personalized characters and additional anonymous Turkish and Romanian
soldiers, the play may be considered an epic re-enactment of Vlad Tepes’s fight against the Turks in 1462. Sorescu, however, chooses the ironic meditation on imperialism over documentary reconstruction and uses historical events only as a general frame while introducing several fictional characters and events. In the first two acts, the action takes place in an Ottoman military camp nine years after the Fall of Constantinople and the death of Constantine XI. The army led by Mohammed II himself advances towards Danube, Wallachia’s Southern border, intending to conquer it and install Radu the Handsome, Tepes’s brother and the Sultan’s secret crush, as its ruler. Some “Byzantine prisoners, play-acting as the Imperial court” (Sorescu 1978: 7) of Constantinople, follow the imperial caravan, held prisoners in a mobile cage. While being treated as if they actually were the historical figures they represent and hopelessly conspiring against Mohammed II, the prisoners perform daily the theatrical re-enactment of their empire’s demise, re-assuring the Sultan of his great military prowess.

Panzaru, a fictional and symbolic Romanian peasant travelling through Europe, deceives the Turkish guards, sneaks into the camp, and confronts Radu. Mimicking naivety, he attempts but fails to convince the pretender to the throne to forgo his plans and keep the Turkish army out of the country. The third act starts after the Turkish army crosses the Danube river and enters Wallachia, having to resist the continuous Romanian attacks and ambushes, that closely recall the battles mentioned in documents of the time. The very last part of the play finally shows the Romanians, first in a military camp where captain Papuc (“Slipper,” in Romanian) and lieutenant Toma decide on the best attack strategies, and then in Toma’s little village, where women arm themselves to fight the Turks, in case of an invasion. In the end of the play, Toma returns home and, as he feels tired and sick, lies down
to “die” for a little while, awaiting the next battle. Although the Romanian scenes represent a very small part of the play, about ten pages out of almost eighty, Sorescu succeeds in making an emotional statement of ordinary people’s genuine patriotism, but crude faith, which is meant to empower his audiences and help them cope with their similar state during the communist dictatorship.

2.2. The English-Canadians’ Mockery and Ignorance of Their Own History

The distortion of history has never been formally enforced by the government or works with historical topics officially censored in colonial and post-colonial English Canada. However, as Salutin restates in his informal diary of the 1837 production, “starting very far back: other countries may have to relive or reinterpret the past, but they know they have a past… English Canadians…must be convinced there is a past that is their own” (Wood 164). Whenever this topic is addressed, the explanations of the collective ignorance and/or self-diminishing attitude towards national history seem to point constantly to the flaws of the public school system, regardless of the political alignment of the speakers. In *Who Killed Canadian History* (1994), Granatstein, for example, compares different trends in the study and teaching of the subject, and reaches the grim conclusion that the curriculum of publicly funded schools has virtually mistreated it over the last fifty years, which would amount to a third of the country’s very existence. When not completely ignored, the image of Canada that is propagated in school perpetuates a colonial self-diminishing perspective that has traded the pro-British attitude for the pro-American one. Granatstein concludes that, consequently, we are now dealing with several generations of Canadians who know very little about their country’s past and dismiss it as “Booooooring!“ His views stirred heated
debates. In the article “Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches,” A B. McKillop, for example, contests Granatstein’s take on Canadian history as “a history of national accomplishment” (McKillop) and warns “Canadian history, in short, is vastly more complex and more interesting than the one he would like Canadians to write about and Canadian students to learn” (McKillop). He also openly accuses Granatstein, considering he “miscasts the role of the scholar as citizen, misrepresents the purpose of scholarship, and distorts the nature and quality of academic historical writing” (McKillop). However, McKillop also acknowledges that “Granatstein makes many telling points” (McKillop), which he supports by reiterating that “national surveys demonstrate an abominable student ignorance of even the most elementary facts of Canadian history and cultural life” (McKillop).

In spite of the academic controversy Granatstein’s book stirred when it was first published, the ongoing popular reactions to it make it clear that some English Canadians and especially some educators, such as the Education student Kelly Rae Thomas from Acadia University, still share his conclusions: “As Granatstein may have accurately guessed, the history lessons I encountered as a child were few and far between. I am embarrassed to say that my national historical knowledge is minimal, but know that I am not alone” (Thomas 3). As late as 2009, a study commissioned by the Dominion Institute also confirmed Granatstein’s point of view, and it warned once again against the “troubling ignorance about our country’s history, particularly among young Canadians” (Chalifoux). After reviewing the high school history curricula in Canada’s provinces and territories, the Canadian History Report Card released in June revealed poor results: “Four provinces failed our study and received an ‘F’. None received an ‘A’. Indeed, only four provinces require that high school
students take a course in Canadian history. These findings show that we are failing students when it comes to educating them about the story of Canada” (Chalifoux).

Whereas the Dominion Institute and Granatstein are accused by some Canadian historians of conservative views and essentialist perspectives of patriotism, national history, heritage, and even of Canada itself, there is, however, a relatively general agreement that the school system has not covered national history, or other Canadian subjects, as fully as it ought to. “English-language Canadian Literature in High Schools,” a 2002 study commissioned by The Canada Council for the Arts and prepared by The Writers’ Trust of Canada, also noted the sad state of the national literature in the public school curriculum: “Teachers say few students can identify 10 Canadian writers and that most students read five or less Canadian books during their secondary education. […] The majority of literature taught in Canadian schools is American authored” (“English-language Canadian Literature”).

Sadly, the situation had not significantly improved in 2007, when Jean Baird, a Consultant with ArtStarts in Schools on the “CanLit in BC Schools Project,” pleaded for the inclusion of Canadian Literature in the school curriculum: “Currently our classrooms are dominated by some British but predominately American novels […] Currently only Saskatchewan has a mandated CanLit course, the grade 12 course. Elsewhere in the country it is possible, and often probable, that a student can graduate having never studied a Canadian novel during high school” (Baird).

In this context, the importance of the plays, which treat Canadian subjects, in particular, and history, in special, increases. In addition to engaging local audiences in the cities where they are first commissioned and performed, some of them are subsequently produced in or toured to different Canadian provinces and territories, and, thus, become able
to connect Canadians and even “students from coast to coast to coast with a common set of knowledge” (Chalifoux). In doing so, they participate in the general education of Canadian citizens, contributing to the everyday re-creation of the historical metanarrative and the collective national identity. In addition to its relevance as a piece of historical drama in the English Canadian context, which “provides a good start at making our history our own shared experience” (Wood 165), 1837 is one of the first twentieth-century plays, if not the first, to treat the national past and, implicitly, the present from an ironic perspective, while carrying an open anti-colonial message and redefining a national myth (Boru 159). In fact, Salutin may be considered among the few pioneers who re-enact the histories of the settler colonies in their works in a time when, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, most playwrights native to those countries “resist theatrical investigations of the past under the mistaken impression that their histories are boring or uneventful” (114). In the 1970s and early 1980s, only a small number of English Canadian dramas with historical subject played an essential role in nurturing people’s ability to imagine a transcontinental and multi-ethnic nation, despite the complicated social and political issues of their past and present development.

At the time of its first production in 1973 and its remounting for a tour of South-Western Ontario in 1974, theatre critics and reviewers described Salutin’s play as “a dramatic manifesto from the disenfranchised of Upper Canada… the reminder of a neglected past… full of present ironies” (Boru 157), as well as “an interpretation reflecting the nationalistic bias of the day, particularly in its efforts to recover some of the forgotten or suppressed details of the rebellion of 1837” (Benson 143). From this perspective, 1837 conforms to the general trend of post-colonial texts, which, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, reconsider a fragment of the past in the “attempt to tell the other [non-colonial]
side of a story and to accommodate not only the key events experienced by a community (or an individual) but also the cultural context through which these events are interpreted and recorded” (1996: 107). As a reflection of the popular nationalism of the 1970s, *1837* employs a radical perspective of the historical events, as Salutin clearly states in his rehearsal diary: “The main issue of the 1837 uprising was whether Canada would operate independently or under the influence of Britain. It was comparable to the American Revolution, except we lost” (Salutin 1976: 185). The revolutionary agenda of the Reform Party’s radical faction and particularly of Mackenzie attest to the validity of the dramaturge’s viewpoint. Several of the documents issued in the months preceding the popular revolution had an anti-colonial content. On July 31st 1837, the Committee of Vigilance of Upper Canada, whose elected secretary was Mackenzie, adopted a “Declaration of Independence” modeled on the American one, which was followed on August 2nd 1837 by the “Declaration of the Reformers of Toronto”, published in the newspaper *The Constitution*. On November 16th, Mackenzie persuaded the radicals members of the Reform Party to issue “a draft constitution for Upper Canada, modelled on that of the U.S., and to attempt to seize control of the government in early December” (Buckner). After the defeat of the rebellion, he further pursued his republican ideals and proclaimed a republic of Upper Canada on Navy Island, from where he was soon forced to withdraw and flee to the Unites States (Buckner). The significance of the 1837 rebellions in Upper Canada and also Lower Canada was long debated.

In his article on this issue for *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, P.A. Buckner explains the two opposite perceptions of the events. Whereas the more radical historians believe that the rebels “represented the authentic voice of the majority, at least of the colonial working classes,” the conservative historians see the events “as unnecessary bloodletting, which
complicated and probably delayed the transition to greater self-government” (Buckner). The official or at least the most common perception is that the farmers’ revolt was “largely a historical accident” (Buckner) whose honourable purpose was a “responsible government” in spite of their unfortunate means. A brief review of some English Canadian history books and especially high school textbooks reveals a similar perspective. Most of them ignore the 1837 event or depict it less than favourably, overlooking Mackenzie’s ultimate goal to free Upper Canada from the British Crown. The 1969 *Penguin History of Canada* by Kenneth McNaught, for example, describes the battle at the Montgomery’s Tavern as a “skirmish” (McNaught 89) and allocates the event a half-page account, emphasizing that Torontonians fought against the rebels because they “feared the extremism of the course chosen by the rebellious little Scot” (89), but does not elaborate further on the issue. Whereas the 2008 online version of the *Canadian Encyclopedia* still recalls the popular revolt as a “somewhat pathetic uprising,” J. Bradley Cruxton’s 2001 Oxford Canadian History textbook allocates to it an entire chapter. In my view, that alone suggests that the perception of the events has gradually changed, most likely as a result of the new post-colonial attitude towards national history, to which Salutin’s play brought its contribution. Cruxton’s entry explains the social, economical, and political conditions that led to the rebellion and describes the events in more detail, supplementing the information with a map of “Mackenzie’s Toronto with Detail of the Rebel’s March” (250) and a photocopy of the Lieutenant Governor’s Proclamation after the rebellion was defeated.

In his rehearsal diary, however, Salutin confesses that the Passe Muraille company felt rather isolated in the attempt to redeem the significance of the 1837 events: “With all the denigration spattered on the rebellion during our schooldays and since, I was beginning to
wonder whether we were the first who had ever thought to treat it as a serious national event” (Salutin 1976: 185). To make a more convincing statement, the company reintegrated the nineteenth-century events into its twentieth-century everyday landscapes and lives, “uncovering mythology right under the noses of its audience” (Boru 158), like in many other Passe Muraille productions. Consequently, in 1837, as in some of the plays Dharwadker analyzes in her study of post-independence Indian theatre, the urban “contemporary setting becomes entangled with the issue of history” (Dharwadker 224). The production consistently underlined that the rebels’ encounters with the government’s militiamen did not take place on mythical battlefields but on well-known Toronto streets: “It was a hell of a battle and it was right there at the corner of Yonge and College. [...] We moved out of the tavern, formed up at the tollgate at Bloor Street and then marched down Yonge” (Salutin 1976: 255). However, an incident that occurred during a performance showed the company that the collective self-diminishing perspective was difficult to counteract. The effect Salutin hoped for, “I think our audiences will be captivated - all those warlike events up and down Yonge St.” (1976: 200) strongly contrasted with how some of the spectators reacted:

When Clare started Act II with ‘Bay and Adelaide, the Northwest corner,’ the audience laughed. If an actor said, ‘Montmartre 4 a.m.,’ or ‘Piccadilly Circus, twelve noon,’ no audience anywhere would laugh. But we are so imbued with self-denial, so colonized, that the very thought of something historic happening here, at Bay and Adelaide, draws laughs. (Salutin 1976: 200, original italics)

Thus, Salutin and the Passe Muraille company had to find the means to convince an audience used to ridicule or ignore its past and question its national identity. To counteract specifically the mistrust in any remotely heroic facts and “portray an oppressive reality in a liberated
“way” (Salutin 1976: 199), they employed the documentary style, which contributed to the impression that history is truthfully re-enacted on stage: “We are the only country that bothers wondering whether it even has an identity. (...) But surely those who want to express something about us in a cultural form need first of all the assurance that we do exist, and that assurance is what the documentary form provides” (Salutin 1984: 92).

Among many documentary devices, textual citations from the Lieutenant-Governor and Mackenzie’s speeches attest to the company’s goal to offer an objective depiction of Canadian history. With the same purpose, events are often described in journalistic style, using the literary device of the retrospective account, instead of being re-enacted, such as in the following example: “Matthews and his men have crossed the bridge and moved west on King Street. They meet a contingent of militia and retreat back across the bridge, attempting to burn it as they go” (Salutin 1976: 258). However, the company’s main goal was to revive and act out scenes from Canadian history, not just to communicate what happened. Accordingly, when actors and even the fictional characters wanted to make specific events more compelling, they re-enacted them in front of the audience, as I will show in my analysis.

In addition to challenging the common attitude towards the past, 1837 also reflected upon specific political, economic, and cultural issues troubling the country in the present. After the Second World War, some historians, such as Arthur Lower in his 1945 book *Colony to Nation*, celebrated Canada’s newly found autonomy on the world stage and its role in dismantling the British Empire. In contrast, during the 1950s, many nationalist politicians and economists expressed the concern that “some complete economic integration with the United States would indeed destroy Canada’s prospects as an independent North American
nation” (Randall White 253). Decades before Frye’s prenational to postnational argument, Harold Adams Innis, for example, observed the rapid dissemination of American capital and mass culture in Canada and warned against the danger of moving from “colony to nation to colony” (Innis 1956: 405). George Grant also deplored Canadians’ fascination with the U.S. in his 1965 Lament for a Nation, in which he, followed in the 1970s by historians, such as Donald Creighton, who once again grieved over Canadians’ severed links to their past and sense of self:

They [Canadians] had permitted their government to turn its back on their past and to repudiate their history; and in the bankruptcy of their own national philosophy, they turned instinctively to the nearest creditor, the United States. … Imitation and plagiarism had become deep-seated Canadian instincts; economic and political dependence had grown into a settled way of life. (Conrad 332)

The 1955 report of the Royal Commission on Canada’s Economic Prospects, chaired by Walter Gordon, “urged the government to exercise closer control over the activities of foreign companies operating in Canada” (Conrad 326) and particularly of the American ones. Eleven years later, the much grimmer report of the Task Force on the Structure of Canadian Industry led by Mel Watkins deconstructed several myths regarding Canada’s need of foreign investment and American-owned plants. The public support of these recommendations, expressed, for example, by an organization calling itself the Committee for an Independent Canada (Conrad 328) was followed by the enactment of several of them through the creation of the Canada Development Corporation (1971), the Foreign Investment Review Agency (1974), and Petro-Canada (1975), as well as the proposal of a “third option” strategy to diversify trade relations with other countries than the U.S. proposed by Mitchell
Sharp, secretary of state for external affairs at the time, in his 1972 paper, “Canada-U.S. Relations: Options for the Future” (Hillmer 300-1). Despite the provinces’ hostility against the federal efforts to control American investments (Conrad 329-30), economic nationalists warned that “an economy based on foreign-owned branch plants was inherently inefficient and imitative” (Brown 528) and signalled the negative effects of American economic domination (High 327).

Although Canada did not have to deal with a dictator of Ceausescu’s sort, it experienced its share of economic, social, cultural downfalls in the 1970s and early 1980s, paralleled by a number of repressive and abusive acts. Farmers, fishermen, people working in the auto industry, as well as women, First Nations people, and legal and illegal immigrants were economically disadvantaged, despite the growth and change in the Canadian economy after the Second World War (Conrad 348-51). In the late 1970s, the economic downfall confirmed the economic nationalists’ previsions. The high unemployment (from 4.4% in 1969 to 8.3% in 1978, High 321) and inflation rates (over 10% in 1974, Granatstein et al 502), commonly labelled “stagflation” (Conrad 344, Brown 535), and the ten billion dollars federal deficit in 1978 (Granatstein et al 505) undermined Canadians’ “post-war faith in the government-as-economic-manager” (Brown 5353). In parallel to plant closures, agriculture was also affected, as huge farms whose productivity depended on new farming technologies that required much less workforce replaced small family-owned farms. As a consequence, in the prairies, for example, the rural population fell from 60% to 30% between 1940 and 1980 (Brown 524). The economic slowdown eventually contributed to the emergence of “a mixture of anxiety and self-interest [that] curdled the liberal optimism of the post-war years…. [and] evolved into a self-interested consumerism” (Brown 535). As Granatstein et al
state, the “more common pattern was a shift from broader social concerns to narrow selfinterest” (492).

2.3. Open Season on Turkeys

In the rather bleak atmosphere of the late 1970s, the depiction of past heroic acts supported the nationalist playwrights and theatre companies’ attempt to deconstruct and explain their countrymen’s stereotypical self-diminishing perception and restore their confidence in the power of the collective. As Salutin’s characters openly criticize the nineteenth-century imperial exploitation and the corruption of the local elite, the implicit suggestion is that the economical, social, and political consequences of the 1837 defeat are still strongly affecting the state of the country, whose independence was still to be gained in the late 1970s. The reviewers of the Passe Muraille rather commonly acknowledged 1837’s conscious rewriting of national history and revolutionary appeal. Reviewing the printed version that was published in 1978, William Westfall, for instance, explains: “The work is radical in intent: it seeks to challenge the traditional interpretations of Mackenzie and the ‘Canadian Revolution’ to the point where both audience and reader can achieve a critical awareness of the true significance of 1837 and therefore of the independence of the present time” (161). Although he explicitly denies the play’s ability “to sustain a change to a radical consciousness” (163), Westfall also recalls an interesting detail that contradicts this position, as it paradoxically proves not only the audience’s acknowledgement of the political message but also the company’s self-imposed acts of censorship: “When the play toured the rural communities of Western Ontario, for example, the company reworked the drama in order to tone down the revolutionary rhetoric the Toronto audiences would accept” (162).
In *A Cold*, Prince Radu the Handsome is the only representative of the corrupt and selfish national ruling class that betrays the interests of the people. *1837*, however, embodies the more complicated situation of a country that is exploited by the foreign imperial power, its local representatives, and also by the local “[m]ushroom aristocrats. Bladders of pride and arrogance – who care not a damn for the country— but only for their own fiefdoms – filling their pockets” (Salutin 1976: 244), the “villains who enslave and oppress our country” (Salutin 1976: 254). “The Head” scene (Salutin 1976: 224-5) re-enacts a discourse of Sir Francis Bond Head, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, before the election of 1836. Whereas the direct quotations attest to Salutin and the company’s effort towards historical accuracy, visual parody makes the anti-colonial perspective even stronger. As described in the stage directions, four actors “comprise themselves as Head’s head. Two of their heads are his eyes, two arms his arching eyebrows, two others his nose. So on for his mouth, dimple, etc.” (Salutin 1976: 224). The action of physically assembling the Lieutenant-Governor’s head, and only the head, on stage, is not only theatrically spectacular, but also has multiple levels of significance. When the oversized head addresses the 1836 assembly of voters and, implicitly, the audience, the impression is of a grotesque and overwhelming, though fragile structure, which can come back to pieces at any given moment. In his diary, Salutin explains that this staging actually embodies Mackenzie’s viewpoint, “who could rarely resist punning on his name” (1976, 224). Once again, even some of the most theatrical solutions have a history-based political significance, which continuously re-emphasizes the play’s anti-colonial agenda.

Citations from one of the Lieutenant-Governor’s documented speeches point out his stereotypically imperialistic attitude. The Lieutenant-Governor does not make any effort to
persuade his electors but identifies himself with the Empire and threatens in its name: “If you choose to dispute with me and live on bad terms with the Mother Country, you will – to use a homely phrase – only quarrel with your own bread and butter” (Salutin 1976: 225). The following scene, “The Election of ’36” develops further the theme of the “political bullying” (Salutin 1976: 226) of Canadian electors, who are physically assaulted if they vote for reform. The members and supporters of both the Liberal and the Conservative parties, “screaming their political slogans,” attack Robert Davis, a “poor peacemaker” who attempts to bring them to order (Salutin 1976: 225-6). In the stage directions, Salutin notes that the fight concludes with the Tories’ victory and “the brutal cry, ‘God—Save—The Queen’” (226), which, in context, reinforces the anti-colonial parody. The Lieutenant-Governor is openly blamed in “The Speech” scene (Salutin 1976: 234-8). Speaking to his electors during a public meeting, Mackenzie parodically portrays Sir Francis as a man who entraps the people in his lasso, but “imagines he presides over the most contented colony in the entire Empire” (Salutin 1976: 240). The call to fight is directly expressed: “if as one man, we took hold of that rope and turned to Sir Francis, then with one mighty tug, we could pull him off his high horse and send him back to England on his ass!” (Salutin 1976: 240). People’s need to unite and organize themselves is also openly addressed because “the power of the people is as nothing without union” (Salutin 1976: 236). Mackenzie continues his parabolic discourse by declaring “open season on turkeys” by which he means Tories (Salutin 1976: 236). I find the similarities between the use of allegory and parable in Mackenzie’s discourse and in A Cold interesting. Although the Canadian writer is open about his anti-colonial agenda, his nineteenth-century characters’ double-talking and irony suggest a way of
disguising the truth similar to the strategies Sorescu was forced to employ given the communist censorship.

The anti-colonial parody is further developed in another scene, “The Dummy” (Salutin 1976: 231-3), a skit performed by the farmers as introduction to one of Mackenzie’s election speeches. The Imperial ventriloquist John Bull exploits and patronizes the “pitiable, colonial” Canadian axeman, Peter Stump, i.e. the “dummy.” The latter is forced to be loyal to the British monarchy, send the product of his work to England, fight the empire’s enemies, allow John Bull to “[p]ick his pocket,” and be denied the right to an independent existence: “you will be helpless (…) Without me, John Bull, you are nothing.” Peter, however, demands his freedom, “take your hand away from my neck,” and welcomes Mackenzie as “the man who is giving me a voice,” in front of the enthusiastic crowd. The play-within-the-play suggests the general characteristics of foreign colonizers, which are similar to Sorescu’s depiction of the Ottoman Empire’s court in A Cold. It also points out the ordinary people’s determination to fight for their freedom, which historical rulers like the Lieutenant-Governor and respectively Mohammed most likely dismissed as improbable and/or of no consequence, as their fictional re-embodiments do.

Still ironizing imperial politics and Victorian mentalities, “The Lady in the Coach” scene dramatizes a personal experience. In the lecture “Roughing It in the Bush” she gives at a ladies’ meeting back home in England, Lady Backwash, “an English gentlewoman of the memoir-writing ilk” (Salutin 1976: 219) recalls her visit to “this wretched colony” (Salutin 1976: 223). Salutin ridicules her attitude, which expresses imperialistic stereotypes. When the coach is stuck in the mud, for example, Lady B. encourages Johnson, her servant, to help the driver, using propagandistic slogans, highly inappropriate in the situation: “Where would
the glorious Empire be today if it weren’t above the mud” [...] Johnson, push with a will –
the eyes of England are upon you” (Salutin 1976: 221-2). Similarly, Lady B. describes the
release of the coach from the mud as a memorable victory she led against the colony’s
wilderness: “We did it! […] Just needed a little leadership. […] We had fought the good
fight and won. We had been faced with insurmountable obstacles and had overcome them.
And now we took the rest of the victorious and what better place than here, in Nature’s
Cathedral” (Salutin 1976: 223). The satire of the imperialistic so-called civilizing mission is
also apparent when Lady B. and her servant meet an Aboriginal man. Encouraging her
servant to climb down from the tree in which he climbed in fear of the “savage,” Lady B.
explains: “it [the First Nations man] speaks English. And if it speaks English, it can take
orders” (Salutin 1976: 223). The objectification of the Other through the pronoun “it”
paradoxically contrasts with the acknowledgment of language skills that enable Bart, the
Indian, to fulfil his role as a colonial subject. Like in post-colonial literatures, in general,
English is revealed as the language of the colonizer, “imposed to facilitate exploitation”

In addition to the ironic portrayal of the imperial representatives, 1837 also addresses
the issues of internal exploitation and corruption and satirizes the so-called “Family
Compact” of Upper Canada, especially in the scene that bears its name. To uncover “the
bonds that tie them together: bonds of blood, marriage and greed” (Salutin 1976: 215),
Salutin uses the convention of a magic show. Mackenzie is parodically “conjuring history,”
describing the remarkable trick, which “this gang of thieves, rogues, villains and fools [used
to be] transformed before your very eyes into the ruling class of this province” (Salutin 1976:
215). Whereas censorship forces Sorescu to limit his anti-communist critique to parables and
allusions, the English Canadian author explicitly indicts “the acts of tyranny and oppression” (216) of Upper Canada’s government in the 1830s, which historical documents confirm (Brown 210). At a public meeting towards the end of Act I, Mackenzie sarcastically names and briefly characterizes some of the Family Compact’s members, “the nobility of this colony” (Salutin 1976: 234). When the crowd boos each and every one of them, Mackenzie proclaims Canadian farmers “the real nobility of Upper Canada” (Salutin 1976: 234) in the general enthusiasm.

Although still a controversial issue, most of the historical texts placidly acknowledge Mackenzie’s status as a hero (Buckner). Documents of the time reveal, however, the extraordinary admiration, which the ordinary Upper Canadians felt towards the revolutionary leader. According to Cruxton, some of the ordinary people idolized him. For example, one of the farmers who helped Mackenzie escape to the U.S. after the defeat of the rebellion was so impressed to have met him that he ordered the events engraved on his gravestone:

Up the hill stood the home of Samuel Chandler
He guided Mackenzie to Buffalo
And here they had supper
Dec. 10, 1837 (Cruxton 267).

Thus, the choice to re-enact Mackenzie’s acts matches more general decolonising tactics, as Gilbert and Tompkins describe them:

A specific strategy of revisionist histories, in both settler and occupation colonies has been the reclamation of subversive figures, to make them into heroes. The leader of a rebellion against colonial forces or someone generally historicised as villainous is
often reconstructed in post-colonial theatre to play a highly prominent role in the struggle for freedom from imperial rule. (116)

The play strives to re-enact past events and persons in an accurate manner, but it does not offer a mythical portrayal of Mackenzie, but one that is consistent with the play’s documentary style and post-modern parody, and most of all with the national concept of heroes and heroism: “Canadian culture debunks heroes, or at least acknowledges ‘heroes’ to be human sized, ordinary, and therefore flawed – any claim to superstar status (even among hockey players, and especially among politicians) is over time viewed with suspicion and dismissed as arrogance” (New 53). This perspective is frequent in the English-Canadian depiction of politicians, from Cartier to Trudeau, including John A. Macdonald, whose dramatic re-enactment I will analyze in the next chapter. Salutin takes a similar approach. On one hand, Mackenzie is praised as a visionary reformer and idealistic rebel who exposed the corrupt upper class in his newspaper, defended the farmers’ interests in the Assembly, and fought for them on the streets of Toronto, where he was “the last man to leave the field” (Salutin 1976: 259). On the other hand, he is parodied as a poor military organizer and a somewhat immature person, “a character built to human scale” (Boru 158). Salutin’s portrayal of Mackenzie’s historical figure stands in an obvious contrast to some critics’ bitter disavowal of 1837 as a remnant of “Victorian art forms” which re-enacted history “in romantic and inspirational terms. Characters are divided into heroes and villains” (Westfall 163).

“The Battle” scene is relevant for the post-modern ironic re-enactment of history, conveyed with the documentary style techniques. The actor performing Mackenzie, Eric Peterson in the original production, starts talking in third person, making any identification
between him and the character impossible, describing his character’s escape from the
Loyalists in the journalistic style that maintains the illusion of authenticity: “The farmer’s
wife diverts soldiers while Mackenzie escapes” (Salutin 1976: 259). Almost instantly,
however, “[s]tepping back into character,” the actor demonstrates the boyish personality of
his character: “And while I wait, I fire my four cannons here at Macnab across the river –
just to let him know I’m still here” (Salutin 1976: 259). As Boru notes, “in spite of—because
of—this theatrical obviousness, the play’s stand on the subject of oppression was
inescapably and pleasantly clear” (158).

Accordingly, Mackenzie is also assigned the role of the playwright’s spokesperson,
“a vehicle for presenting the case for overthrowing the despotic, illegal and avaricious
colonial government” (Boru 158). From his first apparition in a half-a page scene entitled
“Hat” (Salutin, 1967, 209), the revolutionary leader asserts his anti-colonial orientation: “I
run a small newspaper here in Toronto - it’s called The Advocate. Used to be The Colonial
Advocate, but I decided it was high time to get rid of the ‘Colonial’ part. It’s a good paper,
pick up one if you get a chance” (Salutin, 1967, 209). The scene focuses on the story of how
he picked up a hat from the mud on King Street in Toronto, only to discover a man
underneath it. When he offered to help him, Mackenzie was forced to admit that he could not
do it alone:

MAN: You’re quite a little fellow. I think you’d better go for some help.

MACKENZIE: Oh I’m pretty tough. I think I can pull you out myself.

MAN: But it’s not just me I’m worrying about. It’s the wagon and the two oxen.

(Salutin 1976: 209)
Beyond the chuckle, the scene also reads as an allusion to Mackenzie’s need to unite with other people in order to achieve his goals. Mud, on the other hand, becomes a symbol of Upper Canada’s economical and political situation, which metaphorically its citizens feel trapped, in addition, of course, to being an ironic reminder of the uncivilized state of Toronto and, in fact, the entire country. Furthermore, as I mentioned, in “The Lady in the Coach” scene, Salutin uses again the mud to satirize the imperialistic stereotypes. In his election speech, however, Mackenzie addresses the farmers’ cause more directly and emphasizes his adherence to their cause, although the ironic and auto-ironic modes remain dominant. He rejects the diminishing image of the “little Reformer” whose political enemies call “a spaniel dog” and describes himself as a politician determined “to rectify the wrongs in this colony” and identifies himself as “a Scots terrier hot on the tail of a rat!” (Salutin 1976: 234). As a central argument, he recalls his efforts to assert “the will of the people” by going “to the Assembly to see what he can do to rectify the wrongs in this colony” (Salutin 1976: 234) and then to the King of England himself “with a petition of grievances that’s half a mile long” (Salutin 1976: 235). He anticipates the rebellion in the same parodic style, speaking of the various stages of “Tory/turkey shoots,” culminating with a trip to the “turkey parliament” and asserting people’s wishes (Salutin 1976: 236). In case of rejection, the only alternative becomes fighting: “We declare open season on turkeys and you’ll all have one on your plate this year for Christmas!” (Salutin 1976: 236). Eventually, he clearly articulates the goals of the reform movement and subsequently of the 1837 rebellion: “An independent country. A new nation. … Think what this country could be with its natural bounty … it could be one of the greatest in the world” (Salutin 1976: 246).
In spite of his general playful mood, Mackenzie also explicitly voices the workers and farmers’ “despair and frustration” (Salutin 1976: 235). He protests against the country’s economical and political subordination that deepens their poverty: “Everytime [sic] we turn around in this colony, we see its wealth being carted off someplace else. And what of the honest, hardworking people – the farmers and the labourers? The fruits of their effort are being scooped up to support the idle dandies in Toronto or London” (Salutin 1976: 244). The anti-colonial message is conveyed from a perspective and in a styles similar to Sorescu’s ones, despite the different historical and political contexts and the Romanian playwright’s need to disguise it through a tragicomic allegory because of the communist censorship.

2.4. The Romanian Writers’ Aesopian Style

Whereas the historical context in which a play was written generally uncovers aspects that might have become less obvious with the passing of time, the subversive social and political messages of texts written during a dictatorship can usually be understood only when they are read in relationship to the reality they attacked in tacit complicity with the audience/readers. In the case of parodies and satires, knowing what the object of irony is becomes imperative to decoding their double-coded messages. As a parody and an anti-regime allegory, *A Cold* requires from its readers and audiences not only the knowledge of the historical events and personalities it openly re-enacts but also of the realities it alludes to. Thus, I believe that a brief description of Romanian culture and politics in the 1970s will make *A Cold*’s underlying political agenda more apparent. After the Second World War, the U.S.SR started aggressively implementing political, economical, and cultural measures meant to replace the Western paradigm with the communist one in Romania and to
strengthen the country’s incorporation into the so-called Socialist Camp/Eastern Block. These measures involved the country’s leadership structures, education system, social infrastructure, and censorship criteria, which unavoidably determined the slow but profound change of mentalities and of the ways in which people related to each other and imagined their national community. In his book *A History of Romanians*, Ion Bulei explains that “the replacement of national values is paralleled by the systematic inoculation of a new type of patriotism, socialist and internationalist, which stressed not the love of one’s country and its traditions, but the fidelity toward the Communist Party, Marxism-Leninism, and devotion towards the Soviet Union” (163).

During the massive political reprisals of the 1950s, Western or Western-inspired Romanian publications, literature, and culture were declared “poisonous and dangerous” (Bulei 163). Thousands of books were physically destroyed and interdicted\(^\text{13}\), while most of the Romanian artists and intellectuals who started their careers before communism were either imprisoned, killed, and/or forced to align their creations to the requirements of socialist realism\(^\text{14}\) and the regime’s propaganda. The Romanian literature and drama became “completely subordinated to the communist ideology” (Bulei 163). In contrast, Russian and Soviet works were massively translated and published, flooding into the entertainment industry and the Romanian curriculum at all levels. In addition, Romania’s history, and particularly the RCP’s past were constantly “re-written on Marxist-Leninist foundations and on the criteria of the friendship with the Soviet Union” (Bulei 162), as I will explain in more detail in the next chapter.

Immediately after Stalin’s death, a short period of liberalization was initiated by Gheorghiucu-Dej, the RCP General Secretary at the time, and briefly continued by Ceausescu.
After he was elected the Party’s General Secretary in 1965, Ceausescu “criticized the dogma of socialist realism and acknowledged the right to cultural diversity” (Tismaneanu 2005: 228). The implementation of a few popular measures meant to consolidate his new position was abruptly interrupted by the ratification of the so-called 1971 *July Theses*\(^\text{15}\), which “asserted the Party’s leadership role in all fields, required the intensification of the politico-ideological activity, and complete involvement of mass media in political propaganda” (Bulei 172). Whereas the Soviet Union was undergoing the so-called *destalinization* since 1953\(^\text{16}\), Romanian leaders GheorghiukDej and subsequently Ceausescu refused to follow this trend and re-enforced the communist dictatorship. Hidden behind Ceausescu’s 1968 declaration of independence from Moscow, Romania paradoxically began the most Stalinist period of its history, which ended only in 1989 after the dictator’s death and the overthrown of the communist regime (Constantiniu 483-505, Bulei 172-5, Tismaneanu 2005: 233-60). Censorship increased and socialist realism became once again the official norm in Romanian arts and culture. The falsification of history in order to legitimate the communist dictatorship and the ongoing sacrifices demanded of the general population was further intensified, using the same Stalinist strategies. Whereas the rather common opinion is that English-Canadians did not learn much about their country’s history and culture through their formal education and/or forms of popular entertainment, then the Romanians’ sad reality was that they were systematically fed an extraordinary quantity of propagandistic lies about who they were and why they had a communist regime in their country.

Scientific and fictional works that addressed the past expressed solely the communist doctrine and created false arguments to support Ceausescu’s belief that he “embodied historical rationality” (Tismaneanu 2003: 217) and was everybody’s benefactor. Numerous
“intellectual parvenus and professional careerists pandering to the general secretary’s lust for glory” (Tismaneanu 2003, 214) fuelled the leader’s cult for the sake of personal benefits and/or out of fear. As early as 1973, an oversized volume entitled Omagiu (Homage, in Romanian) praised the presidential couple as rightful descendants of Romanian mythic leaders, in words that came close to religious worship. Given their direct contact with the audience, all performance genres were more exposed to censorship. The July Theses explicitly required them to promote exclusively new works “with a militant, revolutionary character … with topics based on our people’s fight for the triumph of socialism” (in Marian Popescu 2004: 122). In theatre, each play had to be approved before the production process could even start and the Central Committee of the RCP designed detailed guidelines for the development of new works, to make sure they would “contribute to the formation of the masses’ socialist conscience” (in Marian Popescu 2004: 122). In the next decades following the 1971 strengthening of political oppression in the arts, most of the Romanian new plays and theatre productions obediently expressed this political agenda, while the very few who attempted to uncover the truth had to disguise it through allegories, parables, and political innuendos, or to leave the country and write back to Ceausescu’s regime from abroad.

Given the Canadians’ freedom of speech, Salutin was able to chose the only anti-colonial mass movement in English Canadian history as the topic of his anti-imperialistic play, whereas Sorescu had to conceal his anti-communist plea in the allegorical re-enactment of fifteenth-century events. Paradoxically, Tepes was one of the Romanian leaders most often mentioned in the official discourse, as Ceausescu wanted to be considered his worthy successor. Sorescu first re-enacted Vlad Tepes and his people’s fight against the Ottoman Empire in A Cold, whose emphasis is, however, on the ordinary people’s heroism, while the
voivode is not one of the characters. The subsequent *The Third Pole* focuses on the depiction of the voivode’s struggles to protect but also to discipline his people in a time when the Romanian provinces were still feudal in mentalities and lifestyle. Both plays employ a parodic and allegoric treatment of the past, which allows for continuous allusions to Romania’s communist present.

As he admitted in a 1991 interview, the Romanian playwright consciously developed evasive writing techniques and used “ subtler outlets, metaphors, parables” (in Vianu 86), allegories, and, most often, irony, in order to have his works published and produced. Paradoxically, the need to disguise the anti-communist political message enhanced the subversive works’ artistic qualities. After liberation, Sorescu explained:

> We created codes in our struggle against censorship. I really think that our literature existed by hiding and exhaling codes. These codes came quite close to transfiguration, which also implies that they came closer to the essence of art, which is not supposed to be rigid mimesis […] a parabolic literature and a literature of the absurd appeared. (in Vianu 87)

As Puiu recalls in her 2002 study of parody, the anti-communist collective complicity guaranteed the understanding of the works’ political allusions. Accordingly, “the audience fervently attended [Sorescu’s] history-based shows, knowing what to search for and how to decode the parabolic layers” (Puiu 138), being more easily convinced than Salutin’s mistrusting spectators. If readers and audiences easily deciphered the subversive messages, the communist censors also recognized them. In the same 1991 interview, Sorescu described his struggle to have his productions released to the public:
I used much energy in talking interminably to the Ministry of Culture, so that the plays would pass the censors. For a play like *The Cold* to be performed, I had to attend endless performances for a whole year, with the show completed. I had to talk to people at the Ministry, to committees and subcommittees every week for an entire year. (in Vianu 89).

The censors’ reluctance to approve the opening of *A Cold* retroactively validates the play’s anti-communist message, which this chapter argues. Despite the censors’ and the audience’s reactions to the play, the printed reviews ignored Sorescu’s anti-colonial message, partly because of self-preservation, and partly to avoid having the play banned by censorship: “Edgar Papu [one of the foremost Romanian cultural theorists at the time] cautiously and fearfully called this new dramatic form ‘historic absurdism’” (Puiu 142) and relied on propagandistic stereotypes, such as “Tepes, a symbol of sacrifices” (Puiu 142). Constantin Maciuca, another public figure of the Romanian communist propaganda, used similar clichés: “‘the people itself as the protagonist,’ ‘expressions of eternity confronted with the ephemeral’” (Puiu 142). Out of the reach of the censors and Ceausescu’s secret police, Dennis Deletant, the translator and author of the “Introduction” to the 1987 English edition of *Vlad Dracula the Impaler*, the more commercial title he chose for Sorescu’s *The Third Pole*, was among the first ones to comment publicly on the play’s allusion to the present:

The parallel with the country’s twentieth century predicament is obvious to anyone familiar with Romania’s present situation, and particularly to the Romanian theatre-goer. If you have ever visited contemporary Romania you may well appreciate the irony of many of Vlad’s utterances and actions, some of which give the listener a feeling of *déjà entendu*” (Deletant in Sorescu 1987, 15).
The question on the end cover points even more directly towards Sorescu’s allegorical re-enactment of the communist dictatorship: “What has the fifteenth century Wallachia to do with twentieth century civilization? Everything! This play, by Romania’s most controversial poet and playwright, shows a ravaged land - a world full of whispers and spies; injustice and despair, where suspicion is rife – ruled by... MARTYR or MADMAN?” (Sorescu 1987, end cover, original capitalization). Deletant’s commentaries on Vlad Dracula the Impaler are also valid for A Cold. Although theatre critics and audiences were unable to make this kind of statements in public, Puiu notes that the plays acted as “a remedy against fear, restoring the freedom of thought and speech [...] a collective and tacit dissident mode” (138). Thirty years after their writing and twenty years after the 1989 revolution, Sorescu’s historical parodies testify to his emotional involvement in the depiction of his people and his genuine attempt to empower them.

Despite the different types of histories and societies in which they are written and received and which they embody on stage, A Cold and 1837 share the common denominators of the dramatic texts involved in the anti-colonial and respectively anti-communist struggles. Similar to Salutin, the Romanian playwright praises the ordinary people who fought for their independence and existence as a nation, offering models of bravery to his oppressed contemporaries and confirming auto-irony as a survival strategy during the communist dictatorship. Whereas the English-Canadian writer had to overcome the inherited ridicule of the anti-colonial revolution, Sorescu had to counteract the devaluation of Romanians’ heroic past, which had become questionable because of its propagandistic overuse. In contrast to the documentary style Salutin used to convince his audiences, Sorescu simultaneously conveyed and dissimulated his political message through absurdist characters and events that were only
vaguely embedded in the fifteenth century historical context but anachronistically parodied situations and verbal stereotypes common in 1970s Romania. Accordingly, my analysis of the play’s double-coded discourse will rely not only on the dramatic text but also on the history of the Romanian communism and its last leader, which Sorescu allegorically satirizes.

2.5. The Anti-Communist Message of Fifteenth Century Events

Being born as the result of the Roman Empire’s takeover of the kingdom of Dacia in 105 CE, Romania inhabits a territory that has always been perceived as being at the edge of the continent and the crossroad of empires always striving to conquer new territories. Sorescu’s re-enactment of the 1462 events is particularly based on historians’ views of the fifteenth-century Wallachia and Moldova as countries surrounded by neighbours with expansionist tendencies, Hungary, Poland, Russia (Bolovan 97, Constantiniu 94), in addition to the Ottoman Empire. This mythologizing perspective, which was highly encouraged and propagated during communism, places the Romanian provinces “in the front line of Christian Europe’s defence against the Ottoman Turks” (Deletant in Sorescu 1987, 13). Historical evidence supports, however, this perspective. Tepes’s letter to the Hungarian king spoke of the Romanian voivode’s consciousness as defender of Christianity (Constantiniu 101-2). Shortly after the historical events depicted in A Cold, Stephen the Great, the voivode of Moldova, shared this point of view when he asked the Venetian merchants for assistance in his ongoing fight against the Turks in the name of his country’s strategic position in the defence of Central European countries and Christianity: “Moldova … is a wall for the Hungarian and Polish countries” (Dungaciu 294). Whereas a number of post-communist
texts cast some doubt over Tepes and Stephen’s heroic resistance and especially over the Romanian leaders’ solidarity in this fight, (Bolovan 51-151), they also confirm Mohammed’s attempt\textsuperscript{19} to incorporate the Romanian territories into his empire and extend the Ottoman domination towards the outskirts of the continent (Bolovan 112).

Historical accuracy aside, in the 1970s Romanian context, Mohammed’s plan was easily decoded as an allegory of the expansion of the Russian Empire and subsequently the Soviet Union to the Black and Baltic Seas: “The Black Sea, we make a lake\textsuperscript{20} of it… and if we make a lake of it for our dynasty, then we too need an exit to the sea… the North Sea…” (Sorescu 1978: 23). This interpretation was further supported by A Cold’s presentation of the Ottoman Empire as a metonymy of the stereotypical imperialistic drive. The transparent allusions to the common thesis that empires are established, rise, and fall following similar developments helped the 1970s audiences see the Soviet Union in the same terms. Beyond the demagogic internationalist propaganda, Sorescu revealed the Russian communist empire’s similarities to any other imperialistic enterprise and also ironically predicted its unavoidable end. Post-Modern parody softened, however, the political message and made it acceptable for the censors.

Before going to sleep, the fictional Mohammed casually skims through a historical atlas, looking at the maps of previous empires. As he discovers that they succeed each other in time but overlap in space, he concludes that his attempt to conquer new countries and enlarge his empire is historically justified: “I trace with my finger the outline of the Hittite empire on a map… In a little while, I realize that in fact the Hittite empire is little else but the Egyptian empire… no, the Assyrian empire… no, the Chaldean… no, the Persian… this being the general state of world affairs, I decide I can go to sleep without a worry on my
mind” (Sorescu 1978: 101). The Sultan openly admits that he intends to “copy” the Byzantine organizational model, minus its civil rights and liberties, establishing what Pasha ironically calls “a plagiarized empire” (Sorescu 1978: 59).

The main element of the play’s anti-communist satire is, however, the portrayal of the Sultan as a dictator, starved for fame, power, and compliments, who closely resembles the popular perception of Ceausescu. In the 1977 performance, actors further emphasized the two leaders’ similarities, a common strategy to defeat censorship by altering the meaning of a play on stage after the written work and the production were officially approved. Puiu specifically recalls how Virgil Ogasanu was performing the role of Mohammed “imitating Ceausescu’s gestures” in the Bulandra production (138). Although they might not be as clear to twenty first-century readers as they were to the live audience, Sorescu’s allusions to Ceausescu are still apparent in the written text. Furthermore, the comparison to recent post-communist accounts of the communist regime can also clarify the text’s double-coded irony.

A megalomaniac like the communist dictator, who enjoyed being praised as Romania’s best “architect/engineer/ruler/thinker”, Mohammed also believes that he is superior to everybody else. Consequently, he is “up to his ears in the editing of the Tables of Law” (Sorescu 1978: 15), confident that he can do a better job than his mythic predecessors. Pasha of Vidin (whom I will abbreviate “Pasha” from now on), Sorescu’s spokesperson in A Cold, openly expresses his disapproval: “His Tables of Law are beneath any criticism. I read them to my soldiers and they were holding their sides with laughter […] It might be better if we went back to lawlessness” (Sorescu 1978: 17). Ceausescu’s works were and still are mocked in a similar way, as Tismaneanu states: “The numerous publications signed by
Nicolae Ceausescu reveal the sterility of his rudimentary ideological approach. [...] The harangues of the general secretary were a chain of verbal incantations” (2003: 216).

In addition, A Cold also parodies the random character of Ceausescu’s administrative decisions, such as the sudden and unjustified changes of the members of his administration (Bulei 173), his inability to accept any criticism (Tismaneanu 2005, 246), and his “subordinates’ fear that they would bring upon them the leader’s anger” (Constantiniu 487). For example, Sorescu’s character promotes his generals or sentences them to death according to their opinions about his one and the same senseless verse: “I, the lash of your darkened eye” (Sorescu 1978: 43). Given his obsession with it, this verse becomes the play’s absurdist leitmotif and the symbol of the Sulatan’s irrational behaviour. Pasha is the only one who dares to criticize Mohammed’s poem: “Your Highness, I have read this ode, this most recent literary production of yours, countless times, and I have reached the conclusion that it is entirely meaningless trying to be original in literature at every cost” (Sorescu 1978: 43). He also makes a direct plea for artistic truth: “It’s important that in the things we write we stumble upon the truth always” (Sorescu 1978: 43). What might appear as a common-sense statement from a Western perspective was in fact a courageous political act, a sarcastic reminder of the countless propagandistic works that presented a falsified image of Romania and its “demiurge president” (Tismaneanu 2005, 249). In contrast to Ceausescu, who consistently denigrated the people with opinions different than his own, the Sultan eventually recognizes Pasha’s courage, although he is frustrated by his criticism: “Men like him, who are prepared to risk their necks for an artistic idea, are very rare indeed” (Sorescu 1978: 65). Mohammed’s allusion to the general lack of opposition he encounters may be read as a transparent allusion to Romanians’ collective passivity and duplicity, only rarely interrupted
by dissident acts: “The regime managed to inculcate fear and a feeling of historical pessimism. […] Until the 1989 collapse, ‘living in truth’ was not an option for a majority of the Romanian intellectual elite” (Tismaneanu 2003: 211-2). Eventually, however, Mohammed cannot stand Pasha’s criticism any longer and orders his castration, to “soften” his voice, just as the very few Romanian dissidents were executed, in the 1950s, and imprisoned, in later years, to silence them.

* A Cold also indict[s] Ceausescu’s indifference towards the ordinary people and their poor living conditions. One of the few Western analysts of Ceausescu’s dictatorship, Katherine Verdery explains that the communist regimes usually engineered the population’s poverty in order to transform access to basic necessities into a reward for unconditional submission (2003: 39-53). In a country where the references to food were later censored from artistic texts as anti-communist allusions, Sorescu lets slip an allusion to the general poverty and hunger in Pasha’s description of Mohammed’s cynical attitude towards his subjects’ hunger:

Do you know that since the fall of Byzantium our poor only eat some yoghurt and then gargle with camomile tea to disinfect themselves? […] I said it’s Your Highness’s business to replace that yoghurt with something more substantial, or else outlaw the gargling…. ‘No, he says, that’s what disinfects your Adam’s apple…’

He’s crazy. (Sorescu 1978: 97)

Besides the parodic allusions to Soviet communization of the European countries as a form of twentieth-century imperialism and to Ceausescu as a stereotypical careless dictator, Sorescu also allegorically satirizes the Romanian local elite’s betrayal of their own people. Re-enacting the documented facts that Radu replaced his brother on the throne with
Mohammed’s help and then recognized the Ottoman sovereignty and accepted to pay an annual tribute (Constantiniu 101-2), *A Cold* offers the ironic portrayal of the pretender to the throne who trades his country’s independence and welfare for its crown, a transparent allusion to Romania’s communist leaders in the twentieth century. Among the very few theatre critics who analyzed Romanian plays after 1989, Puiu also identifies Radu’s demagogical declarations and “pathetic, cliché, and hypocritical nationalism” (140) as the parody of communist slogans and Ceausescu’s aggressive nationalism. This interpretation becomes even clearer when the Sultan himself mocks Radu’s betrayal (Sorescu 1978: 112) and especially by Pasha’s outspoken commentaries: “He has every reason to paint his country’s situation in the darkest colours […] to force us to appoint him to rule there, and to get us to curb the suffering” (Sorescu 1978: 19).

Like the Romanian communist leaders after the Soviet army’s invasion of the country at the end of the Second World War, Radu also poses as Wallachia’s saviour (Sorescu 1978: 60). His claims clearly recall Ceausescu’s well-known stereotypes, as shallow promises to “make reforms, improvements” (Sorescu 1978: 95) and to take into consideration “people’s will” (Sorescu 1978: 112). To highlight his lack of moral and political responsibility even further, Sorescu imagines a paradoxical reversed situation, in which the foreign invader warns the traitor prince about the disastrous consequences of the Ottoman domination. Mohammed paints the grim picture of a future colony which will denied political and economical independence: “we will take away your right to keep an army under your flag… […] 6000 horses shouldn’t be able to haul the gold from Romania” (Sorescu 1978: 1003). As most of the facts Sorescu included in the play, the sultan’s summary is historically documented. However, the scene also reinforces the similarities of the Ottoman and the
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Soviet occupations. The remarks on the tribute Wallachia had to pay to the Porte can easily be read as an allegory of Romania’s war debt to the Soviet Union, “the amount of three hundred million United States dollars payable over six years in commodities (oil products, grain, timber products, seagoing and river craft, sundry machinery, et cetera)” (“The Armistice”). Moreover, the interdiction for Wallachia to have a national army most likely intended to remind of the Romanian armed forces’ military operations after the Armistice under “the general leadership of the Allied (Soviet) High Command” (“The Armistice”) (Constantiniu 418) and the prolonged presence of 25,149 Soviet soldiers in Romania until 1958 (Bulei 166).

In addition to describing the grim political and economic consequences, Mohammed also anticipates that the foreign domination will alter people’s daily lives, the trust in each other, and, implicitly, their sense of a collective identity: “we will establish total chaos, the fear of what the next day will bring… we will buy off your landowners, we will drain your powers” (Sorescu 1978: 103). From this perspective, several theatre historians and reviewers consider A Cold “an allegory for the fear and fatalism that characterize the Romanians” (Deletant in Sorescu 1987: 14), determined by centuries of foreign invasions and occupations and further heightened during communism. In spite of the warnings, Radu asks Mohammed to continue the invading campaign and even assures him that the transformation of Wallachia into a Turkish colony will be a quick process (Sorescu 1978: 115). Radu’s attitude ironically echoes the Romanian twentieth-century leaders’ acceptance of communism in exchange for their rise to power. Documents made public after 1989 attest to the Romanian Communist Party’s lack of political relevance before the Russian intervention in Romania. As it was “unable to gain power on its own” (Constantiniu 430), RCP accepted the help of its “Soviet
patron” (Constantiniu 419-30), which Sorescu allegorically criticizes in *A Cold* through Radu’s acceptance of the Ottoman Empire’s domination.

This short selection of political innuendos, which abound in *A Cold*, support my argument that Salutin and Sorescu use the historical re-enactment in similar ways, although the plays’ objects of parody are naturally different. The indictment of the imperialistic and respectively communist dominations is paralleled by contrast between the abusive ruler and the leader who is devoted to the people. As I showed, Salutin re-enacts Mackenzie as a romantic Canadian-style hero, acknowledging his role in the fight for independence while mocking his flaws. On his part, Sorescu answers to Romanians’ need for more heroic figures. Although Tepes does not appear in *A Cold*, he is a strong presence. His people’s actions indirectly portray him as a patriot and a wise ruler, whose soldiers willingly sacrifice their lives to defend their country. When one of Tepes’s spies is caught in the Ottoman camp and dies without betraying him in spite of the torture, Mohammed himself expresses his admiration: “I think we shouldn’t take the throne away from a man who’s so loved by his people” (Sorescu 1978: 87). Pasha, who has met the Romanian voivode before the events depicted in *A Cold*, recalls with enthusiasm his “striking sense of reality, his ability to size up a situation, his promptness in action, and the energy behind his power” (Sorescu 1978: 95). Whereas Salutin points out the differences between Mackenzie and the members of the Family Compact, depicted as exploiters and traitors of the common people, Sorescu emphasizes the contrast between Tepes and his brother Radu, whose claim to the throne is supported by the Ottoman armies marching towards Wallachia. Pasha is once again the one who tells Radu the truth: “You’ve got two virtues over your brother! You are not as brave as he is; and when it comes to diplomacy, you are a blockhead” (Sorescu 1978: 95). The
Romanians’ attitudes towards their voivode range from women’s treating him as their equal to soldiers’ worshiping him as a hero and a saint. Toma’s wife casually recalls how Tepes stopped at their house, when he was hurt, without revealing his identity. They changed his bandage, gave him one of Toma’s shirts and some food, “fresh bread and pickled tomatoes” (Sorescu 1980: 87, my translation), which he greatly enjoyed. The soldiers, however, have a mystical admiration towards him. They believe him able of extraordinary acts, “you will recognize our lord Vlad easily: He’ll be holding the Sultan’s head in his hands” (Sorescu 1978: 139), and protected against death by his destiny: “Our Vlad cannot die. He has a lot to do still” (Sorescu 1978: 137). In _A Cold_, Tepes’s heroism empowers his soldiers, “I won’t die, either” (Sorescu 1978: 137) and, in turn, they serve as models for the captive audiences.

### 2.5. Canadian Workers, Axemakers, Foundrymen, and Farmers

As I already anticipated earlier in this chapter, in addition to portraying them as exploited colonial subjects, _1837_ and _A Cold_ also re-enact the common people as examples of patriotism, national consciousness, and bravery, providing their twentieth century audiences with models able to help them regain the sense of a national community worth belonging to. In _1837_, the farmers’ hard work and determination to make better lives for themselves and their families echo the pioneer myth, which, as Gilbert and Tompkins point out, “can be rewritten, or re-enacted, as a dialectic between invader and invaded… to demonstrate how indigenous spaces have been invaded and desacralised by the expansion of an alien culture” (154). From the perspective of Aboriginal people’s history, the Upper Canadian farmers may be considered not only _victims_ but also as _agents_ of colonization. Creating their collective play in the 1970s, Salutin and the Passe Muraille company ignore,
however, this point of view and employ the heroic perspective of settlers, which official histories of Canada also disseminate: “For those who came to the colonies, the process of occupying the land and pushing back the wilderness assumed epic proportions. Colonial societies were forged in the struggle for survival in the new environments” (Brown 217).

Accordingly, the play insists upon the hardships of clearing the land and settling in Canada, which are aggravated by imperial exploitation and the corruption of the local elite. Consequently, as Salutin emphasizes the farmers’ subordinate position, lack of rights, and the abuses they are subjected to, the image of the common people of Upper Canada becomes less that of colonizers and more of colonized subjects.

Whereas *A Cold*’s “Prologue” launches the theme of endless foreign invasions, as I will later explain in more detail, in 1837’s first scene, “Walking”, the focus is on Canada’s wilderness and on the settlers’ ongoing sacrifices as they attempt to make a home for themselves and their families in their new country. In the beginning, two unnamed farmers tell the story of Thomas Bench, a Scottish immigrant, who has been walking for four and a half days through the woods towards “a plot of land near Coldwater” which he bought for twenty dollars having to “work the rest out” (Salutin 1976: 205). According to the stage directions, the company theatrically emphasizes the length of his lonely journey by “planting a forest of trees with their voices” (Salutin 1976: 206). When he arrives, presumably exhausted, he “decides not to rest, raises his axe, and begins clearing his land” (Salutin 1976: 206). The following scene, “Clearing”, reinforces this perspective on colonization, this time from the perspective of an imperial representative, Magistrate Thompson, who is amazed that the Steadmans cleared as much as eighteen acres in two years. Like in *A Cold*, the brief scenes that depict the people’s everyday lives justify their decision to rise and fight against
exploitation and corruption. Furthermore, both 1837 and A Cold focus on the collective character rather than the political leaders and emphasise the common people’s sense of belonging to a community which is worth fighting for and, implicitly, their role in the “colony to nation” process. Salutin explicitly notes this in his rehearsal diary: “They [ordinary people] are the core of our past we have to get through to; they must be the centre of the play - not any of the ‘great’ individuals who hog most of the records” (Salutin 1976: 189). Reviewers of the Passe Muraille production confirm the efficacy of these dramaturgical strategy and ideological perspective and praise the company for its choice “to look for drama in circumstances rather than personalities” (Boru 157). As the author’s spokesperson in the play and also the historical leader of the revolutionary movement, Mackenzie explains that “Doel’s […] workers […] Armstrong’s axemakers, Dutcher’s foundrymen” and, most of all, the impoverished farmers (Salutin 1976: 241) are the ones ready to fight for social rights, as well as for national self-determination. Whereas the moderate Reformers are against fighting for independence, “We have pledged ourselves to Reform – not Revolution” (Salutin 1976: 241), the common people consider from the very beginning “the Lieutenant-Governor, or the King of England, or the whole British army” (Salutin 1976: 246) their enemies. The re-evaluation of the 1837 events’ significance is done in several individual and collective scenes, which depict the events and feelings leading up to the uprising, revealing the human aspects of political history. For example, after being beaten during the 1836 election campaign, the reformist farmer Robert Davis decides to travel to the United States to “see that someone else has succeeded” (Salutin 1976: 226). Although he is offered a “four hundred acre cleared farm” (Salutin 1976: 231), he declines the American Dream, inflation of heroes, and openly encouraged murder of native populations, and cannot wait to return
home. However, consistent with Mackenzie and the author’s beliefs, Robert Davis returns to Canada with a revolutionary dream inspired by the American model: “I’ve seen it now. I know it can be done. We can do it too, if we stay together. […] Now is the time to unite and fight!” (Salutin 1976: 231). The people’s reaction when Mackenzie pleads for open rebellion against the Upper Canadian Conservatives confirms this popular agreement, as all of them pledge themselves “to shooting turkeys” (Salutin 1976: 236).

Just as Mackenzie is satirically portrayed as a Canadian-style hero, the farmers’ bravery is also depicted in ironic though scenes that “maintain the appropriate proportions of compassion and idealism” (Boru 158), similar to Passe Muraille’s other collective productions. Salutin employs the vignette technique once again and alternates verses from the satirical song “Across Toronto Bay” with six very short scenes that show the farmers we met in Act 1, now leaving their homes to join the Rebels (1976: 247-51). The general tone is light and optimistic and the scenes present everyday actions to attest to the authenticity of the events depicted on stage and also to eliminate any danger of stereotyping the Upper Canadian revolutionaries. His young siblings, whom he was supposed to take care of, secretly follow an older brother who leaves home to join the rebels. Fred Bench sneaks away from the conjugal bed after his wife falls asleep, although she made him promise he would not go to battle. A merchant’s helper quits his job for ethical reasons, which he describes in naïve but firm words: “I just don’t think it would be fair, sir, for me to keep taking your wages, in case we met on the battlefield – and I had to shoot you dead” (Salutin 1976: 247). The popular enthusiasm tragically conflicts, however, with the lack of weapons and military experience, which Salutin also depicts in the attempt to give an accurate re-enactment of the events. In the “Drilling” scene, for example, a farmer is preparing for battle
by drilling with a pitchfork “as one would with a rifle” while the second one is mocking him “What are you going to do with it? Feed hay to the British? (Salutin 1976: 242). The first farmer eagerly ignores the ridicule and is enthusiastically [w]hirling and stabbing the fork directly out toward the audience. Attack!” (Salutin 1976: 243).

The ironic style consistently helps Salutin avoid an emphatic patriotic tone, without diminishing the political significance of the historical events. The song that links the scenes in Act 2 repeatedly reiterates the rebels’ determination and genuine heroism with lines such as “It’s time to show the Tories that this country’s no man’s toy” (Salutin 1976: 247), “if we stand back to back today, we’ll own this land tomorrow” (Salutin 1976: 249), and “We’ll follow you Mackenzie, to Toronto or to hell” (Salutin 1976: 250). In contrast to historians’ diminishing account of the events, which I have already explained, Salutin describes the encounters between the rebels and the government’s soldiers on a serious note in spite of honestly acknowledging the defeat. In the “MacKenzie’s Call” scene, for example, he recalls both sides’ lack of experience, which is historically documented and thus impossible to ignore, but does not present it as a ridiculous incident:

A REBEL: Well I can tell how it happened because I was there. It was a hell of a battle and it was right there at the corner of Yonge and College […] they cut some of us down, but we fired back. And then we dropped down to let the men behind fire. But the men behind — they were green — they thought we’d dropped because we were all dead. So they turned around and ran back to the tavern. Sheriff Jarvis’ men — they were even greener than that — they threw away their guns and ran back to Toronto. (Salutin 1976: 255)
To emphasize further the genuine risks the farmers took during the rebellion, *1837* also re-enacts on stage a few direct confrontations, including the death of Anthony Anderson, who “is hit, lurches across the stage, and falls dead” (Salutin 1976: 252). The genuinely tragic aspects of the farmers’ revolt are further emphasized in the staging of the final battle. According to the stage directions, the event is acted out in front of the audience, as “bitter and very brief” and resulting in “bodies and weapons of the Rebels litter[ing] the field” (Salutin 1976: 259).

The playwright’s purpose is to re-enact accurately the historical course of events but to convince his audience of their long-ignored importance. In his rehearsal diary, Salutin confesses, however, the temptation to renounce historical accuracy for the sake of a more empowering message: “I’ve thought of changing the ending, having the rebels win […] or cutting off the battle and the defeat” (Salutin 1976: 193). Eventually, he decided to accept his country’s past, re-enact it as it actually happened, and “wring something positive out of that” (Salutin 1976: 193). At the end of the play, the farmer Peter Matthews and the blacksmith Samuel Lount, the only two rebels charged with high treason and executed, re-state the ordinary people’s role in the 1837 events:

LOUNT: This country […] cannot remain long under the hell of such merciless wretches that they murder its inhabitants for their love of liberty. […] If I were to leave my home in Holland Landing again, and march down Yonge Street, I would go by the same route, only hoping that the journey’s end would differ. (Salutin 1976: 264)

As if Salutin consciously aimed to compensate for the textbooks’ omission and appealed to the twentieth-century audiences to pick up the fight for independence, Lount’s final speech
anachronistically echoes the documented request of Elizabeth, his widow: “Canada will do justice to his memory. Canadians cannot long remain in bondage. They will be free” (Cruxton 270). The last line of Lount and also of the play, “We haven’t won yet” (Salutin 1976: 264), summarizes what Salutin explains in more detail in his notes: “Losing, I argued, does not have to make you a ‘Loser’; there are winners who lose. It is the difference between saying, ‘We lost,’ and saying, ‘No, we just haven’t won yet.’ There it is” (Salutin 1976: 193). The 1970s changes in Canadians’ self-perception announced the subsequent post-colonial re-evaluations of the national history and Canada’s status that would take place in the 1980s.

2.6. Patriotic Messages Free of Patriotic Clichés

Similar to Salutin in 1837, Sorescu is also driven in *A Cold* by his admiration of the common people and by his almost mystical perception of himself as “the mirror of a large group of people. Discovering this common self of mine […] gave me great confidence in myself and in the world at the same time” (Vianu 1998: 87). Whereas Salutin still gives brief but convincing portrayals of individual farmers using the vignette technique, Sorescu portrays the Romanian peasants as a collective character of mythic proportion. Prince Radu and Panzaru, who stroll through the Ottoman camp during the first two acts, and a few peasant soldiers and women who appear only towards the end of the play are the only Romanian characters in *A Cold*. However, as the Sultan and his commanders consistently talk about them and perceive them as a dangerous and mysterious force, the general impression is that the Romanians are in fact the main characters. In addition, their reduced presence is compensated by the overt significance of their scenes. As Puiu argues, a “reversed system of dimensions establishes a negative correlation between the characters and
their importance. The ‘small’ characters speak few, but meaningful words” (140). Moreover, the small number of Romanian characters metaphorically corresponds to the small size of Tepes’s army and country in comparison to the Mohammed’s military force and empire. Captain Papuc bitterly points that out: “We are few, much too few” (Sorescu 1978: 134). In contrast, Sorescu consistently emphasizes the historical bravery of the Romanian soldiers, who consistently prove their exceptional patriotism, unconditional devotion to their voivode, courage, and fighting strategies.

In the scenes that take place in the Ottoman camp during the first two acts, Panzaru and two anonymous prisoners metonymically represent the entire national community of Wallachia, which Mohammed strives to conquer. I already mentioned the Romanian spy who dies without betraying despite torture and makes Mohammed meditate on Tepes’s qualities as a leader. In a similar situation, another Romanian prisoner forsakes the role of a foolish cow herder he was playing in the attempt to save his life and openly threatens the Sultan: “our places are dangerous” (Sorescu 1978: 120, my translation), consciously condemning himself to death. A similar heroism exhibits Panzaru, another character who metonymically suggests the Romanian patriotism during the first act. He is a peasant traveller whose portrayal is anachronistically based on the famous nineteenth-century shepherd-traveller Badea Cartan (Gheorghe Cârțan24), who walked all the way from his little village to Rome to see the invasion of Dacia depicted on Trajan’s Column. Similar to his real-life model, Panzaru leaves his funny-named small village of Pătlăgele (“Beetroot,” in English) and travels throughout Europe, drawn by the desire to see “big cities, Vienna… Hamburg” (Sorescu 1978: 69), but also by his patriotic feelings. He appoints himself as Wallachia’s unofficial ambassador, starts looking for allies against the Ottoman Empire, and even takes
the risk to sneak into the Ottoman military camp and struggles to convince Radu to renounce his plans. In his short encounters with the Romanian prince, Panzaru employs a Trickster-like attitude, somewhat similar to Davis’s attitude during his American trip in 1837, and he forces the prince to acknowledge his decision to sacrifice Wallachia’s independence in order to become its ruler, as I already explained. Panzaru warns him that, against Radu’s ill-founded hopes, the Turks would not leave a territory once their army occupied it, confirming in fact the Sultan’s own prediction: “You may think so; but what they get a hold of is well held” (Sorescu 1978: 77).

Like the re-enactment of the Ottoman invasion in general, the peasant’s warning has a double meaning, which was easily understood in the 1970s Romania. On one hand, it openly deplores the past Turkish domination, which kept the country backward and exhausted its resources. On the other hand, it subtly mocks the communist leadership and the Soviet twentieth-century control over Romania. Although the hidden meaning might be less obvious twenty years after the end of the communist dictatorship especially for a reader who does not know the Romanian past in detail, a quick review of the post-1989 account of the beginning of communism in Romania confirms the analogies. Among others, Constantiniu (426-34) and Tismaneanu (2005: 107-28) analyze how Romanian communists came to power with the help of the Soviet army only to be demanded afterwards to transform the country into a “docile satellite” (Tismaneanu 2005, 117).

Taking this into consideration, I argue that A Cold is simultaneously an expression of the Romanian peasants’ determination to defend their country against the Ottoman Empire and also a proof of the playwright’s courage to attack the communist regime under the nose of its censors. Sorescu’s attempt to remind his people of their past heroism and determine
them to fight once again for their rights and freedom attests to his genuine patriotism, as one of the very few writers who did not become docile tools of the state propaganda. His parodic style is a reflection of Romanians’ auto-ironic attitude, an essential strategy of survival and contestation before 1989, which, communist persecutions aside, I find similar in spirit and purpose to the English-Canadian self-mockery as Hutcheon and others describe it. His familiar tone allows Panzaru to make some fundamental statements, avoiding, however, a pompous rhetoric. Mimicking naiveté, he suggests to Radu, for example, that they both would return home *alone*, i.e. without the Turkish army, and simply ask his mother and Tepes for forgiveness (Sorescu 1978: 77). When the Romanian prince refuses this alternative, Panzaru considers talking to the Sultan himself because “Mohammed seems like a sensible man’” (Sorescu 1978: 79). Despite the light tone, the despair of a nation still forced to live under siege is compelling. Furthermore, when he dies because of Radu’s betrayal, Panzaru becomes a representative of the countless unknown heroes who sacrificed their lives defending their country and loved ones.

In the 1970s Romania, historical accuracy was important to gain the trust of an audience continuously fed propagandistic lies. When he is not playing with fictional characters meant to give his political message a human dimension and to mislead the censors, Sorescu bases his depiction of Tepes’s strategy and the heroism of his soldiers on testimonies of the time, which confirm the Romanians’ victories and the low confidence of Mohammed’s army. Among others, Constantin Mihailovici, a Serbian-born janissary who participated in the 1462 Ottoman campaign and witnessed Tepes’s night attack, recalled: “Nevertheless, a great fear overcame us, although the Romanian voivode had a small army, and we were everywhere very careful and buried ourselves in trenches every night, but we
still couldn’t be sure” (in Constantiniu 101). Trying to convince Mohammed to stop his campaign against Wallachia, Pasha, for example, reminds him that Tepes “made a macabre forest with macabre fruit of our impaled vanguard” (Sorescu 1978: 45) and later cites from Tepes’s authentic letter to the King of Hungary, which describes the death of over twenty thousand Turkish soldiers (Sorescu 1978: 105).

Sorescu also mentions two of Tepes’s attacks, most famous for their unusual tactics. During the first one, his soldiers hid themselves in cow skins (Sorescu 1978: 119) and pretended to be a herd watched over by a retarded shepherd, whom I mentioned earlier, as they waited to attack the passing Ottoman army. The second one is a night attack during which Romanian soldiers in Turkish military uniforms invaded the camp and attempted to kill the Sultan himself. Although Mohammed survived, the attack caused serious loss. Mihailovici vividly described the Ottomans’ losses, “people, horses, camels,” their panic, “all the Turks ran away,” and also Mohammed’s punitive measures, “next day, they caught a few hundreds Romanians and the emperor ordered all to be drawn and quartered ” (in Constantiniu 101). In the play, Sorescu re-enacts the preparations of the attack, emphasizing once again the ordinary people’s heroism. As Captain Papuc gives them the final instructions, it becomes clear that he does not count on any survivors. This does not scare his soldiers, “You know, captain, we’re not afraid to die… we only die once” (Sorescu 1978: 137), who peacefully say a prayer for those who “may not see the light of day tomorrow” (Sorescu 1978: 139).

Captain Toma is the only Romanian who is characterized in more depth, not only as a brave soldier, but also as a fair and wise commander, and a tender husband. When Papuc attempts to punish his soldiers to prevent any future betrayals, Toma is the only one that
confronts him, saving his men and gaining the admiration of his superior: “You’ve got guts, Toma; you see me in a rage, and you bare your fangs too. […] I’m glad you won this time” (Sorescu 1978: 129). Later in the play, when he takes part in one of the biggest defeats of Tepes’s army (Oiesti, 19 June 1462), although he is hurt, Toma continues fighting, “I was leading the army… and a spear slashed into me. I didn’t feel anything” (Sorescu 1978: 147), and even helps bury the dead at the end of the battle (Sorescu 1978: 145). He eventually returns home and calmly prepares for his own death, while casually complementing his wife, asking for food, and pretending he has only caught a cold and needs to rest to regain his strength. As Ghitulescu notes in his History of the Romanian Contemporary Drama, Toma’s cold, which gives the play’s title, succinctly expresses the text’s patriotic message: “death doesn’t exist in the fight for the defence of the country’s land, but only a perpetual ‘cold’ like an always postponed death” (311). The normalcy of his heroic gestures makes Toma “a parable of an eternal modesty, a soldier of a country of no importance in the global immensity of geographical and political interests” (Puiu 139) and, implicitly, a appropriate role model for his audiences, in contrast to the stereotypical ones disseminated by the communist propaganda.

By depicting Toma’s death as an authentic act of heroism, Sorescu compensates for the forgetfulness of official statist histories, which do not usually preserve the names of the soldiers but only of the generals, although the very existence of a country relies on them. I find extremely relevant the fact that both plays end with death and defeat, which paradoxically restate the playwrights’ beliefs in their peoples’ vitality and future political liberation. In a tone similar to that of Lount at the end of 1837, Toma’s wife voices her confidence that he will actually wake up after having some rest and go back to war: “We
don’t die that easily, we don’t. We… don’t… die, not us!” (Sorescu 1978: 149). Toma and respectively Lount’s deaths are presented as tragic events, but only temporary delays in achieving their peoples’ goals. Salutin and Sorescu restore the common individuals’ sense of dignity and recall their role in founding and defending their country. By doing this, 1837 and A Cold anticipate one of the common goals of post-colonial histories, which, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, “are not always concerned with constructions of history per se but with constructing the self in history” (109), as a means to deconstruct imperial narratives and reassert collective values.

2.7. The Farmers and Peasants’ Imagined Exile

In addition to the will to sacrifice themselves fighting for the sake of their country, the ordinary people portrayed in 1837 and A Cold also share their inner exile. As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, the re-enactment of this state mirrors the inner exile of the twentieth century spectators and asserts this state as a strong link among the members of the colonized historical and contemporary communities. As both dramatic characters and spectators acknowledge that they do not feel safe and “at home” in Upper Canada and, respectively, Wallachia, they also come to understand that this is what unites them. Accordingly, 1837 and A Cold may be considered dramatic representations of the collective inner exile and also agents of imagined exile, which I defined in my introduction as a state of consciously collective alienation that does not necessarily involve physical displacement. Although the plays’ effect on their audiences is most likely similar, each of them deals with a different progression of history and struggles with different types of prejudices in the theatrical contexts it belonged to.
In the case of the Upper Canadian farmers depicted in 1837, exile is twofold. On one hand, Salutin conveys their physical displacement, as many of his characters are immigrants forced by poverty and sometimes politics to leave their home countries. On the other hand, the play depicts their inner alienation, initially determined by their actual immigration but heightened by the living conditions in Upper Canada. Although the two aspects are intertwined, the rebels’ inner exile is their dominant feature and also their shared characteristic. By emphasizing this common state, 1837 revives the tradition of English-Canadian literature up to 1850, which, according to Richard Plant, depicts the working-class settlers by highlighting that the “conditions of leaving home have created an exile that is irrevocable” (45) for them and have come in the way of their struggles to build a “home away from home” and ground themselves in their new country. The play also addresses some of what Ashcroft et al, among many other post-colonial critics, identify as the “common themes of the literatures of settler colonies – exile, the problem of finding and defining ‘home’, physical and emotional confrontations with the ‘new’ land” (1989: 27). In this process, “the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” plays an essential role and later becomes one of the sources of “the special post-colonial crisis of identity” (Ashcroft et al 1989: 27).

Most of Salutin’s characters, including the Fred Bench, exhibit the consciousness of their physical exile, the price they accepted to pay in order to build better lives for them and their families: “That’s why you cut your roots and come across ocean – to buy your own land, be your own boss” (Salutin 1976: 209, my italics). As their hopes vanish, the farmers gradually develop deeper “feelings of irrevocable exile and entrapment” (Plant 45), which appear in many English-Canadian nineteenth-century literary works. To emphasize these
feelings, *1837* re-enacts the alienating relation to place, which in the cases of territorial nationalism that defines settler colonies profoundly affects the individuals’ sense of identity. Upper Canada is mainly represented as an endless and frightening forest, “Trees and trees and trees and trees” (Salutin 1976: 206), “Trees blocking out almost all the light” (Salutin 1976: 212), where “everybody walked to get anywhere and do anything” (Salutin 1976: 205). The town is also depicted as a hostile environment, in which an individual simply riding his wagon on the streets might get sucked into the mud like in quicksand (Salutin 1976: 209), be exploited by government representatives, and cheated by crooks. After walking for three days through the woods to reach Toronto, Fred, for example, has to wait for days in a row at the Land Office (Salutin 1976: 212) only to discover that the government is not going to keep the promises made to attract settlers.

The scenes that precede the farmers’ revolt explicitly re-enact their desperate financial and psychological states. Like in most traditional societies, owning land guarantees one’s freedom, position in society, and sense of self, in nineteenth-century Upper Canada. As documents attest, among other abuses, illegal disposessions of the lands homesteaded by settlers were so frequent that Mackenzie’s initial call to action promised “to give free deeds to all settlers who live on their lands; to give free gifts of the Clergy Reserve lots to good citizens who have settled them” (McNaught 1969: 89, my italics). In the play, Salutin re-enacts this type of abuses in the “Clearing” scene (Salutin 1976: 206-09). After two years of hard work, the Steadman family loses the lot they cleared, because it is abusively incorporated in “a parcel of one thousand acres which was granted three weeks ago to Colonel Sparling of the Forty-Seven Highlanders” (Salutin 1976: 207) with the Lieutenant-Governor’s complicit approval. Consistent with the play’s anti-colonial agenda, Salutin
subtly points out the imperial tolerance of the abuses. The stage directions specify that the backside of the survey map that assigns the Steadmans’ land to someone else “looks to us [the audience] like a Union Jack” (Salutin 1976: 207), whereas the carrier of the bad news is “magistrate Thompson, obviously an official” (Salutin 1976: 206). The imperialistic re-mapping of the invaded territories starts with taking the lands from the aboriginal population and assigning them to European settlers and it continues in some cases with taking the lands back from the settlers and re-assigning them to the representatives of the Empire and the local elite. This process not only erases the Aboriginal presence but also determines the alienation of the farmers, placed in the double position of colonizers and colonized, in spite of their seemingly voluntary exile and free citizen status. Not only are they unable to return to their home countries because of their precarious financial situation and, sometimes, of their status as social or political outcasts, but most of them are also unable to feel at home in Upper Canada. In addition to its anti-colonial message, the depiction of the nineteenth-century farmers’ exploitation also carries a timely social message, as it closely mirrored the situation of the Canadian farmers and workers in the 1970s.

During the first wave of plant closures and relocations that took place between 1969 and 1972, workers’ unions protested against the foreign and especially American-owned branches of multi-national corporations, which regarded “the Canadian people as nothing more than pawns on a chess board that can be moved and removed at will” (High 328). More than an abstract doctrine, Canadian economic nationalism, called at the time “new nationalism,” became “a powerful weapon in the hands of working people for use against companies that closed plants” (High 322). In contrast to the U.S., where plant closings were “a private contractual matter between employer and employee, […] the identification of the
inhabitants of industrial Ontario with a national community provided the unity of interest necessary to resist” (High 335) them.

In this economic and political context, the exploitation of the 1837 Upper Canadian farmers and their fight for responsible government and, eventually, independence had a special impact. Most of the reviews collected by Conolly in Canadian Drama and the Critics mention the play’s “present ironies” (Boru 157). Whereas plant closures and the external control in the arts stirred a public debate on the American economic and cultural domination, Salutin turned to the past in order to explore the larger implication of the changing dynamics of the Canadian national community and its specific way of imagining itself. Documents and anecdotic evidence from the 1830s (Cruxton 1997: 259) show that the properties and attitudes of the upper classes established physical and respectively psychological boundaries between them and the lower-class settlers and among settlers themselves. Among other factors, the social and physical isolation make it almost impossible for people to gain the sense of belonging to a community and heightens their inner exile. In his A Canadian Retrospective from 1815-1914 textbook, Cruxton explains that there were large uncultivated properties situated in between the smaller farms because the Family Compact and Anglican Church had no interested in producing crops, but were only waiting for the price of the land to go up to sell it with a profit (1997: 259). These wild lands had no ways of access from and through them and, thus, segregated the settlers from each other and from the towns. Inspired by this kind of facts, Salutin articulates the farmers’ alienation in spatial terms and, like some of the post-colonial writers Gilbert and Tompkins discuss in their Post-Colonial Drama, depicts the settler colony as “a site of anxiety and struggle” (1996: 146). He also anticipates Ashcroft et al’s argument that the “alienation of vision and the crisis in self-imagine which
the displacement produces in the case of enslaved populations transported to other countries, can be also found in the accounts of all categories of post-colonial individuals, including the Canadian ‘free settlers’” (Ashcroft et al 1989: 9, my italics).

1837 re-enacts different versions of alienation, from the seclusion of domestic workers within rich people’s houses to that of the farmers who feel trapped on their own lands. A woman, who works as a servant, complains that she is confined to her master’s kitchen because “she doesn’t want me in the rest of the house. Well I know all about it anyway – because my husband built it!” (Salutin 1976: 238). Another woman finds herself isolated in her house, as “there’s no road between our farm and the town – because all the land in between belongs to John Strachan and his accursed Church of England!” (Salutin 1976: 238). The few roads that exist, however, aggravate the alienation, as Salutin’s farmers mockingly point out: “Here’s a road. Fine road too. Except for the river that runs across it. Now they won’t build the bridge. Now what the hell good is a road without a bridge” (Salutin 1976: 238). Salutin shows how the farmers’ physical and inner exiles produced by immigration are doubled by internal exile within Upper Canada’s borders, which is generated by the imperialistic remapping of the land and the leaders’ obvious disinterest in creating local communities and, eventually, a coherent national collective.

The process of imagining the national community occurs, however, but in negative terms. At the beginning of Act 2, Mackenzie, for example, lists the Upper Canadians’ common denominators: “there is discontent, vengeance, rage – in men’s minds” (Salutin 1976: 246). The farmers are also conscious of the exile, exploitation, and poverty they share, although they rarely if ever meet each other. In the scene “Lount’s Forge” (Salutin 1976: 238-9), the presence of a choir of nameless men and women who explain how and why they
have been left with “nothing to lose” (239) is a visual metaphor of a community united by its deprivations. The 1837 popular movement appears as the direct consequence and expression of imagined exile: when they discover that they share their emotional and economic alienation, the Upper Canadian working classes take up arms. As they fight not only for their economic rights but also for Upper Canada’s independence, their revolt attests to the imagined exile’s capacity to help individuals gain the sense of belonging to a national community that is worth fighting and dying for, which has always been one of the essential requirements of the modern state’s existence.

In contrast to the farmers’ gradual discovery of what unites them, Sorescu’s peasants have inherited the collective national consciousness but endless imperialistic invasions force them to live as exiles on their own lands, always threatened and in fear for their lives. The first scene that takes place in the Romanian village suggests this state at various levels. A few women joyfully knead the dough as if dancing but find it hard to keep the rhythm since the fiddler went to war (Sorescu 1978: 123). Word arrives from Tepes that they have to stop making bread and start building a defensive wall out of clay and to baking rocks, with which to defend themselves against the Ottoman soldiers (Sorescu 1978: 123, 125). As they are preparing to do that, a small creak of the gate makes them run away and hide (Sorescu 1978: 133). Fear destroys any chance at leading a normal life. Furthermore, whereas officials abusively deprive the Upper Canadian farmers of their land and homes, foreign invaders force the Romanian peasants to abandon theirs: “Vlad Tepes’s order was to lay everything waste before the Turks” (Sorescu 1978: 135). Retreating into the mountains, hiding, and willingly isolating themselves, sometimes even in a grave, are the Romanians’ most common defensive strategies. As they leave, the peasants bury their gates to save them from rotting
(Sorescu 1978:145), physically disassembling their households but hoping for their restoration in the future. In other words, for the fifteenth-century peasants re-enacted in A Cold, inner exile is a consequence of the ongoing foreign invasions, whereas internal exile paradoxically becomes a defence strategy.

In addition, people’s personal experiences of estrangement are paralleled by Wallachia’s internal exile on the continent, a frequent theme in the Romanian popular and scholarly discourse, which I will discuss in Chapter 5 in more detail. The play’s anti-communist agenda allows for the interpretation of the Western countries’ indifference towards Tepes’s fight against the Ottoman Empire as an allegory of what happened at the end of the Second World War. As documents revealed after 1989 confirm, at Yalta, Romania was once again “abandoned by the Western countries, this time in the hands of Stalin” (Bulei 156). A Cold satirically exposes the rich European countries’ lack of interest in the fate of the poor ones, including the Romanian provinces, commonly considered a backward, exotic, and dispensable Other, only accidentally situated on the same continent. In A Cold, not only the Turks, but also the Greeks look down at the Romanians and their fight to defend their country. Stratos is actively searching for European support for the Greek cause and hopes to start a Crusade to regain Constantinople’s independence. Without hesitation, however, he denies the possibility that the Romanian provinces could also benefit from a Christian awakening “because the Turks would notice” (Sorescu 1978: 39) and that must be avoided. Conscious of Europe’s segregation in two types of countries and talking in the name of his people, Panzaru actively tries to convince Radu to return home “alone” and to make Mohammed go straight to Vienna26, whose riches make it much more worth the bother of conquest. Once the Turkish army would arrive in Vienna, Panzaru plans to throw snowballs
at people’s windows, actually and metaphorically waking them up: “I’d like to [...] scare the
guys who sit by the fire and do not give our struggles any thought!” (Sorescu 1978: 91, my
italics).

From a diachronic point of view, the 1462 Ottoman campaign is represented as a
metonymy of an endless series of imperialistic attacks, starting with the Roman invasion of
Dacia, which Pasha recommends to Mohammed as an example of successful military
strategy (Sorescu 1978:109), and ending with the Soviet army’s invasion at the end of the
Second World War, as I already explained. This perspective is subtly reinforced in the play’s
last scene, which takes place in Toma’s house. Hearing his steps, Toma’s wife, generically
named “The Lady”, decides to play a prank and hide with the other women: “Let them
believe the Tartars took us… For Tartars too have invaded in the meantime” (Sorescu
1978:145). The Lady’s line concisely suggests Wallachia’s ongoing invasions by different
people, which eventually make the people feel ill-fated if not actually cursed. A Cold
repeatedly re-iterates this belief, still popular in the 1970s Romania, and Panzarhu even wants
to pose this question to Mohammed himself: “Why bother with us? Why us, of all people?
We’re not made of honey” (Sorescu 1978: 79, my italics). Preparing for a decisive battle,
Captain Papuc re-affirms the same collective frustration and anxiety: “Why did they come
here? What did we ever do to them? There is only one answer: “Because!”” (Sorescu 1978:
128, my italics). Both Panzarhu and Papuc speak in the name of their communities, which
they actively relate to or, in Anderson’s words, imagine. When confronting Papuc, Toma
shows that he knows the name of each man in his company, can give details from their lives,
and explains that he feels responsible for each and every one of them (Sorescu 1978:129).
During his travels, Panzarhu is homesick and always talks about his native village, while he is
always searching for other countrymen, so that “we could talk Romanian” (Sorescu 1978: 71). The stories about the people he has met are full of anecdotic details and reconstruct a diverse human landscape, which includes Gheorghe Iordan, the owner of a store for hammer-zithers in Targoviste, an unemployed flutist who breaks ice in Vienna for a living, and a man who married four women in Turkey and now has to deal with them. His memories are, however, dominated by the people he left behind in the little village of Patlagele, presumably the same village where Sorescu sets the end of the play, transforming it into a metonymy of the entire country. Panzaru is worried about the consequences of the Ottoman invasion, “It’s going to be the end of the world” (Sorescu 1978: 79), and eventually sacrifices himself trying to protect his people.

In *A Cold*, Romanians are conscious of their individual and collective alienation and of its role as a motivator in their struggle to survive as a nation. Captain Papuc metaphorically attests to their integration of imagined exile to the extent that they physically identify themselves with the country: “*Live land defending itself*. That’s what we are” (Sorescu 1978: 128, my translation & italics). Sorescu even uses a few *ad literam* metaphors, which point out the peasants’ extreme spirit of sacrifice and the ability to imagine their nation across time. As I explained, Toma returns to his little village and dies, pretending that has only caught a cold and needs some rest but will soon wake up and go back to war. Waiting for their men to come home, Romanian women tell a similar story of a peasant, who refuses to retreat into the mountains. Instead, he digs his own grave and asks the others to cover him with dirt, confident that one day he would simply rise from his grave and rejoin the fight for independence: “On your way back, come take me along… I will not retreat!” (Sorescu 1978: 131). This attitude closely resembles the myth “of the chosen people now to
be reborn after its long sleep of decay and/or exile” (Smith 66). This myth is common in nationalist discourses that use history as the basis for nurturing the collective identity and promoting a national revival, as Sorescu does in *A Cold*. To the fifteenth-century Romanians and, allegorically, to the twentieth-century ones, death appears as a temporary exile from which one can return to rejoin his/her people. Caught in between the Ottoman invasion and the Western indifference, the Romanian peasants fight under Tepes’s leadership to defend their national community, impressing even their enemies. Pasha admiringly explains their strength: “They’ve got the consciousness of unity… they’ve got the awareness that their being is threatened, even their right to exist as a people” (Sorescu 1978: 55, 57).

Re-enacting the 1837 farmers’ revolt and respectively the fifteenth-century fight against the Ottoman Empire, Salutin and Sorescu embody on stage their people’s collective consciousness and strong bonds created by the shared hardships and the opposition to colonization. Whereas for Salutin’s farmers inner exile is at least partly determined by their status as settler in a British colony, Sorescu’s peasants feel estranged in their birth country, which is in danger of becoming a Turkish colony. In spite of different historical circumstances, the Canadian farmers and the Romanian peasants manifest similar forms of alienation and willingly rise to arms, accepting to sacrifice their lives in the name of their people’s independence.

2.8. From Laughter to Historical Consciousness

At the end of this chapter, let me restate that the two plays I discussed re-enact national histories for a Canadian audience raised in the ignorance of its collective past and, respectively, for Romanian spectators fed up with the demagogical praise of their heroic past
in communist propaganda. *1837* and *A Cold* speak the language of mockery for spectators that are used to mock themselves and paradoxically enable them to take themselves seriously through the re-evaluation of ordinary people’s heroism and the indictment of the morally questionable leaders. Furthermore, the two plays unveil forgotten historical events that have taken place in their audiences’ everyday neighbourhoods and landscapes, and re-inscribe them in the collective memory. As historical but also political theatre pieces, *1837* and *A Cold* foreshadow the post-colonial changes in the treatment of the past. Salutin’s play speaks of the settlers’ histories, does not address the state of Aboriginal colonized people, and could be accused of participating “(albeit unwittingly) in the dominant mythologies” (Gilbert 1996: 114). I believe, however, that even its selective and partial rewriting of colonial history helped create the context that subsequently made possible more drastic reconstructions of the past by First Nations writers. In a similar way, *A Cold* mocks the communist dictatorship defying the censors’ vigilance, and its counter-narrative expresses the popular anti-colonial attitude, whose later result is the 1989 popular revolution itself.

In spite of the lack of direct theatrical offspring, both *1837* and *A Cold* had a significant influence on the dramatic treatment of history in each country. Re-enacting the past with irony and intellectual distance is echoed in later English-Canadian productions, such as *Billy Bishop Goes to War* by John Gray and Eric Peterson, the post-modern epic *The History of the Village of the Small Huts* by Michael Hollingsworth, and *Sir John, Eh?* by Jim Garrard which I will analyze in my next chapter. In Romania, however, only a small number of playwrights attempted the ironic re-enactment of history, such as Mircea Radu Iacoban in his tragicomedies *The Fortress and the Rats* (1977) and *The Night* (1986). Such plays, however, remained isolated in provincial theatres and/or limited editions and did not have a
major impact on national drama, which was overwhelmed by propagandistic works. Like Sorescu warned, “A bad historical play can do more wrong than good; a bad historical play can lose a battle history won” (in Puiu 149). Next to other forms of oppression, the distortion of the past and the enactment of false communist heroic acts alienated people from their collective history. Only in the late 1990s, Romanian playwrights would willingly re-enact the past, many of them attempting once again to parody it in order to make sense of the “multiple and varied histories which … overlap, intersect, and compete with each other” (Gilbert 1996: 160) in a colonized country. In both English Canada and Romania, however, the subsequent post-colonial and post-communist rewritings of master historical narratives and the simultaneous redefinitions of national identities became possible only after accepting the recent past with self-irony, but not resentment.

NOTES

1 Given my perception of communism and post-communism as specific forms of colonialism and respectively post-colonialism, my use of the terms “colonial”, “anti-colonial” and “post-colonial” refers to both colonial and communist paradigms.

2 In this chapter, I sometimes refer to 1837: The Farmers’ Revolt as Salutin’s play, although it was produced by Theatre Passe Muraille under Paul Thompson’s direction with Rick Salutin as dramaturge. Also, I abbreviated its title to 1837.

3 A Cold first opened on March 3, 1977 at “Lucia Sturdza Bulandra” Theatre in Bucharest, a more experimental establishment, directed by Dan Micu, with Ion Caramitru, future Minister of Culture between 1996-2000, in the role of Pasha of Vidin and Virgil Ogășanu as Mohammed. In 1978, two more productions at the National Theatres in Bucharest and Cluj confirmed its inclusion in the mainstream theatre and the official discourse, as the result of a tacit complicity among censors, theatre critics, and audiences.

4 Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia, called “Vlad the Impaler” (1431–1476), was the voivode and the defender of Wallachia against Ottoman expansionism. His three reigns were in 1448, 1456–1462, and 1476 (“Vlad III the Impaler”). He is now commonly recalled as Vlad the
Impaler and/or Dracula, given his fierce methods of punishment, the impalement, and Bram Stoker’s depiction of the Romanian prince as a blood-thirsty vampire.

5 Theatre Passe Muraille’s earlier documentary productions are: *Doukhobors* (1971), *Under the Greywacke* (1973), *Oil* (1974), and *The West Show* (1975). Other Canadian companies that pursued collective social and historical documentaries include Toronto Workshop Productions; 25th Street Theatre, Saskatoon; Theatre Network, Edmonton; the Mulgrave Road Co-op of Guysborough; Theatre Energy in the Slocum Valley, BC; Mummers Troupe of St. John’s; and Globe Theatre, Regina.

6 In this chapter, I use the 1978 English edition, translated by Stavros Deligiorgis (Junimea 1978).

7 Dionysus Hatzopoulos describes several versions of the death of Constantine XI, the last Roman Emperor, including the legend that “when the Ottomans entered the city, an angel rescued the emperor, turned him into marble and placed him in a cave under the earth near the Golden Gate, where he waits to be brought to life again” (1453).

8 That is not to say that censorship did not exist in Canada. As Conrad states, there were two main forms of censorship after the Second World War in Canada. On one hand, economic supremacy amounted to censorship powers, as “the big money that controlled the private media [censored] ideas and information displeasing to media owners” (388). On the other hand, there was also “formal state censorship of what Canadians could see and hear” (Conrad 388). In addition, films and books were censored by religious, film, municipal library, and school boards, for political or sexual explicit content. In the 1950s, French feminist Simone de Beauvoir was barred from the CBC. The Arts Council of the city of Montreal refused to subsidize the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde’s production of *Les Fées ont soif* (*The Fairies are Thirsty*) by Denise Boucher as late as 1978, while the Catholic archdiocese denounced and organized several actions of protest.

9 The idea that documentary as a style is inherent in national culture is first formulated in 1969 by Dorothy Livesay in her influential essays *The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre*. She identifies a tradition of narrative poetry “based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements” (Livesay 269) and argues that the preference for documentary is as old as Canadian literature.

10 In this 1972 paper, Mitchell Sharp called for a lessening of U.S. economic and cultural influence on Canada. He rejected the maintaining of Canada’s current relationships to the United States, as well as a closer integration, and proposed the “third option” to “develop and strengthen the Canadian economy and… [thus] reduce the present Canadian vulnerability” (Hillmer 300-1) in relation to its neighbour. In spite of some notable results, such as the 1971 Protocol on Consultations with the Soviet Union and the 1976 contractual links with the European Community and Japan, the Canadian economic dependence on the U.S. increased in later years with the Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA.
In a brief overview of the trade union movement in 1945-1975, Conrad and Finkel give a few examples of discrimination and abuses, such as the brutal police intervention in the 1945 strike at the Ford Motor Company plant in Windsor and the 1949 strike in the town of Asbestos. Another relevant case is the decision of the Robert Bourassa government to invoke legislation “to end labour disruption, jailing the heads of Quebec’s three largest labour federations when they encouraged their members to defy back-to-work orders” (Conrad 353) during the 1972 strikes of the public sector unions.

Freedom of speech was guaranteed through the Canadian Bill of Rights enacted by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker’s government on August 10, 1960. It is now Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, enacted in 1982.

Bulei mentions that the brochure Publications Interdicted until May 1, 1948 contained five hundred pages of titles (163).

In the online Literary Encyclopedia, Neil Cornwell defines it from the larger perspective of Soviet and Soviet-controlled cultures: “Socialist Realism was a cultural policy (rather than, one might now think, even a method or still less a viable theory) enforced from above, and designed to bring a significant measure of bureaucratic – indeed governmental – control across the entire range of artistic production” (“(Soviet) Socialist Realism”). Among others, Rosy Singh briefly describes Socialist Realism at the beginning of her article on Milan Kundera’s work (Lahiri 51-67).

“The July Theses” (Romanian: Tezele din iulie) is a name commonly given to a speech Ceaușescu delivered on July 6, 1971 before the RCP’s Executive Committee, which “stipulated more rigorous state control over artistic and cultural activities, as well as over education and the press” (Treptow 541).

A dictionary definition of “destalinization” is: “An effort after the death of the Soviet premier Joseph Stalin to soften some of the repressive measures used by his government. Premier Nikita Khrushchev was a leader in the de-Stalinization movement, which involved the downgrading of Stalin's reputation” (“De-Stalinization”).

According to Sorescu’s post-1989 testimonies, in spite of his national and international literary fame, his plays were censored not only in Romania but also in other socialist countries. For example, his plays “Iona and The Third Pale” [which] were interdicted by the Ministry of Culture in Poland and Czechoslovakia” (in Vianu 90).

The Cold is an alternative title for A Cold, as it appears in the published English version I analyse in this study.

When Tepes refused to pay tribute, attacked the Ottoman cities at the South of the Danube, Wallachia’s natural Southern border, and killed more than twenty three thousand people, the Sultan decided “to punish personally the one who defied his authority” (Constantiniu 101).
Poetics of Denial

20 Bolovan mentions that the Black Sea became, “as its new masters called it, a Turkish lake” (112). The term proves once again Sorescu’s reliance on documented sources in his attempt to convince his audience of the historical accuracy that supports his parody.

21 Constantiniu gives a detailed account of the tribute the Romanian Principalities had to pay to the Porte (112-114), which supports the accuracy of Sorescu’s fictional report.

22 Among many other post-1989 Romanian historians, Constantiniu points out the imperialistic character of the Soviet Union’s terms outlined in *The Armistice Agreement with Rumania* signed on September 12, 1944 with the approval of the United States and United Kingdom (418-9).

23 Tismaneanu notes that on August 23rd, 1944, when Romania denounced its alliance with Germany, RCP had only 80 members in Bucharest and less than 1,000 in the rest of the country (109).

24 “Badea Cârțan (*Brother Cârțan* – the common nickname of Gheorghe Cârțan; 1849-1911) was a self-taught Romanian shepherd, who contributed to the survival of the Romanian culture in Transylvania during the Austro-Hungarian occupation by sneaking Romanian books over the border. A patriot with a great sense of history, Cârțan made a 45-day trip on foot to Rome because he wished to see Trajan’s Column and other evidences of the Latin origin of the Romanian people. Legend says that, after pouring Romanian soil and wheat at the column’s base, he wrapped himself in his peasant’s coat (*cojoc*) and went to sleep there. The next day he was awakened by a policeman who shouted in amazement, “A Dacian has fallen off the column!,” as Cârțan was dressed just like the Dacians carved into the column” (“Badea Cârțan”).

25 This is one of the points where Salutin’s remnant colonialist stereotypes become apparent. The complete absence of the Aboriginal people from the lands the farmers clear attests to the author’s implicit acceptance of the imperial thesis *terra nullius*. For more on treatment of space in post-colonial historical drama see Gilbert and Thompson’s subchapter ‘Spatial Histories’ (146-56).

26 An Ottoman siege of Vienna actually took place in 1683 and was unsuccessful. According to Constantiniu (139), the defeat marked the beginning of the Ottoman Empire’s decline.
3.1. Post-Colonial and Post-Communist Historical Parodies

This chapter continues the discussion of English-Canadian and Romanian plays with historical subject matter but it approaches them from a different perspective. On one hand, it focuses on the role of political leaders in determining essential changes in a nation’s history. On the other hand, it investigates how gaining the consciousness that history is a cultural artefact and re-assessing collectively ignored or presumably forgotten events may in fact counteract a nation’s alienation in relation to its own past, restoring its sense of history and identity. As I explained in my analysis of 1837 and A Cold, in anti-colonial and anti-communist plays, authors tend to represent generic national communities, as a way of empowering their oppressed countrymen and determining them to fight for their rights and freedom. After the foreign domination officially ceases and the country regains and, in the case of a former settler colony, actually gains for the first time political autonomy, the role of political leaders comes more and more often under scrutiny, most often in the attempt to assign responsibility and blame.

Whereas in former communist countries that often involves charging and trying the former leaders after the regime change becomes effective, the official re-evaluation of the colonial leadership may take more time and have less drastic forms. To give just one example, the Ceausescus were hastily tried and executed in 1989, only a couple of days after the beginning of the December Revolution in Bucharest. In contrast, the Canadian government issued only in 1998 a “Statement of Reconciliation” contained within a
document entitled *Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*, followed after ten years by the Prime Minister’s “full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system” (“Prime Minister Harper”). The playwrights’ engagement of these issues generally reflects the official trends and responds to the different degrees of interest in each country. Accordingly, a harsher approach defines the Romanian dramatic re-enactment of communism, while a lighter tone and a somewhat traditionally romantic view of colonial past still dominate the English-Canadian historical drama at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, even when the plays are commissioned and/or produced by the former so-called “alternative theatres” of the 1970s, now well integrated into the Canadian dramatic canon. In contrast, however, the narratives of the minorities, including First Nations, French-Canadians, immigrants, as well as feminists and sexual minorities pursue a more drastic re-evaluation of Canadian society and its colonial inheritance. To name but a few, Monique Mojica, Michelle St. John, Michel Tremblay, Wajdi Mouawad, Guillermo Verdecchia, Judith Thompson, and Brad Fraser usually depict a shocking image of contemporary Canada from the perspective of the oppressed, which deconstructs the stereotypical image of a happy and peaceful Northern kingdom. Their works are extensively discussed in media and academic texts and I will also analyze a couple of their plays in the following chapters. In this chapter I am interested, however, in English-Canadian and Romanian plays that re-imagine colonial/communist leaders, from the highest ranks in the country to the nameless activists.

In spite of the small number of such works, I believe that this type of historical drama is relevant to my study because it is usually motivated by an author’s strong desire to challenge the stereotypical perception of the respective political personality and, implicitly,
of its leadership. Most English-Canadian plays, however, emphasize facts and ordinary people over leaders, and re-enact from the national auto-ironic perspective.

Michael Hollingsworth’s *The Story of the Village of the Small Huts* focuses on the country’s most important historical figures from the establishment of New France to the end of the Second World War. The eight-part epic drama ironically “enacts a vision of the nation as it proceeds through stages of colonialism towards an endlessly deferred postcolonial autonomy” (Filewod 1995: 8). Relying heavily on historical testimonies and employing a “video cabaret” style, Hollingsworth renounces character psychology for the sake of political polemics and plot development for historical timeline. *A Flush of Tories* by Allan Stratton embodies several Conservative politicians in a sort of Canadian nineteenth-century political circus, while his *Rexy!* ironizes Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s leadership during the Second World War and especially his struggle to assert the country’s political autonomy in relationship to the U.K. and U.S. Trudeau is the main character of several plays, including the highly successful *Maggie & Pierre: A Fantasy of Love, Politics and the Media* by Linda Griffiths with Paul Thomson, which the playwright herself defines as “a metaphor for the country’s involvement in politics and love, based on the political and personal realities of two individuals” (11). An exception in English-Canadian post-colonial historical drama, *Maggie & Pierre* focuses on the Prime Minister’s troubled marriage and ignores his political career. In addition to Members of Parliament and Prime Ministers, English-Canadian playwrights also re-enact contested personalities, such as Louis Riel, in “The Trial of Louis Riel” by John Coulter and the fourth part of Hollingsworth’s cycle, “Confederation and Riel” and General Walsh in Sharon Pollock’s play that bears his name. In the context of this type of English-Canadian historical drama, *Sir John, Eh?* by Jim Garrard, which I will analyze in
this chapter, has a special status, given its attempt to balance the re-enactment of
Macdonald’s personal and public lives and to openly frame the reassessment of the past as a
challenge to the collective sense of history at the end of the twentieth century.

In Romania, post-communist historical plays focused on political personalities are
even fewer, but, as I anticipated, they challenge and re-write the previous metanarrative in a
more decisive way. On one hand, they challenge the propagandistic treatment of history,
which dominated Romanian drama before 1989, and continue Sorescu’s endeavour after a
break of more than thirty years. On the other hand, they take advantage of the newly
achieved freedom of speech and rewrite history, uncovering the communists’ concealment or
distortion of documented facts. The communist historical drama emphasized the role of
countless unknown citizens and soldiers in the triumph of communism, according to the
collectivist doctrine, which only allowed for anonymous heroes. In their explorations of the
communist dictatorship and, more often, of the 1989 December Revolution, Naghiu, Radu
Macrinici, Mihai Ispirescu, and Horia Garbea challenge the stereotypes of the genre by
polemically re-imagining the communist hero. For instance, Ispirescu’s *The Drought and the
Snowstorm* metaphorically delves into the guilty conscience of a nameless agent of the
previous regime, re-enacting moments from the abuses of the Stalinist 1950s decade.
Macrinici *My D(ear) Country* retells the story of the 1989 events from the perspective of
another anonymous agent of the communist regime, an executioner of the Romanian secret
police and his brain-washed wife and daughter. One of the few plays that re-enact
recognizable political leaders, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi’s *The Zero Newsroom* re-imagines the
post-communist transition as a never-ending Romanian dystopia in which historical
personalities mingle with contemporary politicians in a parodic re-enactment of the 1989
revolution. The second play I will discuss in this chapter, *A Day in Nicolae Ceauşescu’s Life* by Denis Dinulescu is the most transparent attempt to re-enact the history of the communist dictatorship, which openly indicts the propagandistic falsification of the past, and the survival of communist strategies and even of political personalities in the post-communist public life.

My choice of plays was determined by the similarities of their topics, post-colonial agendas, and dramaturgical strategies. My main argument is that the purpose of *Sir John, Eh?* and *A Day* is similar to many of the plays Gilbert and Tompkins discuss in *Post-Colonial Drama*, which strive to achieve “a ceremonial catharsis of colonial oppression” (142) and to counteract people’s alienation in relationship to their shared past. In Garrard and Dinulescu’s plays, this political agenda is also supported by the authors’ special focus on the perception of history, and especially on the ability to influence and/or manipulate it. Raphael Samuel’s inclusive perspective of history validates this approach: “The sense of the past, at any given point of time, is as much a matter of history as what happened in it” (15). Furthermore, it also asserts the study of reception as a legitimate field of historical inquiry next to more traditional aspects, such as foreign policy, the relations of church and state, historical documents, as well as myths, ballads, and novels (Samuel 15). From this viewpoint, *Sir John, Eh?* and *A Day* belong to popular memory while simultaneously challenging it. However, there are also important differences between the two texts, most of which arise because of the obvious differences between the two personalities and historical periods they re-enact. After giving the plays’ short synopses, I will elaborate further on this issue.
Sir John, Eh? is a musical parody that uses the play-within-the-play convention to re-enact some of the most important political confrontations in Canadian society in the 1860s, focusing on the life of Sir John A. Macdonald (1815-1891), Canada’s first Prime Minister (1867-73). The presence of Courtney, an impoverished young rock singer from the twentieth century, who encounters the historical figures and watches a few staged excerpts from their public and private lives, emphasizes the play’s non-illusionist character and its purpose to challenge the twentieth-century common perspective of the past in the name of a romantic and somewhat stereotypical depiction of Macdonald’s shortcomings and his nation-building initiatives. Although Courtney is more a dramaturgical device lacking strong personal motivations and a well-developed personality, Garrard’s attempt at character is obvious. He presents her as Macdonald’s fictional illegitimate great-granddaughter by his long time lover, Eliza Grimason, the owner of Kingston’s Royal Tavern, where he kept an unofficial office during his election campaigns. The play starts on June 11, 1998, when Courtney carries out her dead grandfather’s wishes to take on his yearly task and pour whiskey on the grave of Canada’s first prime minister on the day of the anniversary of his death. After singing, shaking with fear and taking a big swig of whisky herself, Courtney discovers that she has inherited her grandfather’s supernatural power to bring back her dead relatives, “Through a love that moves the stars” (Garrard 17), although the playwright playfully insinuates that the whisky might have been the one doing the trick. She unintentionally conjures Sir John and his family’s ghosts, granted an annual anniversary trip to Earth, “Once a year the night is ours/ To celebrate our hist’ry” (Garrard 16). As the story unfolds and Courtney becomes more comfortable with the Macdonalds, she starts accusing the former Prime Minister for the wrongdoings in Canada’s past and most of all for the present and claims she is speaking for
her generation. To defend himself, the fictional Macdonald and his family members, suddenly turned actors, stage a musical full of live songs and dances. The show-within-the-show re-enacts several political confrontations and events that led to the 1867 creation of the Dominion of Canada with Macdonald as its first Prime Minister. In this context, Courtney is not only the fictional audience of the dramatic re-enactment of past events, but also the twentieth century judge of past political strategies, accomplishments, and even morality. As she enjoys the show, she becomes, rather too easily, more sympathetic towards the Macdonalds and agrees to meet them again the following year for their picnic “in the upper world” (Garrard 13). Her final attitude suggests the reconciliation of the 1990s generation, whose representative Courtney claims to be, with the country’s beginnings as a British colony unified and ruled by corrupt politicians.

Dinulescu’s A Day in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Life employs a similar perspective of history as a politically biased construct and uses similar metatheatrical strategies. In spite of its metaphoric description as “a day”, the play reviews more than fifty years of the life of Nicolae Ceausescu\(^2\) (1918-1989), the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 and Romania’s first President from 1974 until December 1989, when he was tried and executed. In the play, Nicolae is always accompanied by Elena, his wife, reflecting the popular belief that Elena Ceausescu (1916-1989) was the brain behind her husband’s decisions. The so-called communist “wooden language,” propagandistic clichés, and political innuendos are assembled in an absurdist scenario, whose dialogues and situations are intentionally fictional and blatantly parodic. Despite the relatively light tone of the political satire, the play relies on personal and political events, which are historically documented and do not minimize the Ceausescus’ role in the history of Romania. Like Garrard, Dinulescu
also uses the play-within-a-play technique to structure his parody, but does not employ the didactic convention of a fictional character who represents the post-communist generations and audiences and eventually reaches a conclusion on their behalf. In addition, whereas Macdonald himself orchestrates the revival of the past *Sir John, Eh?*, the re-enactment of the Ceausescus’ deeds is co-ordinated by a series of representatives of the deeply feared Romanian secret police, all with the same name, “The Boy,” and performed by the same actor. Following each Boy’s detailed plans, Nicolae’s life is retroactively changed according to his embellished image and biography in the communist propaganda at the peak of his cult of personality. Accordingly, the communist leader goes through different stages of his life, as a teenage apprentice shoemaker, a student in Moscow, a dictator, and, eventually, a sarcastic ghost. In parallel to his political career, Dinulescu briefly suggests famous episodes from the Ceausescus’ family life. During the play’s metaphorical “day,” Nicolae gets married, has children, and helps his wife rise to the position of Vice Prime Minister, so-called world-renowned scientist, and the people’s symbolic mother. Flattering poems and songs about the Ceausescus link the historical re-enactments and constitute *A Day’s* musical leitmotif and a direct parody of the RCP propagandistic discourse. At the end of the play, Nicolae and Elena’s ghosts cheerfully contemplate the disastrous consequences of their leadership.

Although post-colonial playwrights do not usually make any attempts “to achieve ‘historical verisimilitude’ in the dramatized account of colonization” (Gilbert and Tompkins 140), Garrard and Dinulescu are explicitly interested in restoring the truth about their countries’ past while mocking its stereotypical accounts and pointing out how easy it is to manipulate the truth. Both plays respect, for the most part, historical accuracy in terms of relying on facts and data, which are documented in primary sources unaltered by the
imperial/communist propaganda, but mismatch them in a parodic manner. In other words, the content and even the atmosphere of the English-Canadian parliamentary debates are historically truthful but the MPs wear clown noses; like in real life, Ceausescu becomes a student at the Military Academy in Moscow, but his final project is transforming a pair of military boots into women’s footwear. This type of intervention in the historical narrative expresses the authors’ attempt to change the post-colonial and respectively post-communist perceptions of the past without altering the essential documented facts, relying on their audiences’ intellectual engagement and knowledge of the object of parody. While I do not usually discuss performance and reception aspects in this dissertation, I believe that in this particular case they will attest to the playwrights’ achievement of this purpose.

Consequently, in the first section of this chapter, I will discuss the reception of each show, using theatrical reviews and online anonymous blogs. In the second part of this chapter, I will analyze how Macdonald and Ceausescu are depicted, discussing the dramaturgical devices that assert the plays’ political messages through the parodic portrayal of their main characters. The last section will analyze a few examples of parodic re-enactments of events that changed each country’s destiny, explaining how the playwrights engage in the re-evaluation of the past and of the present. I do not claim that the two plays represent the general treatment of history in post-colonial English-Canadian and respectively post-communist Romanian dramas. However, the re-evaluation of the colonial/communist past and especially the demand for such an enterprise are common in the two countries’ academic and journalistic discourses at the end of the 1990s, when many texts deplore the identity crisis and blame the ignorance of national history as one of its causes.
Before I start my analysis, I need to make some further clarifications regarding the two plays and my decision to discuss them in this study. My theoretical research helped me understand history’s general role in the definition of national identities and its special participation in the post-colonial and post-communist redefinitions, as I already explained in my introduction and previous chapter. However, my discovery of *A Day* and even more so the chance to see Teatrul Mic’s production during my 2005 research trip to Romania shaped the topic of this chapter. Directly related to my exploration of national identity and imagined exile, Dinulescu’s polemical re-enactment not of a specific event but of the carefully planned and executed long-term process of falsifying a people’s national history confirmed my thesis of similarities of the deep changes communization and colonization determined in people’s sense of history and imagined community. Like Ceausescu’s real-life submissive historians, artists, and secret police agents, the Boy does not only change the perspective of the past but actually alters it by retroactively adding to it facts that never happened, with the support of the elite and the loud approval of the general population. In that light, drawing attention to the different types of political manipulation of history becomes a tool for re-envisioning the nation, dealing with the layered feelings of guilt and shame, given the complicity – either forced, unknowing, or voluntary – of a portion of the Romanian populace that made it possible.

Finding an English-Canadian play that overtly emphasized the possibility to manipulate history, while focusing on a political leader proved more difficult than I initially envisioned. First, I had to admit that English-Canadians acknowledge no abrupt change of their political status and historical metanarrative which would have required an abrupt redefinition of their sense of history. On the “slower, evolutionary—but nonetheless
inevitable—path to nationhood,” in moving from one stage to another, Canadians have
“respectfully observed the strict requirements of legal and imperial form” (Milne 314-7).
Although, as David Milne argues, this “image represses much of the actual violence in
Canada’s history” (314), which is occasionally re-enacted by minority writers, it also
imprints a lack of urgency on most of the English-Canadian historical drama, as I explained
at the beginning of this chapter. Sir John, Eh? simultaneously challenges and reflects the
past’s little importance in the national metanarrative, while not giving enough information
about the context in which it takes place and was written. In the beginning, Courtney, the
twentieth-century character, does not seem too interested in her country’s history, and her
attitude motivates the historical ghosts to re-enact the past for her sole benefit.

Although its didactic aspects are some of Sir John, Eh?’s main dramaturgical flaws,
as some of its reviewers noted, they also distinguish it from other English-Canadian plays
similar in tone and subject matter, some of which I already mentioned. Opposing Courtney
and respectively the Macdondalds’ perspectives of the past, it openly discusses the
possibility to alter the perception of the past in the name of different political doctrines and
purposes. Garrard’s play has intellectual and interpretative limitations, which will become
evident in my analysis. However, it also offers an explicit example of how an English-
Canadian post-colonial playwright has become conscious that people need history, but what
history they need and what history they are provided with might be very different. Both plays
I will analyze plead, however, for a cathartic remembering and re-assessment of tacitly
forgotten events. Whereas I will make the necessary references to the historical events re-
enacted in the two plays as well as to the political and cultural context in which they were
written, I believe that the comparison of historical facts and leaders is less relevant to my
thesis. My analysis will focus on each play’s impact on its own national audiences and the types of history re-writings Garrard and Dinulescu pursue.

3.2. Cathartic Reactions to the Ironic Re-enactment of the Past

The attempt to come to terms with the past appears as an essential stage of the redefinition of the nation that follows drastic changes in a country’s political regime and its collective perception of self. This perspective is, however, only accommodated by civic nationalism, which emphasizes the citizens’ conscious and willing participation in the national community. The issue of remembering/forgetting the nation’s past is essential from Renan’s point of view, as he “rejects the statist concept of the nation in order to identify the nation as a form of morality” (Smith 17). Consistently, Renan values a people’s attitude towards its sorrows and fratricides as a self-defining factor:

Now it is of the essence of a nation that all individuals should have much in common, and further that they should have forgotten much. No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifal, or a Visigoth, while every French citizen must have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew’s and the massacres in the South in the thirteenth century. (Dahbour 145)

Interestingly, as Anderson points out, the paradox implicit in this statement is that “readers were being told to ‘have already forgotten’ what Renan’s own words assumed they naturally remembered!” (200). The unspoken complicity becomes then “a prime contemporary civic duty” (Anderson 200) and “[h]aving to ‘have forgotten’ tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be ‘reminded’ turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies” (201). The dual forgotten/remembered attitude
towards the past becomes more evident in the countries where former abusive regimes, such as the colonial and the communist ones, relied on the cooperation of a part of the population and the passivity of the rest, while it physically or psychologically eliminated its opponents. Post-modernism, however, brought a new alternative. Whereas it advocated the need to acknowledge the past, it also offered the possibility to do it from an ironic perspective, as Eco’s statement cited in the previous chapter suggested. Among many other analysts of post-colonial theatre in different countries, Dharwadker confirms this prediction and notes that, for Indian post-independence theatre, her case study, the ironic recuperation of history has become an important aspect of the liberated nation’s relationship to its colonial past. The achievement of or failure to achieve a collective catharsis and, thus, of the ability to purge shame and embarrassment and to reintegrate in the historical metanarrative the events which were tacitly ignored, depends on the degree to which a collective is assuming the new perspectives initiated by decolonisation/decommunization, which the two plays employ.

The reviews of and the few online commentaries on *Sir John, Eh?* and *A Day* acknowledge the two plays’ re-enactment of events, which are usually ignored/forgotten and, thus, their ability to reflect upon collective alienation, inferiority complexes, and self-diminishing stereotypes. According to the recorded testimonies, however, *A Day* elicited more emotional reactions, whereas *Sir John, Eh?* was enthusiastically received when it was workshopped at the Kingston Summer Festival, but opened to rather mixed reviews in 1997 at the Grand Theatre in Kingston, Ontario and in 1998 at Passe Muraille in Toronto. I find it interesting to note, however, that the blurbs on the book’s fourth cover advertise the play as a politically engaged text, in nationalistic, though good-humoured terms: “Sir John A. Macdonald and his family rise from the grave to monitor the state of the nation and stretch
their ghostly legs” (Garrard, fourth cover). Furthermore, the publisher states that the re-enactment of the past is done from the perspective of the young generations, represented by Courtney, who “doesn’t think much of Sir John A.’s behaviour, either as a politician or as a husband, and (...) calls him to account” (Garrard, fourth cover). On the same cover, Geoff Chapman of The Toronto Star polemically challenges the diminishing perception of the past, similarly to Granatstein’s perspective, which I mentioned in my previous chapter: “History dull? Canadian history in particular? Not on your life” (Garrard, fourth cover). The source of this enthusiastic statement, his 1997 review of the play’s run at the Grand Theatre in Kingston, Ontario, explicitly points to the postmodern treatment of the main achievement of Macdonald’s career, as it bears the title “Nation Building Makes for Fine Musical” (Chapman J 12). Similar to my attempt at the beginning of this chapter, although from a slightly different perspective, Chapman assesses the play’s special character in comparison to other historical dramas produced in the last decades of the twentieth century. His auto-ironic but patriotic conclusions highlight the fact that Sir John, Eh? purposely attempts to fill in a gap in the public memory:

This is not the caricaturish representation of Michael Hollingsworth's satirical, eight-part The History of the Village of the Small Huts cycle. Nor is it an attempt to use isolated incidents (such as the 1837 farmers’ revolt) as play fodder, nor a bid to make spectacular fun of a politician, (Allan Stratton’s Rexy, about Mackenzie King.) Sir John Eh? is a show that strives to put a human face on the relatively obscure nation-maker most of us know primarily as an image on our $10 bills. (Chapman J 12) Harriet Zaidman, a teacher-librarian in Winnipeg, Manitoba, also acknowledges Garrard’s attempt to mediate English-Canadians’ access to their national history and to re-inscribe the
colonial past into the collective self-definition. She deplores the general lack of historical knowledge and emphasizes its importance for the ongoing redefinition of citizenship: “Canadians don’t know enough about their history. (...) Consequently, any effort that is made to popularize Canadian events and personalities can only contribute to our identity and our culture” (“Review”). Her position is consistent with ongoing pleas of some English-Canadian historians, educators, and artists who urge the education system to include more Canadian subjects in the curriculum, as I explained in my previous chapter. From this point of view, she appreciates the textbook-like clarity of the main events, including Riel’s execution and the Pacific Scandal: “The different sides of the issues, the different people involved and their aims and objectives are outlined so that the audience gets a larger picture of this historical period” (“Review”). In her conclusions, she recommends Sir John, Eh? for production by Grades 9 – 12 students, as the play has the potential to compensate for the poor high school curriculum and “make the historical figures and events more relevant to the identity of modern-day Canadians” (Zaidman, “Review”).

In this context, I was surprised to discover that some of the reviews of the Passe Murraillée’s 1998 production completely ignored the play’s nationalist aspects. To my amazement, The Toronto Star’s Vit Wagner focused his article on the similarities between Macdonald and Bill Clinton’s extramarital affairs and questionable campaign contributions, given the buzz created by the so-called “Lewinsky Scandal.” In The Globe and Mail, Kate Taylor briefly noted the historical issues, but concluded that the show was “an irreverent musical biography of Canada’s first prime minister that featured some lovely songs and a ragged charm” (D3). When it comes to the play’s allusions to the present, the differences between the reviewers’ opinions are even more drastic. Greg Burliuk of The Ottawa Citizen
appreciated the play’s comments on the present and concluded that “The best line is about Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard: ‘A man who’s had his leg off would know what separation was like’” (E 7). In contrast, Chapman considered the direct allusions to the present unnecessary and particularly dislikes the line that Burliuk enjoys: “Tasteless metaphors referring to Lucien Bouchard’s leg amputation and Quebec separation are unneeded, as are most other contemporary remarks, since the links between 19th-century politicking and today’s are clear enough” (J 12).

While both Sir John, Eh! and A Day recall historical events with long-term political consequences in the respective countries, the mature spectators of the 2005 Bucharest production actually lived through the period Dinulescu re-enacts. Consequently, Teatrul Mic’s show had a stronger effect on some of the survivors of communism, whose reactions are more easily comparable to a collective comic catharsis. Although some of the Romanian audience’s comments posted online are anonymous and, thus, may be considered unreliable according to scholarly standards, I consider them useful for the understanding of the play’s efficacy. For example, an audience member, who declares he was born in 1987, describes A Day’s highly emotional impact on his mother, who was overwhelmed by memories although still finding the political satire amusing: “I was laughing, but also felt like crying’ – mom said after the show” (“Cronica Subiectiva”/ “The Subjective Review”). His lack of direct experience of communism makes him, however, unable to enjoy and even to recognize the political and social parody. Consequently, he only perceives the play’s serious message and finds irony unacceptable and unnecessary:

This is the drama of Romania. And that terrifies me. Yes, I know, the ones who rule us today, ruled us before [1989] too. The ones who live well today, lived well before
too. The ones who are miserable today, were miserable before too. You think we should make light of all the suffering? I’m sick of that. (“Cronica Subiectiva”)

Similarly, another young audience member without direct experience of communism, as he makes us understand that he was only eight years old at the time of the anti-communist revolution⁶, actually overlooks the re-enactment of Ceausescu’s dictatorship but is impressed by A Day’s ability to address the social and political issues of Romania’s post-communist transition and recommends it in his online blog: “I strongly advise you to see this show because you’ll be surprised by the actuality of the issues it discusses” (Ovidiu Platon).

Similar to the reactions of the anonymous mature spectators, the veteran theatre critic Florica Ichim explains that the show stirred some tragic and somehow embarrassing memories. She recalls how the auto-ironic political jokes were among the few means of psychological survival during the last years of Ceausescu’s dictatorship, when the “cold, hunger, and fear combined their forces to humiliate and destroy us. How did we cope? Complaining, whispering, laughing” (Ichim). Sixteen years after the official disappearance of the communist regime, she perceives A Day as an effective response to the imperative need to deal with the communist past: “the show asserts itself as necessary discourse and liberation. I believe that is what catharsis should look like in a mad century” (Ichim, A Review, my italics). Mihaela Michailov, another theatre critic, has a similar perspective and also predicts the show’s role in solving the inherited identity crisis: “Using parody as an outlet, Tocilescu [the show’s director] makes the acknowledgement of the unhealed wounds that haunt us. His show is also an exercise of detached reconciliation with our infected past. […] The recuperation of a period fractured at the identity level can be achieved” (“Haide, fâ”).
The strong, though different reactions of the audiences and reviewers prove once again the efficacy of self-mockery in the Romanian public discourse. In her study of the Romanian linguistic imaginary, Cesereanu identifies this kind of irony as one of the dominant styles, both in media and in fiction. Analyzing the weekly magazine *Academia Catavencu (The Catavencu Academy)*, which she considers representative of post-communist political satire, Ceseareanu describes its “corrosive and hilarious grotesque” whose effect is “the society’s improvement and cleansing, but also the relaxation through humour (even though that often proves a black humour)” (120). *A Day* employs the same type of irony, achieving similar effects on its audience. The awards the play and subsequently the Teatrul Mic (Little Theatre) production won in the literary and theatre competitions officially confirmed *A Day*’s social, political, and artistic value. From the perspective of this study, however, I can also argue *A Day*’s ability to determine people’s acknowledgement of their shared alienation in relationship to their past as a possible basis for re-imagining the national community, a form, in other words, of what I call imagined exile.

3.3. A Drunkard in the House

*Sir John, Eh?* and *A Day* may be considered post-modern dramatic biographies of the two political leaders whose influences on their countries’ destinies can be reconsidered, overstating or diminishing it, but cannot be denied. As the plays purposely treat history as an artefact, they also objectify the historical personalities, emphasizing that their personalities and achievements depend exclusively on the perspective from which they are remembered. As my references to history texts and evidence will establish, Garrard respects the public records of Macdonald’s life, while Dinulescu strives to uncover the accurate version of
Ceausescu’s biography from the rubble of its propagandistic inflated adaptation. However, in spite of their attempt at historical accuracy, both playwrights also employ the post-modern ironic perspective of the past. In this way, they offer their audiences the medium and the perspectives that would enable them to reassess the two leaders and deal with the collective resentment against them and their leaderships. Despite the similar post-colonial/post-communist agendas, the playwrights treat their main characters in different ways, corresponding to the originals’ real-life actions and people’s feelings towards them. Although every now and then a twentieth-century text or an article minimizes Macdonald’s accomplishments, he has devoted supporters. Donald Smith, for example, dismisses as misinformed a *Globe and Mail* article by Jan Won, “Lunch With Sir [John A. Macdonald],” published on January 1, 2000, and strongly defends him: “As a Canadian historian, I believe that Sir John -- while he was undoubtedly all too human -- has nevertheless been underestimated and over-caricatured. When it comes to his alleged racism and moral turpitude, if he is judged by the standards of his age, not ours, he emerges as complex, tolerant and politically adept” (A. 15).

Garrard re-enacts Macdonald from a similar sympathetic perspective as the most skilful and genuinely patriotic politician in the Canadian federation about to be formed without, however, sugar-coating his flaws. His historical accomplishments, starting with the 1867 foundation of the country, appear to excuse his human flaws and unorthodox political strategies, as if the playwright would strive to convince his audience that *the end justifies the means* in this case. In contrast, Dinulescu depicts Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu from an unforgiving viewpoint, as two uneducated and unskilled workers, whose only purpose is the rise to power without any consideration for the truth and people’s interests. In addition, their
biographies and political careers are metaphorically presented as the exclusive product of the all-powerful Soviet-style secret police. In spite of the obvious differences between Macdonald and Ceausescu as real-life leaders and dramatic characters, and the feelings they stir among their people, Garrard and Dinulescu’s political agendas, cultural attitudes, and literary styles in re-enacting them as post-modern characters are amazingly similar.

Sir John, Eh? begins on a playful ironic tone, when Sir John exhibits a behaviour, which is unexpected for a Prime Minister and anachronistic for a nineteenth-century person. The venerable ghost asks for newspapers, deplores Courtney’s lack of consideration for his requests, and resigns to listening to the news on her walkman, without any fear of new technologies. Even more, he casually confesses to a longing for whisky and stretches, while whining that a grave “is a narrow place” (Garrard, 12). Throughout the play, Garrard chooses to show many sides of the Prime Minister, on personal and public levels, whose strong contrast structures his re-enactment and generates the parody. However, his image as a “proper whiskey man” and a “joker and a dancer and a tease” (Garrard 67) is particularly emphasized, consistent with most of his caricatures, which portray him at least slightly intoxicated, and even with the more formal records of his career. Even when they praise him for his political achievement, most of the history books incriminate Macdonald’s drinking habit and his terrible public image: “Later there were times as a prime minister when his drinking habits and behaviour were scandalous to the country. Everyone knew when Macdonald was drinking heavily because some newspapers reported sarcastically ‘John A. is sick again’” (Bradley & Wilson, 58.) In contrast to his contemporaries, Christopher Ondaatje and Robert Catherwood, twentieth-century historians, find it, if not excusable, not that important: “He was to be plagued by ill health for the remainder of his life, and when his
difficulties seemed too great he resorted to the bottle, running through cycles of hard work and excessive drinking. But the country loved him just the same, preferring Sir John drunk to anyone else sober” (Ondaatje 22). Although Garrard’s character finds this flaw less reprehensible, he nevertheless does not deny it and shows himself drunk in several recreations of the past. His defence in one of the ongoing altercations with George Brown anachronistically echoes historians’ later statements:

BROWN: Drunk again, Macdonald?

JOHN A.: The majority of men prefer John A. Macdonald drunk to George Brown sober. (Garrard 38)

In spite of a seemingly light-hearted post-modern perspective, the depiction of Macdonald’s political career occupies the most part of the first act. From the very beginning, the Prime Minister appears in a “nineteenth-century parliamentary grab” and his main concern is to find out if the country is “[s]till holding together” (Garrard 10). From the nineteenth-century perspectives of his voters, fellow politicians, and family members, Macdonald is recalled as “the father of the country” (Garrard 15), “the greatest man God ever put breath into” (Garrard 49), and respectively “a wonderful tangle of a man. Best man in the world” (Garrard 72). His mother proudly recalls that her son was worshiped as a national hero: “When my son was alive the people came from miles around to hear him speak – to gaze upon his face” (Garrard 25). Courtney, however, dismisses Macdonald’s achievements and regards him as an evil, dishonest and irresponsible politician, the “Chief Liar” (Garrard 48), who takes bribes, tricks people, ridicules fellow politicians, and does not keep his word. Most historians and biographers acknowledge his compromises, but consider them unavoidable in nineteenth-century Canada. In Eighteen Men. The Prime Ministers of
Canada, Gordon Donaldson, for example, explicitly argues the Prime Minister’s moral integrity in spite of his election campaign tactics: “He was honest by the political standards of the times. He bought votes, but votes did not buy him” (7). Zaidman also excuses his behaviour, as he was “a man of the times” (Zaidman). Garrard’s character also finds his tactics excusable: “I never took bribes for my own use” (Garrard 19). To help Courtney better understand his tactics, he describes one of his encounters with Colonel Playfair.

Fictional Macdonald recalls how, after winning the 1887 election, he was giving his “usual ‘Canadians have spoken their minds’ speech – ‘Not for sacks of Yankee gold,’ sort of thing” (Garrard 19) in Parliament, when Playfair anxiously interrupted him. In the scene that comes to life in front of Courtney, and of course, the audience, the colonel demands his rights: “You gave me a promise last election—if I was to buy and pay for all the votes in the back townships of Frontenac County—you’d get me the contract to build the road from Perth to Buckshot Creek. I kept my bargain and I’ve got a cellar full of empty whiskey kegs to prove it” (Garrard 20). Instead of keeping his word, Sir John first mocks the Colonel asking for his opinion on a foolish matter: “how many pounds of powder would you say it would take, put directly under a bull’s bottom, to blow the horns clear off him?” (Garrard 20). Then, he takes his promise back because “that’s work for younger men” and appoints Playfair to a Postmaster position, but only when “there’s a vacancy” (Garrard 20). After watching the Colonel being tricked, Courtney is appalled: “That’s dishonest!” (Garrard 20), while Sir John is obviously pleased with himself: “Now where was the harm in that?” (Garrard 20).

The entire episode might be considered a fictional scene meant to ridicule the Prime Minister and portray him as a corrupted, cynical, and immoral politician. According to historical accounts and nineteenth-century testimonies, however, Garrard’s re-enactment
proves much closer to recorded history than one could have expected. In *The Illustrated History of Canada*, Craig Brown, for example, describes Macdonald’s campaign strategies in terms very close to Garrard’s dramatic re-enactment: “he told his followers in any doubtful constituencies to ‘spend money’ persuading the electors to vote for them” (335). In addition, Brown reproduces one of the political cartoons of J. W. Bengough, the founder of the satirical weekly *Grip* (1873-94), which established itself through caricatures of Macdonald during the Pacific Scandal (*The Canadian Encyclopedia*). In this particular drawing, the Liberal leader Alexander Mackenzie stares at an “innocent,” but red-nosed Sir John A., into whose mouth the cartoonist puts the words “I admit. I took the money and bribed the electors with it. Is there anything wrong about that?” (Brown 335 & “J. W. Bengough,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*). The playwright’s sources of inspiration for Sir John’s attitude are easily recognizable and attest that most puns and innuendos reproduced in the play belonged to Macdonald himself and not his author. Beyond that, however, Garrard’s postmodern satire is manifest through how he re-tells the Prime Minister’s story so that it effectively targets the past but also the present of Canadian politics. As reviewer Geoff Chapman observes, the obvious parallelism denies the audience any possible chuckles: “the links between 19th-century politicking and today’s are clear enough. Thus Sir John can declare: ‘Bribery is an essential tool of government’ and ‘truth is slippery,’ without provoking any audience reaction” (J.12).

The playwright, however, attempts to recreate the Prime Minister as a complex human being, not only as a collection of citations and the carrier of a post-colonial message. The flashback of the Macdonald family’s “Great Crossing to the Canadas on the Earl of Buckinghamshire” (Garrard 26-28) gives information on the reasons the Macdonalds had to
leave Glasgow and shows the future politician as a five-year old boy, whose mother asks him to be brave and hide his fear. Garrard, however, does not miss the opportunity to present his character in relationship to the Empire, whose devoted subject he was. The post-colonial irony is subtly expressed in the stage directions that describe how young John A. finds comfort “curled up under the Union Jack” (Garrard 30), while sailors are busy “burying passengers at sea...wrapped in a British flag” (Garrard 26). Commenting on this childhood memory of the British flag, Macdonald identifies it as the metaphorical origin of his later political options: “I wrapped myself in this flag for comfort’s sake when I was young—because I was afraid (...) ‘A British subject I was born—a British subject I will die,’ is what I said” (Garrard 30). The character’s statement is in fact the exact citation of the Prime Minister’s slogan during his 1891 election campaign⁸, when he “appealed with unrivalled emotionalism to English-speaking colonialism” (McNaught 182-3) and won his last mandate. However, the images of the British flag as a blanket for the frightened little boy and respectively as a shroud for the dead ironically contrast with the Prime Minister’s solemn statements and his imperial attachment.

Whereas the first act focuses on Macdonald’s political career, the second act depicts some touching scenes from his complicated private life, including his engagement with Isabella, his first wife, and the last evening they were together before her sudden death in 1849; the proposal scene and the arrival in Canada of Agnes, his second wife and, years later, a family scene with both of them in the company of their sick daughter. Somewhat melodramatic, the character takes responsibility for all his political mistakes, but confesses eternal regret that he ignored the feelings of Mrs. Grimason, his lover of many years, who was recently widowed and carrying his child, Courtney’s grandfather, when he came back
from England with his second wife. Though rare in the script, moments of psychological introspection and of bitter self-reflection help reveal the inner struggle of a politician who had to choose between a fulfilled personal life and a public one. The non-illusionist style prevails and Macdonald expresses his sadness not in a heart-felt confession but a song:

I see a man at a crossroads
Looking to the left and the right
He’s tired but he knows that he’s got far to go
He’s laying down his unlived lives. (Garrard, 71)

In addition, *Sir John, Eh?* re-enacts a scene in which Macdonald accepts McGee’s proposition to lead a political coalition and the country in spite of the promise he made Isabella to “abandon politics” (Garrard 70). Consistent with his plan to rehabilitate the mistreated Prime Minister, Garrard makes a humble McGee speak to Macdonald in definitive words: “You are the only of us who can bind the coalition and lead us out of chaos” (Garrard 70). The testimonies of other nineteenth-century politicians confirm this perspective. For instance, Wilfrid Laurier, Sir John’s political opponent, stated in the House of Commons after Macdonald’s death: “It is almost impossible to imagine the politics of this country -the fate of this country- without him. His loss overwhelms us...The career of Sir John A. Macdonald, which has just closed, is one of the most remarkable careers of this century” (Bradley & Wilson 246). In addition to having his colleagues and rivals’ recognize his moral and political authority, Garrard also shows that Macdonald was aware of his role in national politics.

In spite of the lack of traditional “heroism,” historians generally agree on Macdonald’s essential role in Canada’s history. Donald G. Creighton, one of his enthusiastic
biographers, states: “There can be not the slightest doubt that Macdonald was a most accomplished master of the craft and mystery of politics. (...) The solidity of his achievements mocked the facile depreciation of his character. The bibulous party hack became the principal author of the constitution of a great state. The indolent procrastinator created a transcontinental nation in less than a quarter of century” (in Ondaatje 27). In contrast, Dinulescu’s portrayal of the Ceausescus expresses Romanians’ collective embarrassment and frustration that they for more than twenty years quietly accepted their leadership and the continuous distortion of their history and sense of self.

3.4. Tragicomic Victims of Pride and the Communist Secret Police

Several post-communist history, psychology, and political science analyses discuss Romania’s former president, emphasizing the tragic consequences his dictatorship had for the country and its people. Although he is not a favourite choice for artists, after having been forced for so many years to sing his praise, the former President still appears as a character in a few plays, only one of which was written in Romania. In her 1990 Adjetivos (Adjectives) (Larson 52), Bolivian Maritza Wilde uses the play-within-a play format, in which two actors rehearse a play about the Ceausescu’s speedy trial and execution. They also appear as vampires in Saviana Stanescu’s Waxing West, which I will discuss in a subsequent chapter, and as a parodic Dracula and his wife in Anne Washburn’s The Communist Dracula Pageant. While the latter two plays’ ironic re-enactment of the communist leaders is somewhat similar to Dinulescu’s vision, A Day attempts a more complex portrayal, depicting the former Romanian President from several synchronic and diachronic perspectives in the
larger context of the Romanian society, making a clearer and more consistent political statement.

As he explains in the short introduction that accompanies the play’s English translation, Dinulescu intentionally depicts Ceausescu as “a dictator without any scruples, a product of the Romanian Securitate and of the KGB, who contributed to the strengthening of a vicious system of repression directed against his own people” (2007: 1). Consistently, the show’s page on Teatrul Mic’s website emphasizes not Ceausescu’s personal role but the Romanian culture’s Russification, under the close supervision of the KGB-style local secret police.

Identifying the communist imperial power as the main source and ideological model of Romania’s decline, the advertisement actually describes a type of in-depth communization, which is very similar to the effects of Western-type of colonization: “Under the supervision of the Boys, in fifty years, the Romanian people has let go of its traditions, individuality, and talents, copying instead from the Russians their Soviet architecture, textbooks, movies, theatre, industry, army, clothing, songs, ‘performers’ [secret police informants] of folk music, politicians, theatre directors, dissidents, writers, soccer coaches and ‘tourist guides’ [secret police informants]” (O Zi, Teatrul Mic). Before 1989, the belief in an all-powerful Moscow-funded repressive system that supported Ceausescu and perverted the Romanian way of life was persistent in the popular imagination. In her study “The Romanian Mythopolitics in the Twentieth Century,” Cesereanu actually identifies it as a myth of the secret police and a parallel conspiracy theory. In support of her argument, she recalls how Romanians regarded Internal Affairs as “a secret society and organization, able
to control everybody through personal files […], informants (snitches) and last, but not least, by exerting physical and psychological pressure (torture) on its victims” (Cesereanu 184).

Dinulescu employs this popular perspective and makes the anonymous but powerful Boy, the mastermind of the communist dictatorship and the main character of his dramatic parody: “*A Day* is nothing more than a fraction of a Boy’s work” (*O Zi*, Teatrul Mic). From the very first scene, Nicolae and Elena are depicted as simpletons, who are unable to come up with a plan and make decisions and rely on the Boy’s strategies, accepting and sometimes even demanding his instructions: “Cut the crap, read us the schedule, tell us what to do” (Dinulescu, 2007, 3).

The non-linear narrative, non-illusionist style, and post-modern pastiche allow the author to ignore historical causality and chronology, and explicitly re-enact the Ceausescus’ rise to power from the perspective of the grotesque dictators they became in the last decades of their lives. Furthermore, the characters themselves are aware of their future political power and beautified biographies when the play begins in the years preceding the Second World War. Consequently, they strive to conform to the official versions of their youth and struggle through tedious activities. Nicolae hurts himself making shoes, while Elena tries to understand a basic chemistry textbook and makes fun of commonsense statements, which seem beyond her understanding. The trying experiences make the two bicker but the thought of their future rewards convince them to accept the sacrifices:

Elena: Let’s stop fighting, Nicu! The Boy will hear us and say that posterity will find out…

Nicolae: I don’t give a shit about posterity! But you’re right…. Go back to studying. I’ll put a red strap on the shoes. (Dinulescu 2005: 2).
The tone of the absurdist caricature echoes the popular ridicule expressed in subversive jokes, an important survival strategy, as I explained, while unexpectedly preserving historical accuracy. If Macdonald was openly ridiculed for his drinking habit, the Ceausescus’ humble origin and lack of schooling were continuously, though cautiously mocked, especially after they came to power and earned a tremendous number of university degrees (Frunza 585). N. Ceausescu’s biographies, written before and after the 1989 fall of communism in Romania, (Hamelet 1971, Frunza 1984, Treptow 1996, Tismaneanu 2003, Constantinescu 2002) confirm that he left his poor village and family at the age of eleven before completing his education and became a shoemaker’s apprentice in Bucharest. In popular perception and in Dinulescu’s depiction, N. Ceausescu remained an illiterate and unskilled shoemaker for the rest of his life, as my analysis will subsequently prove. In her youth, E. Ceausescu was also an uneducated factory worker (Frunza 582), who dropped out of school in grade four (“Elena Ceausescu,” <http://www.ceausescu.org>). After her husband came into power, she was, however, awarded a PhD in Chemistry and continuously praised as “comrade academician doctor engineer Elena Ceausescu, the president of the National Council of Science and Education, an outstanding politician and a world-renowned scientist” (Berce 22), “whose scientific works fertilized the production practices of the major industries in our economy, while also entering the market of the universal science” (Zanc 173), to cite only two examples out of countless ones. In ironic contrast, Dinulescu emphasizes Elena’s complete lack of knowledge and ability to understand scientific concepts, which makes her the easy victim of the Boy’s cynical mockery and manipulation:

Elena: Shouldn’t I also invent some law of chemistry, in all these years [in power]?
Boy: Of course, comrade... It’s right here... You are going to invent... Let me just
find the page... you can invent the Law of Archimedes... (Dinulescu 2007: 19).

In addition to the secret police’s direct contribution to N. Ceausescu’s political career,
Dinulescu also suggests the Soviet approval of his rise to power. The scene that portrays him
as a student at the Military Academy in Moscow is grotesque. In order to please the General,
the school commander, Nicolae decides to make use of his shoe making skills. He then steals
the General’s military boots, reshares them into high-heeled women’s shoes of two different
colours, and attempts to make the Russian try them on (Dinulescu, A Day 18). The General’s
reaction after the boot incident illustrates the popular belief that Moscow accepted Ceausescu
as the RCP’s General Secretary because it believed him to be stupid and, thus, easy to
manipulate (Tismaneanu 2005, 221-2):

Nicolae: He approached me... He took me by my collar...

Elena: Oh, Nicu, how wonderful!

Nicolae: …by my collar and said: Ceauşescu, you are a blockhead, an idiot...

Elena: O, Nicu, how beautiful...

Nicolae: A madman... You are going to rise to the top of your country.

(Dinulescu, A Day 18).

The parodic re-enactment of his political advancement has, however, a more
emotional value than a factual one, renouncing historical evidence for the sake of expressing
the popular belief that Ceausescu would have been unable to rise to and remain in power
without the support of Moscow and the secret police. Most historians, however, contradict
this theory and describe the internal power struggles that led to his election as the RCP
general secretary, and acknowledge his ability to secure this position (Tismaneanu 2005,
220-2; Constantiniu 473-4). Among others, Ion Bulei’s *A History of Romanians* concludes: “With remarkable political competence and trickery, with ceaseless energy, N. Ceausescu managed to eliminate, in only a few years, the closest collaborators of his predecessor […], and, subsequently, the ones who helped him achieve his goal. With precision, intelligence, and impressive tenacity, N. Ceausescu made his way towards absolute power over the state and party structures and, eventually, over the entire Romanian population” (169). In spite of his extensive research (Dinulescu, “Surse de inspiratie”), the playwright chose to ignore the historians’ findings and to represent the dictator and his wife from the popular point of view, as power-hungry marionettes of Moscow and the secret police.

Similar to *Sir John, Eh?*, most of the details he re-enacts in *A Day* are, however, accurate, in spite of the comic distortion of the characters and occasional overstatements. While Garrard adopts the historians’ position that the final motivation of Macdonald’s dishonest acts was Canada’s unification and its subsequent betterment, Dinulescu is also consistent with the views of the historical texts written either in exile or after 1989, when historians were presumably free of the state censorship. The general agreement is that the Ceausescus bluntly ignored everything they did not understand, physically eliminated everyone who opposed them (Tismaneanu 2005: 234-5), and feared and oppressed intellectuals (Frunza 583-4). Dinulescu’s ironic recreations explicitly exhibit similar attitudes, with the Ceausescus behaving in private as people used to imagine them before 1989. Far from the public eyes, they drop the act of “the nation’s caring parents” and cynically voice their contempt:

Nicolae: The best thing is to deceive them as quickly as possible... And take power as soon as possible.
Elena: Yes, Nicu... Then, they all will depend on us ... Oh dear, I get goose bumps just thinking about it... (Dinulescu 2005: 4, my translation)

Holding a more personal grudge, Elena also plans to take revenge on the authors of her chemistry textbook, “these sons of bitches” (Dinulescu 2007: 3), and her husband agrees: “We’ll have to take care of these stupid people when we come to power” (Dinulescu 2007: 5). Like in real life, in A Day, the Ceausescus are viciously addicted to power and openly encourage the blatant cult of personality orchestrated by their secret police and devoted sycophants. Although the praise may seem absurdist, Dinulescu’s musical re-creations closely resemble the collective worship that took place during the dictatorship:

There’s such wisdom on your valiant face

It’s righteousness that you always seek

There’s such kindness in your brown eyes

That tears of love keep flowing down my cheek. (Dinulescu 2007: 8)

While Macdonald easily tricked colonel Playfair and dominated his political opponents, the communist dictator also appears superior to his flatterers in both documented testimonies and in Dinulescu’s play. The official records\textsuperscript{11} of the only four meetings Ceausescu had with Romanian writers, edited and published by Liviu Malita, validate this perspective. Like in the post-communist parody, the actual writers\textsuperscript{12} were more than willing to submit their works to the requirements of the communist propaganda and did not care to claim their artistic freedom, when Ceausescu began implementing his version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution through his so-called July Thesis. The recorded intervention of Zaharia Stancu, one of the most prolific novelists and eventually a President of the Romanian Writers’ Union, a very important position in communist Romania, is characteristic of the submissive
attitude. He humbly agrees with the General-Secretary and demagogically emphasizes the collective adoption of the State policies: “the majority of writers acknowledged the Party’s documents with great interest, and wherever possible followed them and improved their work” (Patrasconiu). Dinulescu employs the same obedient tone and creates a collective character of Writers, who enthusiastically embrace socialist realism: “We want to write about the new man, about collectivization, we want to criticize negative attitudes […] We want to write poems about furnaces and engineers” (Dinulescu 2005: 25). Alluding to intellectuals and artists’ poverty, the Writers cheerfully share the only typing machine the dictator endows them with. In spite of the parodic style, Dinulescu’s re-enactment proves once again closer to reality than an uninformed reader might acknowledge. In the Teatrul Mic’s production, Writers were easily recognizable parodies of real-life Romanian authors, and one of them actually sued\textsuperscript{13} director Tocilescu for libel. The Ceausescu’s formal meeting with the Scientists is similar to his meeting with the Writers. As a reminder of the lack of food in 1980s Romania and of the distasteful surrogates that filled the stores, Scientists show an absurd enthusiasm to study “the leaves and the hay to find out what we are going to replace meat and coffee with” (Dinulescu 2005: 26). Their attitude recalls once more the betrayal of the Romanian “false elite” (Tismaneanu 252) that openly and consistently supported N. Ceausescu, giving him the scientific and ideological tools to deceive and manipulate the less educated masses. Blinded by his unquenchable thirst for power and praise, the President eventually becomes a tragicomic character, whose real-life character and fictional representation bring to mind Alfred Jarry’s Ubu, Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s Caligula, and Berthold Brecht’s Arturo Ui.
3.5. The Role of Bribery in the Foundation of Canada

In *Sir John, Eh?* and *A Day*, laughter uncovers past betrayals and corruption but also makes them more easily accepted, like the sweet coating of a bitter pill able to cure a collective disease. The re-enactment of the two historical leaders is projected onto the larger context of national histories and politics. Dinulescu anchors his play in the context of a disappointing post-communist transition, implicitly and explicitly uncovering its similarities to the communist dictatorship. Whereas at the end of *A Day* the Ceausescus’ ghosts make fun of the post-communist Parliament, Dinulescu does not physically represent it on stage. In contrast, Garrard specifically sets his historical parody in 1998. Although the present is barely suggested and most of the scenes take place in the past, the twentieth century context provides the audiences with a familiar frame of reference, which reveals the historical re-enactment as necessary and the political satire as topical. In addition, *A Day* focuses on the falsification of history, whereas *Sir John, Eh?* indict its ignorance.

As I explained in my previous chapter, the English-Canadians’ lack of knowledge regarding their shared past and disinterest in their national culture are some of the most debated, explained, researched, but not solved issues in the academic and media discourse of the twentieth century. A few years before *Sir John, Eh?* was written, Glen Williams raised these issues once again and deplored “the failure of Canadians to transmit through the generations enthusiasm for, or even knowledge about, their own unique national experience” (7), which he considered one of the main sources of the Canadians’ identity crisis and helped explain their acceptance of the American imperialist dominance in the twentieth century. Discussing the importance of political culture in Canada, David V. J. Bell also addressed these phenomena from several different perspectives, including Harold Innis’s theories of
cultural transmission. Considering that “the culture of society is transformed when new developments take place in the technology of communication” (149), an argument which was later used by Anderson’s in his theory of nationalism, Bell notes that, “Canada, unlike virtually any other country in the world, has a cultural transmission system that is almost entirely in the hands of a foreign power” (150), namely the U.S. According to him, this paradoxical phenomenon is the reason why most Canadians grow up reading, watching, listening to, and even eating American products and, thus, develop “a very shaky sense of Canadian identity and relatively little knowledge about their own country and political institutions, much less any sense of what might constitute Canadian culture in the mass media, the arts, music, and letters” (150). Historians, such as Donald Swainson and Donald B. Smith, express a similar frustration, specifically referring to young generations’ lack of knowledge about the foundation of Canada and its first Prime Minister: “Our children discuss the pilgrim fathers on Thanksgiving, and think that George Washington founded Canada. They refer to ‘our president.’ The only Macdonald that they know anything about sells hamburgers” (Swainson 23); “A generation ago an Information Canada poll of primary-school students revealed that most of them thought Sir John A. Macdonald's main contribution to North American life was a hamburger chain” (Donald B. Smith A. 15). Ten years after *Sir John, Eh?* was written, the Dominion Institute’s 2007 survey reinforced the same concern, as it found that “[f]ewer than half of respondents (46%) could name Canada’s first prime minister. Just one-quarter (26%) knew the year of Confederation” (Chalifoux).

In this context, the re-enactment of Canadian history and especially of “Sir John A. Macdonald, the closest thing Canada has to a founding father” (Donald B. Smith A. 15) becomes a nationalistic statement and an implicitly an anti-American one, although Garrard
does not directly address this issue. He does, however, point out the indifference towards their country of some of the young Canadians, whose representative Courtney claims to be, as she defies Sir John and tells him everybody she knows is “sick of hearing” about political and social matters like “keeping the country together. Nobody I know cares one way or the other” (Garrard 18). Courtney stirred different reactions from the reviewers, from sympathetic approval for her “stirring protest song entitled I’m in Rags” (Taylor D.3) to her sarcastic dismissal as a conventional character: “Garrard uses the character as a soapbox to chronicle the ills of our country; Courtney professes to know nothing about history, yet keeps quoting from a book that states all of Sir John’s wrongdoing. … (Do you know any 20-year-olds who really act like this?)” (Burliuk E. 7). In spite of the character’s dramaturgical flaws, I consider her an effective device that helps the author challenge the cynical attitudes towards Canada’s past and present. Garrard stresses Courtney’s lack of knowledge, doubled by self-righteousness and hasty criticism, but makes it clear that her attitude reflects more general social problems.

In all honesty, Courtney accuses Macdonald of corruption in the name of what she was being taught, “That’s not what it said in my history books” (Garrard 19), as a reminder of the stereotyping perspectives of Macdonald and of a contested school curriculum. Like in real life, and as statistics confirm and historians lament, Courtney distances herself from Macdonald’s efforts, denying the value of his achievements: “You are the ones responsible for starting this awful country. You seem to think it was a pretty shit hot thing to do. We don’t have a lot in common” (31). She dismisses the praises of Macdonald’s father and sister and explicitly evaluates Canada from a bitter twentieth-century standpoint:

HUGH: Canada’s my son’s greatest achievement.
COURTNEY: Achievement? If Canada was my greatest achievement I’d drink bleach.

_The others are flabbergasted._

MARGARET: Canada’s a nation because of my brother! (…)

COURTNEY: What kind of a nation is that? Bunch of guys lining their own pockets!” (Garrard, 19)

When Macdonald tries to defend it, Courtney once again recalls some of the problems of the English-Canadian society at the end of the twentieth century:

JOHN A.: What’s so awful about the country?

COURTNEY: A guy in my band’s got a Ph.D. He sent out nine hundred resumes and didn’t get an interview. That’s one example (Garrard, 31.)

Although remarks of this kind are rare in the play and somewhat stereotypical they suggest the collective disappointment that made some people worry for the fate of Canada as an independent nation and of the _Canadian dream_ towards the end of the twentieth century.

In the aftermath of the 1988 Free Trade Agreement followed four years later by the North American Free Trade Agreement, several multinational corporations moved their branches from Canada to locations with lower wage levels, smaller corporate taxes, fewer industrial regulations, and workers unions. As a consequence, a “deep recession gripped Canada in 1990”, which lasted for three years and was followed by a “jobless recovery” (Conrad 397). The standard of living declined, as unemployment reached almost 10% and almost five million Canadians were classified as poor in 1993. In addition, most of the traditional values and programs of the generous welfare state were in jeopardy at the end of the twentieth century. Especially in Ontario but to some extent in the entire country, the succeeding either
Liberal or Conservative governments of the 1990s cut social, healthcare, and education programs, closed hospitals, weakened environmental regulations, and made unemployment insurance and welfare much harder to get than at the beginning of the decade. On the international level, although Canada proclaimed its support for human rights and continued its peacekeeping actions, foreign policy generally pursued economic interests. The government sold arms to both Iraq and Iran during their territorial war in the 1980s, conducted trade relations with China, Turkey, Vietnam, and Thailand, in spite of blatant human rights violations. Mel Hurtig, an Edmonton-based long-time champion of Canadian nationalism, stated in his *The Betrayal of Canada* that NAFTA was already responsible for the loss of 264,000 manufacturing jobs and predicted that “the future will be worse… the destruction and disappearance of our country” (339).

Young people were the surest victims of unemployment, even when they had professional qualifications or post-secondary education. As Courtney would belong to this so-called “Generation X” whose prospects for success in their adult lives were bleak at the end of the 1990s, her mistrust in politicians and resentment of traditional values are historically motivated. Similar to other English-Canadian playwrights and artists, Garrard attempts to counterpoint what several historians, cultural politics analysts, anthropologists, writers, and artists lamented as a “profound identity crisis … never-ending identity crisis” (Bell 148, 152), re-affirms the ability of the shared past to unite a national community, and challenges the stereotypical perceptions of Canadian history and Macdonald. As he cannot falsify the past for the sake of a nationalist argument, in *Sir John, Eh?* Garrard attempts an accurate, although comic depiction of the foundation of Canada, hoping that, like Courtney, the audience would rediscover the national history and be persuaded to accept it.
The Prime Minister, self-appointed history teacher and master of ceremonies, organizes an ad-hoc history class, using the play-within-a-play re-enactment of some of the political events that preceded and followed the 1867 Union, including “the terrible parliamentary wars we fought before Confederation came to be” (Garrard 66), House meetings, the Pacific Scandal, the execution of Riel, and the political turmoil raised by Ottawa’s designation as the National Capital. The Prime Minister’s role in Canadian politics is particularly emphasized in the revival of the two Parliament meetings in Montreal. Consistent with the whole play, the style is parodic, with politicians wearing clown noses - “blue for the Tories (including the Governor) and red for the Grits” (Garrard 34. During the first scene, Liberals and Conservatives attempt to discuss the “rep-by-pop” ("representation by population"), demanded by citizens of Canada West, but end up insulting and accusing each other in a musical confrontation, which recalls Brecht’s political satire and alienation effect. Issues of major importance to Canada, including its status as a free country or a British colony are addressed in nursery-style rhymes:

**GRITS:** We’re McGee and Mackenzie and Mowat and Brown

We want to bid adieu to the British Crown

We’d like to be republican and free

We aim to take the Tory out of history.

**TORIES:** God save our queen, wherever she may be

In British North America we believe

We stand for faith, we stand for loyalty

To God and Britain and the Royalty. (Garrard 37)
The naïve tone does not minimize the gravity of the political message, although it ridicules the so-called “straightforward and pragmatic politicians” (Swainson 21), commonly known as “The Fathers of Confederation.” The characters’ consciousness that they are involved in historical events, which is also manifest in A Day, suggests a delicate balance between serious matters and a light comedic style, which defines the play in general. Liberals claim the Rights of Man on the American model, “Equal opportunity for every citizen. Every man. Every woman. Every child” (Garrard 36) and fight to make the citizens of Canada, Americans (Garrard 37). In contrast, Conservatives plead for loyalty towards the British Empire. Macdonald and George Brown, the leader of the Liberal opposition, aggressively insult each other, while the Governor helplessly calls them back to order: “Unparliamentary language!” (Garrard 38, 39). The altercation ends abruptly when “John A. falls down drunk on his face” (Garrard 39) and the Parliament adjourns.

The second Parliament scene re-enacts the debates that took place after the Queen nominated Ottawa as the National Capital in 1857. Although the Parliament failed for 17 years to agree on this matter, the Liberal MPs opposed and voted against the Royal decision. In Garrard’s vision, the scene that follows the vote “takes on something of the form of a square dance” (Garrard 41) and once more resembles absurdist theatre. The Tory government resigns, and George Brown forms a Liberal cabinet, whose members, Brown, Mackenzie, Mowat, and McGee, are asked to respect the rule and resign as MPs. Given the Liberals’ lack of representation in the Parliament, Macdonald calls for a “want of confidence” (Garrard 44), and within minutes the newly formed cabinet is forced to resign. Eventually, Cartier forms another government, which is identical to the one at the beginning of the meeting. Nothing has changed, but the Tories manage to silence their opposition in the process. The Governor
conducts a final song, which ironically expresses the corruption that dominated Canadian politics in the pre-Confederation period: “The name of the game:/ How much can I steal?/
The harder I try/ The better I feel” (Garrard 46). The singing and dancing, the speed at which governments and motions succeed one another, and the overall burlesque atmosphere make Garrard’s re-enactment seem well removed from reality. Courtney’s reaction confirms that the scene gives the impression of a fictional theatrical entertainment, as she compliments Macdonald for his “[g]reat drunk acting” and expresses her sheer enjoyment: “That was fun” (Garrard 39).

According to Brown, however, the nineteenth century Canadian Parliament was indeed like the chaotic and corrupt place 14 Garrard re-enacted: “Parliament was… abrupt, caustic, humorous, distinctly unrefined. (...) Parliament sometimes proceeded amid the singing of songs, the mimicking of cats and roosters” (Brown 338). J. Bradley Cruxton and W. Douglas Wilson’s Grade 8 Canadian history textbook gives a more detailed description of the 1857 debate regarding the National Capital, which helps me restate that, as he mentioned in a 1997 interview, Garrard relied on documented facts and extrapolated “from existing information” (Burliuk 1996: C6), compressing time for comic effect. Whereas in reality “Brown was prime minister for a little over 48 hours” (Cruxton 9), in the play he gains and loses power in the same scene, which heightens the satire of Canadian politics. However, the depiction of the Prime Minister’s political efficiency and sincere enjoyment is authentic: “Macdonald and his Conservative government returned to power and joked about the double shuffle” (Cruxton 9). In spite of Macdonald’s human flaws and questionable leadership methods, Garrard seems to side eventually with his defenders. In the play, this role is
attributed to the women that surround him, including his sister who emotionally states: “My brother improved the situation. Things were far worse before he came along” (Garrard 33).

Like the post-modern parody, the post-colonial re-enactment of Canada’s past and its first Prime Minister is not an actual re-invention, but in fact a repetition with a minimal difference of what historical documents and testimonies attest that actually happened, whose purpose is to help Courtney and the audience come to terms with their shared past, as an essential part of their national identity. As she enjoys the show and promises to come back next year to meet the Macdonalds for whisky and some political gossip, the young girl seems to have accepted her personal and national ancestors. If I credit Courtney with being a representative of at least a section of the audience, then I can consider her a dramaturgical tool to acknowledge and then to counteract the alienation from their shared past and from each other that is part of Canadian culture. From this perspective, Garrard’s historical parody enables imagined exile as a temporary link of the post-colonial community while presenting the remembering and auto-ironic reassessment of the past as one of the ways to resolve the national identity crisis.

Interestingly, A Day’s re-enactment of the communist period can be described in the same terms, although within a fundamentally different political and moral context. According to Renan, Anderson, and others, democratic societies do not lie about the past, but pretend to forget the morally questionable events. In contrast, communist dictatorships boldly falsify the past without even worrying about preserving the appearances of a truthful account. As I have already explained, Sir John, Eh? and A Day share the mockery of a morally questionable national past, on one hand, and the parody of this very same type of collective self-mockery, on the other hand. However, whereas Garrard employs this narrative
strategy to remind his audiences of forgotten truths, Dinulescu uses it to separate truth from lies. The parodic re-enactment of N. Ceausescu’s life becomes the medium to deconstruct not only the propagandistic image of his life and political career but also of Romania’s history itself.

3.6. The Secret Police’s Tampering with Romanian History

A Day’s main purpose is to expose the “re-writing of the past in order to control the present,” which, in his study of communist Albania (in Betea 127), Gabriel Jandot identifies as one of the communist regimes’ main manipulation techniques. Historians locate the advent of this strategy in the Stalinist distortion of the history of the Bolshevik Revolution, whose official version was reinvented for propagandistic purposes. The official parallel narrative was widely enforced, especially after The Short Textbook of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was published in 1938 and immediately translated and printed in all communist countries, including Romania, where it sold 735,000 copies in 1944 (Betea 78). At the 1947 inception of the communist regime in Romania, the Romanian Communist Party consisted of less than a thousand members (Frunza 637, Constantiniu 405) and was desperately striving to assert its mass character, as its own official doctrine stated. As Anderson observes, in this type of situation “revolutionaries successfully take control of the state, and are for the first time in a position to use the power of the state in pursuit of their visions” (1991: 159). Accordingly, the Romanian communists felt entitled to pursue the Stalinist model and started falsifying their country’s past in order to inscribe themselves a posteriori in the national history. From 1965 onwards and more so after the 1971 implementation of the July Thesis, Ceausescu’s cult of personality determined an even more
aggressive and consistent rewriting of the national history “according to the needs of the moment” (Betea 101). The RCP’s invented mythology was meant to legitimate not only its political leadership, as it did at the beginning of the communist regime, but also that of its General Secretary (Tismaneanu 2005, 34; Frunza 576-591; Bulei 172-4).

In *A Day*, Dinulescu deconstructs in a parodic style the official mystification of the past, the collective denial, and the intellectuals’ complicity that took place during communism in Romania. Ceausescu’s and the RCP’s histories are not only parodically re-enacted, like in *Sir John, Eh?*, but actually manufactured in front of the audience, according to the future propagandistic history books, which the Boy seems to have drafted in advance. Consequently, he chooses what events must take place and how they will be remembered, relying on the passivity of the ordinary citizens and the complicity of the intellectuals, which closely resembles their real-life attitude (Constantinu 488, Bulei 163). The re-enactment of N. Ceausescu’s anti-fascist activity before the Second World War is a relevant example of how Dinulescu deconstructs the falsification of history. Given his very young age at the time, most post-communist historians doubt that he had actually pursued any significant actions during that period and sarcastically note the discrepancies in the “the official propaganda [which] kept lowering the age of his revolutionary beginnings from 16 to 15 and then 14 years old” (Bulei 168). Dinulescu reveals the Boy’s methodical efforts to invent Nicolae’s so-called revolutionary activity and have it documented: “You [Nicolae] pass through the crowd and the witnesses will take the manifestos themselves, they’re our boys, some of them are future historians” (Dinulescu 2007 13). In *A Day*, the secret police’s methods to alter the past are diverse, ranging from the resignification of actual events to the creation of fictional ones and the fabrication of the corresponding physical evidence: “if we
ever need a speech, I mean, in God knows how many years, well, we’ll manufacture one right there and then, and date it as 1939” (Dinulescu 7); “From time to time, there has to be a photo to make things credible... […] We take a picture beforehand, and, when we need a photo, we can make a collage” (Dinulescu 2007 12-13). Overseeing the entire process, the future President already shows the absolute confidence of a dictator, “who do you think will inquire about my activities? Who’s going to dare?” (Dinulescu 2005: 13) and anticipates his famous reliance on the terror instituted by his secret police: “whoever won’t believe, just won’t believe, and we’ll have other methods for them” (Dinulescu 2005: 6).

In addition to re-enacting the invention of N. Ceausescu and RCP’s histories, A Day also addresses the propagandistic rewriting of the country’s remote past, which was altered so that “the party, represented by its leader, would embody the popular aspirations from previous periods” (Betea 126) and legitimize its absolute power (Frunza 588). Among many other political analysts, Betea observes how in communist countries, such as the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Albania, and Cuba, the leaders are attributed hyperbolic qualities that transform them into quintessential national heroes and saviours. In a similar manner, Ceausescu “borrows an amalgam of characteristics from medieval and modern heroes, which affirm ‘the spirit of freedom and national unity,’ ideas propagandistically designated as ‘the red thread of Romanian history’” (Betea 126), and imagines himself as their worthy successor and the communist saviour of the nation. Sycophant painters, sculptors, and poets supported his illusion, fuelling Ceausescu’s cult of personality. One of the countless collections of praises includes a telling example of mystifying painting: “In Carmen Panaitescu’s work, the portrait of comrade Nicolae Ceausescu is surrounded by the effigies of Decebalusi, Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave, and Alexandru Ioan Cuza, in a
symbolic display of the socialist present’s links to the great historical militant traditions of the Romanian people” (Toca 162).

Dinulescu takes the flattery literally and creates a scene in which some of Romania’s most important historical rulers humbly ask Ceausescu for advice on how to win fifteenth and respectively seventeenth century battles against the Ottoman Empire. Moldova’s ruler Stefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great, 1433-1504), one of the most successful adversaries of the Ottoman Empire, helplessly begs for one of Ceausescu’s “indications,” which he generously spread around during his infamous work visits: “I must defeat the Turks at Podul Inalt and I’ve come to ask for an indication” (Dinulescu 2005: 26). Even a landmark event such as the first unification of the three Romanian principalities under Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave, 1558-1601) in 1600 is presented as Ceausescu’s and his secret police’s accomplishment:

Mihai Viteazul: Well, about the unification, comrade… I have to make it happen, and I need you to tell me who to unite with who…

Nicolae: That’s not your business… You just get a white horse and one hundred Romanian soldiers, and prance around Alba Iulia… Make sure a lot of people see you… We’ll take care of the rest… The times will change and the Union must be remodelled… I’m not sure you understand. (Dinulescu 2005: 27)

As the two historical events mentioned are among Romania’s foundational myths and the two leaders among the greatest national heroes, the parody actually points out the depth of the communist falsification of the past and, implicitly, of its effects on people’s sense of
history and identity. The strong reactions of *A Day*’s reviewers confirm the perception of the underlying tragic message:

> History is violently confiscated by two idiots, two illiterates who mispronounce words, who suddenly became supreme commanders, Doctors of Philosophy. Around them, a belt of obedience, tolerance, and silence. Nicu and Leana re-write their biographies and append to history textbooks the set of lies fabricated in test tubes blackened by stupidity. As if the world starts and ends with them, everyone around them fuels their ego-bestialization. (Michailov).

Deconstructing the past comes, however, with its risks. To incriminate the communist falsification strategies, Dinulescu also alters some of the documented facts, similar to some of the post-colonial playwrights, who, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, openly employ “performative manipulations of history/time” (144) in order to express their political agendas. *A Day* blurs the line between the communist and post-communist alterations of history truths. Facts that are certified by the presumably more reliable post-communist and even anti-communist historians are presented in *A Day* as the sole result of the secret police’s efforts to give Ceausescu a past fit for a communist hero. For example, Dinulescu shows how the secret police agent plans to add to Ceausescu’s biography a period of political detention, to the latter’s enthusiasm:

> Boy 1: There are also a few days in prison, for having promoted communist ideas...

> One or two days there, maybe a week....

> Nicolae: Oh, but that was very important... all great communists were imprisoned.

(Dinulescu 2007: 10)
The Boy’s detailed description of how he plans to achieve this gives the unquestionable impression that the N. Ceausescu’s real-life imprisonment was another propagandistic sham:

Well, when you were 14-15 years old, you had to walk home from Bucharest, being taken from one gendarmerie to the next, accused that, as a shoemaker’s apprentice, you had spoken to the other apprentices about Marx, Engels and Lenin, whom you knew about at that young age... […] As I said, a young boy left Bucharest, on foot, of course, and every gendarmerie is going to make a note of this date ten years ago... Mistakes are impossible, because we have spoken with all of them, and in the field everywhere... See what I mean.... (Dinulescu 2007: 10, 11)

However, the post-communist histories of the RCP and chronologies of Ceausescu’s life attest to his imprisonment in 1936 and 1939 (Tismaneanu 2005, 105-106). Given Dinulescu’s extensive research effort in the process of writing the play (“Surse de inspiratie / Sources of Inspiration”), I assume this was a conscious choice. However, I cannot help but wonder whether the post-communist forgetting and/or alteration of national histories are less morally culpable than the communist ones it deconstructs. Of course, the length and the political consequences are tremendously different but the mechanism seems the same. In his quest to express the beliefs and feelings of the Romanian people and to help his audiences cope with the past, Dinulescu forgoes historical accuracy every once in a while. As some of the reviews I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter attest, A Day achieved this goal and determined public, and, I argue, cathartic re-evaluations of the collective communist experience and its long-term consequences.

Although he focuses on the past, the playwright does not ignore the present. The satire of the post-communist regime becomes evident at the end of the play. As the
Ceausescus, now cynical ghosts, recognize the Boy among the members of the new and supposedly democratic Romanian Parliament, they celebrate the collective brainwashing, which presumably made people elect former secret police agents as their representatives:

Nicolae: Ha, ha, ha... We completely confused them...

Elena: We wrung out their brains...

Nicolae: Ha, ha, ha... we screwed them... (Dinulescu 2005: 38)

In addition to the direct criticism of contemporary politics, Dinulescu eventually challenges the stereotypical Romanian fatalism, often invoked as an excuse for any type of personal or collective mistakes. Comparing his people to other nations, not coincidentally former and actual empires, Nicolae’s ghost cynically concludes that Romanians did not have any significant achievement and were actually predestined to endure his reckless dictatorship:

Nicolae: Look at the Germans… the French, the English… the Americans... They had a mission and they fulfilled it... Even those poor Portuguese... A ship set out from one of their harbours and they discovered the new world...[…] maybe this was just the mission of this people… to have the two of us... and achieve nothing else...(Dinulescu 2007: 38).

The inferiority complex in relation to the Western nations seems a long-term consequence of the diminishing perspectives enforced by the colonizers and a frequent post-colonial and respectively post-communist syndrome of the liberated nations. *Sir John, Eh!* and *A Day* challenge this collective state and attempt to counteract it. Similar to its function in other post-colonial and post-communist countries, Garrard and Dinulescu’s dramatic re-enactments of the past strive to determine a public act of “‘the recuperation of memory,’ i.e. the re-signifying of previous information” (Betea 101). Garrard challenges the ignorance of
Canada’s national history and value as a country, which Courtney expresses in statements such as “If Canada was my greatest achievement I’d drink bleach” (Garrard 18). Anachronistically anticipating Anderson’s definition of the nation, Margaret states, “My brother invented Canada” (49), recalling not only Macdonald’s founding role, but also the colonial beginnings of the country, as a warning against its twentieth-century subaltern position.

Although to a different end and with different means, Ceausescu also engaged in a nation-building enterprise, as he invented his version of Romania and left the people to deal with it long after his death. Dinulescu observes the long-term consequences of his dictatorship in the alteration of Romania’s national history and, implicitly, of its national identity. A Day anticipated by six years the official decision to appoint a presidential commission to analyze the Romanian communist dictatorship, whose Final Report was published in 2007. As Tismaneanu, the Presidential Commission’s leader, acknowledged two weeks before Romania was accepted as a EU member, the long delay had major consequences: “For 16 years, Romania has avoided confronting her communist past, a procrastination which has resulted in the hegemony of lies and mystification. This, in turn, has created a climate of frustration and anger, manipulated by demagogues” (Trandafir). Among other post-colonial/post-communist playwrights, Garrard and Dinulescu attempted to compensate in drama for what was missing in state politics, drawing attention to the shared feelings of alienation and emphasizing their ability to restore people’s sense of community.
NOTES

1 From now on, I will use the shortened title *A Day*.

2 From now on, I will use N. Ceausescu and E. Ceausescu when discussing the actual historical personalities, and Nicolae and Elena, when discussing Dinulescu’s dramatic characters.

3 The ambiguous Romanian nickname for the secret police agents, “the Boys,” speaks of their anonymity and similarity.

4 I saw the show during my research trip to Romania in 2005 and I have to confess the same mixed reactions, as the play made me laugh but also brought back painful memories.

5 In this chapter, I use parody as Linda Hutcheon defines it: “a repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity” (26).

6 Whereas I cannot consider the anonymous opinions representative of a large segment of the play’s younger audience, I included them in my study for their personal value.

7 The play was awarded the Bucharest Writers’ Union’s prize in 2000 (“Colecția Biblioteca București”). The production won Best Director (Alexandru Tocilescu) and Best Actress (Coca Bloos for the role of Elena Ceausescu) in the UNITER 2006 national competition (“Gala Premiilor Uniter”), and three more awards in the 2006 Festival of Romanian Comedy, festCo: Best Set Design (Puiu Antemir) and, again, Best Director and best Actress (“Cultura”, *Gandul*).

8 “‘A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die,’ said Sir John A. to cheering crowds. He urged the people to vote for his party” (Bradley & Wilson, 246).

9 According to Petcu, Ceausescu earned his Bachelor of Economic Science in 1966 and his PhD in 1978. This is a selection of President Ceausescu’s other Romanian and foreign academic titles: Honorific President of the Romanian Social and Political Sciences Academy (1988); Honorific President of the Romanian Academy (1970); Doctor honoris causa of Central University, Ecuador (1973), Bucharest University (1973), University of San Marcos, at Lima, Peru (1974), Beirut Arab University, Liban (1974), University of Buenos Aires, Argentina (1975), University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines (1975), University of Tehran, Iran (1975), University of Yucatan, Mexico (1978), and so on.

10 Here is how ceausescu.org comments on her academic titles: “Nicolae appointed her to the National Council of Scientific Research. Two years later Elena was awarded her Ph.D. in industrial chemistry despite having had other people do the work for it. All her supposed scholarly achievements and awards were entirely fraudulent. Indeed, she was seen many times dozing off, open-mouthed, when scientific papers were discussed” (July 12, 2008).
According to Petcu, she was also full member of the Institute of Chemistry of Great Britain and Ireland and held numerous academic distinctions from many other foreign universities.

11 In Ceausescu, critic literar (Ceausescu: A Literary Critic), 2008, editor Liviu Malita publishes these transcripts from the archive of RCP’s Central Committee.

12 According to these records, A. E. Baconski was the only one who openly opposed Ceausescu during those meetings.

13 Because one of the actors playing the Writers resembled Paul Everac, a well-known author of propagandistic plays, Florin Calinescu, the actor playing Nicolae Ceausescu, used the name “Paul” when addressing him during the show. Subsequently, theatre critic Cristina Modreanu described the incident in her article and wrote that the satire of the sycophant writers was well-placed. After reading the review, Everac sued the playwright and the director for slander (Boiangu).

14 Although not directly related to my study, Brown’s details are juicy: “During a standing vote the yeas would line up on one side and the nays on the other, the fun consisting of dragging or carrying an MP over to the opposite side. Alexander Mackenzie, although short, one day selected the larger Cartier as his prize, but the victim struggled with such energy that he escaped having to vote for the wrong side” (Brown 338).

15 Betea gives a relevant example of the strategies used to deny access to information and perpetuate history’s most recent official version: “before 1989, the back issues of Scanteia [The Spark, originally in Romanian], the official newspaper of the RCP’s Central Committee, couldn’t be accessed without special authorization for the period 1944-1965, so many were the distortions and forgeries of the Party’s official history” (88).

16 Decebalus, Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave, and Alexandru Ioan Cuza are some of the most important Romanian historical leaders. Stephen the Great (Romanian: Stefan cel Mare, 1433-1504) was the Prince of Moldavia (1457-1504). He achieved fame for his long resistance against the Ottomans, and was deemed by Pope Sixtus IV verus christianae fidei athleta (true Champion of Christian Faith). Michael the Brave (Romanian: Mihai Viteazul, 1558-1601) was the Prince of Wallachia (1593-1601), of Transylvania (1599-1600), and of Moldavia (1600) three principalities that he united under his rule, anticipated the existence of the modern state of Romania after the First World War.

17 Nicu and Leana were the popular mocking nicknames of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, respectively.
CHAPTER 4
Denial, Meta-Denial, and Imagined Exile

Motto: “How can we adapt when everything changes so fast?

[...] We need to adapt because resistance is futile.”

(Gregory Charles, CBC 2, Sunday, February 15, 2009)

4.1. Some 1990s Redefinitions of the Identity Crisis and Imagined Exile

After exploring drama’s treatment and re-enactment of the past, the next two chapters discuss plays with contemporary subjects, which express post-colonial and post-communist attitudes towards national identity. Although historical, economical, and cultural conditions were strikingly different in post-colonial Canada compared to post-communist Romania, at the end of the twentieth century, both countries underwent crises of national identity. As I explained in Chapter 1, this state was determined by the coexistence of several conflicting definitions of the nation, none of those being able to dominate or exclude the others and assert itself as the collective metanarrative. Furthermore, public, civic, and religious institutions became temporarily unable to create and sustain the bonds among citizens, and respectively between the citizens and their national community. In this context, imagined exile provided the individual with one of the few available ways to reconnect to his/her national collective.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the expressions of identity crisis and imagined exile in two 1990s plays, English-Canadian Sled by Judith Thompson and Romanian The Future Is Rubbish by Vlad Zografi. These dramatic works re-enact the present
in a magic realist style, mixing naturalist, absurdist, and fantastic elements, but also openly challenge some of the political and social problems dominant in each country at that time. I do not claim that all of the citizens of 1990s Canada and Romania share the feelings and ideas expressed in these plays. I will show, however, that the empirical data collected by ethnographers, anthropologists, and political scientists, as well as journalistic articles and scholarly analyses, confirm the occurrence in real life of the perspectives employed by the two plays. I believe, thus, that these plays may be considered representative for at least some parts of the population of each country. The analysis of Thompson and Zografi’s expressions of the post-colonial and respectively post-communist identity crisis and of each people’s ways of overcoming this state will eventually help me articulate more general conclusions regarding the role of imagined exile in each country.

4.2. A Deadly Sled Ride and a Bogus Charity Foundation

Whereas both playwrights whose works I am discussing in this chapter have openly expressed their political opinions and the desire to support them through their dramatic works, *Sled* and *The Future Is Rubbish* (identified as *The Future* from now on) attest to their authors’ interest in challenging collective denial and deconstructing the collective identity crisis. Thompson openly explains that she makes it her job to enable audiences to see “what is invisible and covered up with piles of everydayness and everyday life” (“An Interview” 37) in order to reveal that our “whole society is founded on denial. Denial of murdering the Native people, denial of oppressing women. Everything we do” (“Offending” 34). In his “Foreword” to the 1997 printed version of the play, Duncan McIntosh, the director of its world premiere at Tarragon theatre, confirms the audience’s perception of this agenda, as he
notes that *Sled* was commonly acknowledged “as a metaphor for Canada; a prayer for the dying; an exposé of the hypocrisy of life in the comfortable Northern hemisphere in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century; a lament for the loss of our natural language” (McIntosh in Thompson, *Sled*, 8).

In a similar manner, theatre reviewers, such as Mihaela Michailov, acknowledge *The Future*’s focus on “a Romania trapped in an endless chaos, which agonically fights to subsist, because decent living is out of the question” (par. 1). In his note in the programme of the first and so far only production, Zografi, however, seems to accept jokingly his birth country’s so-called special status, including “the politico-socio-economic catastrophe” and ironically praises the Romanians’ complete lack of hopes and illusions (Prelipceanu). If anything, he chooses to mock the self-mockery itself. In spite of the black humour and fantastical elements, *Sled* and *The Future* give an accurate account of individuals and collectives as the long-term victims of international politics and internal state policies. The implementation of decolonisation and multiculturalism and respectively of de-communization and a market economy are accompanied by the necessary changes of the official definitions of the national identity and of the self-defining strategies. In addition, the common individual’s fate is at the discretion of the economical and political elites and of the representatives of the public institutions, including the Church, the police force, and the government officials. My exploration of some aspects of the English-Canadian and Romanian national identity crises is framed by the theories of civic nationalism and by specific studies of national identity in each country. I will first discuss relevant aspects of the playwrights’ reflections on the identity crisis and then explore the ways in which the articulation of imagined exile helps people regain the feeling of belonging to a national community.
As the plot of each play is very complicated, I thought that a few extra details might be useful. *Sled* re-enacts the dramas of some families living in a multicultural neighbourhood in Toronto, whose stories are partly re-enacted in front of us, and partly retold by the elderly Italian-born Joe, who spends most of his time on the porch to avoid his ailing wife. The play begins with Annie, a lodge-singer, being bullied by a drunken young man, Kevin, during her show at Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge. Her husband, Jack, a violent policeman with a huge ego, forces Kevin to apologize on his knees in front of all the customers. Shortly after, Annie takes a walk in the woods. Coincidentally, Kevin is hunting in the same place together with his friend Mike. When Kevin sees Annie, he pretends to take her for a moose and kills her. As Mike plans to turn himself in, Kevin kills him too, and runs away after grabbing Annie’s red dress as a hunting trophy. Looking for a place to hide, he then takes refuge in his family house in Toronto, the same house from where he was abducted by his babysitter when he was four years old. After he meets Evangeline, his half-sister, Kevin forces her to realize that they do not have the same father, Evangeline being in fact the love-child of a Cree man she has never met, and then bullies her into an incestuous relationship and a job as an exotic dancer. When Evangeline meets Jack at the strip club and is attracted to him, Thompson reveals that the two families were in fact living in the same neighbourhood, although they never met. Coming back home, Kevin surprises Evangeline and Jack together and the two men fight out of jealousy. Jack accidentally discovers Annie’s dress and understands that Kevin is his wife’s murderer and attempts to kill him. Forced to choose between them, Evangeline shoots Jack and runs into the woods with her brother. On the run, Kevin robs Joe, after accusing him of not preventing his abduction twenty years ago. The play ends at the site of the first murders, where Kevin and pregnant Evangeline await death surrounded by the
Northern Lights, which according to First Nations’ tradition symbolize the spirits of her paternal ancestors, having died violent deaths. In spite of being satiated with events, shocking disclosures, and paradoxical coincidences and reversals, *Sled* does not become confusing because the plot is very clearly articulated and the abundance of naturalistic details makes it strangely plausible. In addition, Thompson garnishes her story with the ghostly apparitions of Evangeline’s mother, trying to prevent Kevin’s terrible deeds, and of Annie, who prolongs her parting with a life ended violently.

Zografi also combines naturalistic and fantastic elements, even adding a touch of Sci-Fi. As in *Sled*, the action takes place in a neighbourhood, where the strangers pass by each other every day, and at the offices of the Ecumenical Philanthropy, a bogus charity foundation. Julien Rougier, a.k.a. Iulian Rosca, a Romanian immigrant to Switzerland, returns home to make a TV documentary about Romania’s misery, accompanied by Willy and Aldo, his cameraman and respectively sound engineer. Searching for dreadful subjects, in order to satisfy the West’s need for sensationalism, Rougier connects with Bistran, the president of the Ecumenical Philanthropy whose funds he embezzles. Bistran helps the TV crew find the homeless, the orphans, the madmen, and also puts them in touch with organizations similar to his, whose managers are starved for European money and attention. The play’s major twist is the discovery that Rougier is in fact the Devil, who has come to Romania to turn good people to evil. He quickly finds himself useless in a country which closely recalls hell itself and whose citizens “made it alone to the end” of evil (Zografi 21). As an extreme solution, Rougier decides to preach morality and collective values against indifference and selfishness in order to “save their souls so that we could push them back down” (23). As his first experiment, he chooses David, the charity’s computer programmer.
A stereotypical wacky scientist, David avoids social relationships, including the care of the secretary/prostitute Vera, who keeps pestering him to take care of himself. His only companions are the Statistic Man and the Statistic Woman, two virtual creatures who voice his scepticism in regard to human civilization. Rougier decides to save him from himself, make him leave his computer, discover that people are more than statistics, and experience real life. David pursues the Devil’s advice, only to discover himself alone in the real world, as Vera declines his marriage proposal, and Cezar does not accept him as a friend. As he still sees what is good and beautiful in people, Rougier commits him to the hospice in a last attempt to turn him to evil.

Several secondary plot lines add anecdotic details to the image of a chaotic society, following the three devils’ encounters with other characters. In addition to searching for graphic misery and pure souls, Willy and Aldo, the Devil’s assistants, have fun impersonating stereotypical characters from 1990s Romania, including public speakers, thieves, and abusive policemen. The play starts at an ad-hoc public meeting with two anonymous but fancy speakers, First Speaker and Second Speaker, later identified as Aldo and Willy, the Devils’ assistants, talking in front of a crowd that includes some of the play’s main characters, such as Cleo, Cezar, professional beggars who are husband and wife, and two thieves, First Thief and Second Thief, who are picking pockets. The comic depictions of Cleo and Cezar’s domestic troubles intersect the main plot several times, focused on their fights for the best begging spot, but also revealing a tender relationship towards the end of the play. They are the only ones who attempt to befriend David, although they eventually reject him. First Thief and Second Thief re-appear in other scenes, eventually breaking into the church and David’s office at the foundation. At the end of the play, David has found his
happiness among the patients of a mental hospital, while a team of Swedish journalists will soon replace the Swiss/evil TV producers, most likely interested in the same aspects.

4.3. A North-American Babel Tower

In contrast to the historical plays I already discussed that focused on English-Canadians, Sled presents a metonymic representation of the post-colonial Canadian nation after its multicultural redefinition. Initiated in 1971, after the adoption of the Lester B. Pearson’s Commission’s Report, Trudeau’s policy, “Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework” (Mackey 64), was an active form of state intervention and marked the shift from biculturalism to multiculturalism as “an attempt to redefine the symbolic system of Canada” (Breton 1988: 39-40). As Eva Mackey explains in her study The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada, “‘Multiculturalism’ replaces Britain as a central symbol of Canada” (65) and the concept of the “cultural mosaic,” in contrast to the American “melting pot,” becomes the essential nation-building strategy. However, from Mackey’s post-colonial 1990s perspective, the new policy also “defines acceptable forms of difference” (66), which simultaneously recognize and limit diversity. The state’s support of cultural minority groups is limited to helping them “participate in and contribute to Canadian society” and Canadian unity […] buttress the project of nation-building and national unity in Canada” (Mackey 66, original italics). Echoing the early European strategies of building a nation around a homogenous ethnic core (Smith 37-42, 68), however double in Canada, French and English-Canadians are reaffirmed as dominant, as their “linguistic and political rights as members of their groups” are reasserted, while the members of ethnic minorities only have rights “as individual citizens” and cannot authorize political changes,
but only request them (Mackey 66). Furthermore, Mackey notes that multiculturalism¹ “has been critiqued for maintaining the idea of British Canadians as the ‘norm,’ in relation to “multicultural’ Canadians” (67), including the French, a status quo which is maintained at the end of the twentieth century. In the 1987 Multiculturalism and Citizenship Act and subsequent state funded projects, “cultural forms other than the unmarked and dominant British national identity […] are limited and defined according to their place within the project of national-building” (Mackey 89). The official narratives of the nation, such as the exhibition *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, which celebrated the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and the public school textbooks, perpetuate a Western cultural project, which appropriates Aboriginality and cultural difference to erase past and present conflicts and produce “the particular characteristic of tolerance and cultural pluralism said to define Canadian identity today” (Mackie 83-9). From the perspective of the national identity crisis I use in this study, the specificity of the multicultural Canadian policies attests to the remnants at the performative level of the ethnic definition of the nation, which characterizes the colonial period, and the civic definition that post-colonialism attempts to employ at the pedagogical level.

Twenty-five years after the official implementation of multiculturalism, Thompson depicts the way in which a community of urban Canadians deals with its long-term consequences. Her characters’ internal and external conflicts, the crimes and abuses that take place in the neighbourhood, and the general atmosphere produce a cynical alternative to the official “innocent and ‘tolerant’” (Mackey 88) image of the country. Although Thompson clearly reasserts civic nationalism and shared social values as essential to the formation of a
Canadian people, she also emphasizes the role of cultural heritages, mother tongues, and ethnicities in the individual and collective self-defining process. From this perspective, national identity becomes a complex, but concrete notion that influences how ordinary individuals relate to themselves and to the others, and how they imagine themselves and the place they have within the also imagined national community. Accordingly, a conflicting position towards ignoring or denying any or all of the features that make up the national identity may lead to a crisis on both the personal and collective levels. In addition, *Sled*'s characters are depicted as the site of the confrontation between two conflicting definitions of the Canadian people: the remnant colonial vision of two distinct but homogenous Anglo-Saxon and French collectives, on one hand, and the post-colonial and multicultural perspectives, on the other hand. The play is set mainly in a Toronto neighbourhood, close to the intersection of Clinton and Bloor streets, which is depicted as a metonymy of the country through its ethnic, social, and cultural diversity.

From the very beginning of the play, Thompson suggests that multiculturalism has become integrated into the urban landscape and community. In the song, “Thursday in November,” which Annie performs at the Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge, she affectionately describes a walk on Bloor Street, past “Italian groceries, Korean fruit and flowers, Hungarian deli” (Thompson 1997: 17). The spatial markers polemically recall the “folkloric and culinary remnants” (Smolicz 1985: 455 in Mackey 66) that metonymically represent the minority cultures in Canada, reduced to exotic alternatives to the official English and French norms. After her death, Annie’s apparition describes once again her neighbourhood, anticipating its future. Her point of view subtly re-affirms its multiethnic character and also raises the issue of the gradual assimilation of second-generation Canadians into the Anglo-
Saxon standard, symbolized by the children’s sport of choice: “for years and years to come, [Italian] Joe will sit on his porch, the Sikh men will deliver flyers to our door every Sunday and the kids will play road hockey” (Thompson 1997: 39, my italics). What is only suggested in the setting becomes much clearer in the play’s plot and dramatis personae.

*Sled*’s characters evoke a history of colonial settlement, inter-ethnic marriages, and immigration, paralleled by the state’s continuous struggle to implement a common meta-narrative and a definition of the nation. They have mixed ancestries and still recall their Old World roots, albeit preserving their non-Canadian heritage on different levels. In other words, echoing Bhabha’s definition of colonial doubleness, they are then less than one [Canadian] and double. Thompson uses languages as metonymies of the forgotten, denied, or simply declined second identities of Canadians, employing in fact what I identified in my first chapter as metonymies of absence. In *Sled*, all characters use another language in addition to English or at least reveal through their accents a different mother tongue, like Volker, the German proprietor of Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge (Thompson 1996: 16). At the same time, however, they are torn between the colonial and the post-colonial definitions of the Canadian nation, i.e. between the conflicting assimilationist and multicultural policies. Thus, they are ethnically and culturally marked in comparison to the official Anglo-Saxon Canadian norm, which Mackey identifies as the disguised colonial feature of multicultural policies and of “pluralism as a narrative of nationhood” (94). Consequently, *Sled*’s characters are at the stage when colonial doubleness has evolved into post-colonial multiplicity and has aggravated the inherited identity crisis.

Whereas in the final draft the political argument was toned down, during the workshop stage the play contained more open debates. The “Barbeque Dream” scene, as
Thompson calls one of the discarded parts, debates ethnic issues and Canadian policies and most clearly expresses the characters’ identity crises and state of imagined exile. Although it was cut from the final production and printed drafts, the scene was published in *Canadian Theatre Review*, Winter 1996, Issue 89, “from the manuscript entitled Last Things, dated November 1995, which was the basis of the Tarragon’s script development workshop in December 1995 - January 1996” (Knowles, “Great lines”). In her 1996 interview with Jennifer Fletcher, Thompson states that this scene represents “the politics of the play” (Fletcher). Furthermore, she mentions that when she sends out the play, she attaches a copy of the scene, as a way of “summarizing what I think the play is about” (Fletcher). I believe that the playwright’s testimony, combined with the scene’s public accessibility, allows me to comment on it briefly, although it is not included in the printed edition of *Sled*. The scene is an overt re-enactment of Canadians’ identity crisis, as it metonymically represents the so-called multicultural *mosaic*. The identity crisis is overtly depicted from the perspective of several ethnic groups, including the descendants of English and French settlers, First Nations people, Metis, and immigrants of other European origins. Each of them shows different definitions of the country and conflicting expectations.

In terms of plot, the “Barbeque Dream” scene enacts Jack’s nightmare after Annie’s death and depicts a “Welcome Neighbours” party where more characters take part than eventually remained in the final version, including Jase, Annie’s son; Carl, Joe’s son; and some other neighbours. All but Kevin enjoy Annie and Jack’s barbeque party and “toast...to the neighbourhood” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). The neighbourly discussion slowly becomes political. Some accuse and others praise the multicultural policy and the mingling of races and ethnicities. However, all of them gradually reveal that they are “yearning for a sense of
home, angrily laying blame for the unfortunate aspects of their histories” (Walker 408) and revert to the languages of their ancestors. Annie explicitly states that she does not regard English as her “natural language” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”) and starts speaking in Gaelic. Sam, the son of a rabbi from Vienna, speaks in Hebrew; Quebecois Helen speaks in French and chants “Vive le Quebec libre” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”); Metis Evangeline speaks half in English, half in Cree; Carl in Italian; Kevin in Norse; even Jack recalls other-than-English and French roots and, according to the stage directions, speaks in “whatever language is appropriate for the actor” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). Kevin ruins the party through his aggressive behaviour, heightened by his terrorist-like “black balaclava” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”), echoing his real-life disruptive attitude and criminal acts. As Annie perceives his threat and Jack tries to pull off his mask to reveal his identity, the dream ends on a note of alienation, lack of communication, and fear, emphasizing the characters and communities’ internal conflicts.

More than in Sled’s printed version, in the “Barbeque Dream” scene, the fears and xenophobic complaints closely recall some of the opinions and points of view Mackey encountered in her 1992 field research and reveal the unofficial face of multiculturalism. Where real-life Marcia bursts out angrily, “Do you know that you can get multicultural funding for absolutely every nationality except Canadian? Canadian-Canadian?” (Mackey 194), fictional Helen deplores the loss of the English-French language and ethnic dominance: “You’re pretending you don’t mind thousands of other languages, coming in, taking over. Crushing us…” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). Similarly, English Sam accuses “the whole pretence at bilingualism,” and wonders “how much did that cost” although he also states that Quebec is “what separates us from America” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”).
Although the “Barbeque Dream” scene was cut, the same political agenda is apparent in the final version of Sled. The characters’ identity crises carry the plot and reveal the hidden face of a seemingly harmonious multicultural community from Toronto.

Paradoxically, the ethnically marked Canadians, such as Joe and his family, appear to cope better with their multiple identities, while their second and third-generation actively strive to accept the multiethnic character of their new nation. In contrast, Sled’s Canadian-Canadians, as Mackey’s anonymous interviewees and others call them, experience powerful identity crises. Annie’s inner conflict is rooted in her need to reconnect with her 18th-century Irish roots; Jack’s inferiority complexes and violent behaviour are explained through the bullying he suffered as a teenager because of his double French-English culture; Evangeline’s alienation is presented as the consequence of her ignorance of her Aboriginal heritage. The search for roots takes place on the conscious level for Annie, and the unconscious one for Evangeline who did not know her Aboriginal father and Kevin who cannot remember his biological parents. All of them, however, feel out of place, uprooted, and lost, and unconsciously search for ways to re-define themselves. From this perspective, Sled echoes Canadian settlers’ endless and often unsuccessful search for home in their North American habitat. I will briefly explore some of these identity-searching processes, starting with Annie, whose unusual inner journey reflects the conflict among several perceptions of the self. She experiences the contradictions between Canada’s colonial and post-colonial definitions of its national identity and is actively drawn towards the land’s Aboriginal spirituality. Moreover, in spite of being a sixth-generation Canadian, Annie is unable to acknowledge her Canadian identity and to recall this country and English language as genuinely hers. Searching for a resolution, Annie attempts to reconnect to the European identity of her ancestors. Her
yearning for her Old World home reiterates, at the end of the twentieth century, the similar feelings of many early nineteenth century settlers and even of some native-born Canadians, which Plant identifies as dominant in the literary production of the century and describes as a manifestation of the “in-bred, ever-present desire to return ‘home’ to the land of his ‘parents’” (65). Annie’s song, “Oh heavenly time of day” (Thompson Sled:13-4), opens the play, inscribing it under the sign of the search for home and a less conflicted national identity. In it, Annie invokes Maeve O’Hara, born 1791, “my mother’s mother’s mother’s mother’s motherrrr” (ibid. 14). As an unconscious though transparent result of acculturation and territorial nationalism, the white, Anglo-Saxon, Canadian-born woman relies on First Nations beliefs to find comfort. Surprisingly, she imagines her Irish ancestor as one of the stars representing the dead people’s spirits, according to the Iroquois belief. A short time after, during her fatal walk through the woods, Annie voices once again her nostalgia for a lost European heritage she never knew, sings in Gaelic, and describes her vision of Maeve, surviving the disastrous trip over the ocean on her way to Canada (ibid. 30). As we find out later in the flashbacks of her discussions with Jack, she has in fact an obsessive desire to trace her family’s roots, go back to Ireland to “look at the graves” and “hear my natural language” (ibid. 87, my italics). Jack ridicules Annie’s yearning, explaining that she shares it with “about three hundred thousand American tourists a year” (ibid. 87), who go there for the same reason. He also points out that, six generations after Maeve’s emigration, upon her hypothetical return to Ireland, she would be nothing else than a foreigner: “They hate you over there. They have no interest in you whatsoever. They don’t see you as family, they see you as American” (ibid. 87). In spite of his sarcastic tone, his comments remind us that this type of identity crisis, of course, at different levels of intensity, might be common in both
former North American colonies. Furthermore, Jack’s point of view suggests another possible aspect of Canadians’ identity crisis – their common perception as Americans, which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.

As she is denied the chance to reconnect to her ancestral roots, Annie metaphorically searches in the mythical Canadian North for other ways to feel a part of a national community. From an anthropological perspective, her attempt can be considered representative of the conflict between ethnic nationalism, which most likely defined her European ancestors, and territorial nationalism, which defines Canada as a former colony. According to Allan Smith, when the nation is “conceived of as a territorial patria” it becomes legitimate to appropriate the culture of “earlier civilizations in the same place” (1991: 117) to define the colonial/post-colonial nation which lacks myths and an ancestral history of its own. Pursuing this line of argument, which I consider appropriate given Thompson’s open political agenda, Kevin’s senseless murder and Annie’s lack of peace after her death might be perceived as a symbolic way of rendering this aspect of territorial nationalism impossible. Although they might be fascinated by the Aboriginal myths, white Canadians cannot integrate them into their definitions of self. In contrast, half-Cree Evangeline finds redemption and final peace in the woods, paradoxically guided by Annie’s ghost, while indirectly determining Kevin’s death by exposure at the end of the play. Thompson, however, attempts to anchor the play’s symbolism in reality. In addition to her feeling different from the white people among whom she grew up (Thompson 1997: 84) and being subconsciously drawn towards her father’s culture, Evangeline actively pursues her second national identity. After discovering that she is the natural daughter of a Cree man, Evangeline starts studying their culture: “I studied the stars. The stars and some Cree Songs,
a few phrases. I got books from the library” (Thompson 1997: 100). In spite of the short period in which she has the consciousness of her Aboriginal inheritance, Cree beliefs appear to suit Evangeline’s spiritual needs better. After killing Jack, for example, she does not resort to her mother’s Christian rituals. Longing for redemption, Evangeline sings “a Cree song of lamentation over Jack’s body” (102), and takes refuge in the mythical Northern wilderness, talking to Annie, the name she gives to her unborn daughter, in Cree, promising that she will always watch over her from the sky: “you will see me, in the North Star, because, the North Star, in Cree: ‘kewe tinok atchak,” is always there in the sky, Annie, and guides us” (Thompson 1997: 106).

In addition to the long-term consequences of colonization on both European settlers and First Nations people, Thompson also addresses the relationship between English and French Canadians and the identity crises of some of their common descendants. With an Anglophone father and a Francophone mother, Jack grew up nurtured by both cultures, going to an English school, but speaking French at home with his grandmother, and attending the Catholic service every Sunday. When he was nine years old, however, he was bullied at school for his French culture and habits, and expressed his frustration violently. Interestingly, Thompson once again uses food and language as the most obvious markers of one’s national identity: “I put holes in the walls with my fists. I wouldn’t talk French wouldn’t eat French, if my mother put tortière and sugar pie on the table I would throw ‘em on the floor, “You stupid bitch, I want a hamburger and a fuckin’ popsicle, not this frog shit” (Thompson 1997: 42). As an adult, Jack is consistent in his denial of his maternal heritage and, in fact, of his doubleness as a Canadian with mixed cultural ancestry. Although he is still able to speak French, he strongly asserts himself as belonging to the Anglophone majority. From his
perspective, the role of heritage and ethnicity is denied and one’s will to nationhood is the most important element in the self-identifying process:

I have absolutely no desire ever to visit France, or even Quebec. Just because my name is Prevost? And my grandfather grew up in Rimouski? I have nothing to do with those people. Oh tabernaque, je me souviens je suis tres fuckin’ triste and pissed off that Wolfe il triumph de Montcalm on the fuckin’ Plains of Abraham and je suis triste vive le Quebec libre vive le Quebec libre that was my ancestors, on both sides, two generations ago, but that is not me do you ever see me watch the French station?

No! No! I am this now, THIS. (Thompson 1997: 88, original italics and capital letters)

In the “Barbeque dream” scene, he presents an even more aggressive attitude. As a Canadian-Canadian, he feels entitled to employ a historical perspective and deplores the failure of the Canadian dream: “Fathers of confederation are pissed, man. Bloor and Bathurst, they did not imagine. Jane and Finch they could not conceive. Sir John A. is turning in his grave” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). From the same point of view, Jack perpetuates the colonial ideal of a homogenous Canadian nation, whose new members must forgo their ethnic roots: “Who cares what we come from. We’re Canadian now, Canadian, and we must walk forward” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). In her field research, Mackey notes that one of her subjects exhibits the same attitude, projecting her denial of ethnic status on to immigrants: “If I came to this country to make it my country, and I took citizenship, I’d like someone to say to me, ‘It doesn’t matter that you originated from China or Japan, you are now a Canadian’” (Mackey 104). Once again, Sled appears as an accurate re-enactment of some Canadians’ beliefs. In Jack’s case, the denial of his maternal cultural inheritance and
the mockery of Annie’s genuine identity concerns simultaneously express and aggravate his own inner conflict, as his inferiority complexes and his violent behaviour as a policeman, husband, and lover prove.

Another conflicted Canadian-Canadian character is Kevin, whose alienation and violence are motivated not only through the severance of his links to his mythical ancestors, but also to his birth parents: “Nothing’s been right since she [the kidnapper] took me away from you, my whole life, nothing” (Thompson 1997: 64). Like Jack, he also covers his denial with violent acts. Whereas Jack’s doubleness evoked the conflicted relationships between French and English-Canadians, Kevin could be considered an allegoric representative of the colonizers’ relationship to First Nations people. From this perspective, the incestuous relation he forces his half Cree sister into symbolically recalls the portrayal of rape on stage in plays by First Nations women, such as Monique Mojica and Marie Clements, which Knowles discusses in his “The Hearts of Its Women” article (Knowles 2003: 245-264). Although Thompson does not specify any non-English ancestry in Kevin’s case, he suddenly starts speaking in Norse right before he kills Annie (Thompson 1997: 33), like he does in “The Barbeque Dream” scene. In the context of Sled’s symbolism, his use of an ancient language might suggest long-forgotten European roots, like any of the white North Americans would naturally have. In contrast, more recent immigrants consciously acknowledge their double if not multiple ethnicities and the coping strategies they need to employ.

The identity crisis and subsequently the state of imagined exile are most apparent in Sled’s depiction of a multi-generational Italian-Canadian family. The raisonneur of the play “who carries all the history of his multicultural neighbourhood in his memory” (Walker 407),
Joe drifts in and out of the main plot line, with only a few direct interactions with other characters. His stories open and subsequently structure the play, evoking various episodes from his family’s Canadian life. If multiculturalism has made this process at least less obvious, as Joe explains, denying one’s birth national identity and replacing it with an acquired one was mandatory for the immigrants trying to adapt to their new country in the first half of the twentieth century: “You have to bury all that. Once you’re here. In Canada” (Thompson 1997: 55). For his father, who arrived in Toronto at the beginning of the 20th century, this also meant physically burying his gun in order to avoid deportation, as a fellow Italian immigrant had advised him: “He tells him if the cops catch you with a gun, you’re on the next boat back” (ibid 55). In the play’s symbolism, the buried weapon is another metonymy of absence, standing for his denied ethnicity. The incident that led to his death is also described in ethnic terms. As Joe remembers, his father and uncle were planning “to scare some Irish fellows that were botherin’ them at all hours, askin’ for whores and for whisky” (Thompson 1997: 49). To this end, they dig up the weapon from under the “mother’s climbing yellow roses” (ibid 49), a symbol of their new home in Canada, which they now ruin. Accidentally, the gun goes off while his uncle is cleaning it in the kitchen, in front of the entire family: “I saw my father killed by his own brother. Shot through the heart” (ibid 49).

Joe’s father can, thus, be considered the victim of his desire to retrieve his Italian identity and of inter-ethnic conflicts. In addition to the ethnic stores and restaurants, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the coexistence of Other definitions of the national identity, which compete with the new Canadian allegiance, has been formally represented in the urban landscape. Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, ethnic
neighbourhoods like “Little Italys, Little Portugals, Little Budapests, and Little Jerusalems (Conrad 364) have been established and become common after the Second World War in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Proof of today’s multiculturalism, they are still marked on maps not only in Canada but also in the U.S. and even in European countries, which host compact communities of immigrants. While they are now usually famous for their exotic food and merchandise, at the middle of the twentieth century they represented the division of the city along ethnic inner borders, with strong significance for the respective communities. In the “Barbeque Dream” scene, Carl, Joe’s son, recalls how the relationships between neighbourhoods mimicked those between states: “When I was young you couldn't go into any other neighbourhood, other than your own. […] Like, if I was sittin’ here, and my brother and I seen two Irish men walkin up the street, we'd say ‘what in hell are you doing on our street, get the hell off it,’ and we’d be on the phone to our friends and before you knew it there’d be a fight” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). Carl also notes, however, that multicultural policies have gradually blurred the city’s inner borders and transformed Toronto into a city on whose streets all languages but English can sometimes be heard and everybody’s Otherness has become the shared identity marker. In other words, he acknowledges the city as a site of imagined exile, as I will attempt to prove in the next section of this chapter.

To return to Joe, let me note that although he was born in Canada, he still faces problems of identity and struggles to be accepted. Like in the case of the other characters, his conflicted relationships to his ancestors’ mother tongue, on one hand, and to English, on the other hand, reveal the denial of his sense of Otherness. As Allan Smith, among many others, notes, second and third-generation Canadians deny the relationships with their ancestors’ home countries and regard the Old World culture “as something to be brought out and dusted
off, rather self-consciously, on special national occasions” (Allan Smith 130). As Mackey concludes in the study I already mentioned, this attitude might be understood as one of the long-term results of both assimilationist and multicultural policies, according to which minority cultures are only accepted as exotic fragments of the national culture. From the official perspective, “acceptable cultural diversity must buttress the project of nation-building and national unity in Canada” (Mackey 66). Growing up, Joe experiences the transition from overt colonialism and assimilationist policies to post-colonialism and multicultural policies. Accordingly, he has the natural tendency to regard his parents’ “land of exile” as his and his children’s “land of adoption,” and therefore renounces his Old World ethnic identity and mother tongue: “I don’t read Italian and I don’t write Italian. But I can speak it. Pretty well. I grew up speakin’ it. To my mother. To the fella who ran this store. To a couple of neighbours. To everyone else, I spoke English.” (Thompson 1996: 55). The hybridization of languages, and implicitly cultures, is still apparent in his generation, “I speak Italian when I get together with my brothers and sisters, you know, a mix of Italian and Canadian” (Thompson 1997: 55, my italics). The third generation, however, appears to deny completely their European origin: “My children, they don’t speak it [Italian] at all” (ibid.). In contrast to Joe’s apparent indifference, the play’s overall message suggests the tragic consequences of the loss of one’s cultural inheritance and national identity on individuals and families. Thompson clearly reasserts civic nationalism as characteristic of the Canadian people but also emphasizes the role of cultural heritage, mother tongues, and shared social values as complementary to the collective will to nationhood in the self-defining process. Sled echoes post-colonial perspectives and deconstructs the belief that a “Canadian way of life” does not exist, and that any resident, “French, Irish, Ukrainian or
Eskimo, can be a subject of the Queen and a citizen of Canada without in any way changing or ceasing to be himself” (Morton 85). To anticipate in Thompson’s spirit, I could imagine members of the sixth generation of Joe’s family struggling with an inherited identity crisis and dreaming of Italy in the same way in which Annie was dreaming of Ireland.

4.4. The Romanian Delinquent Imaginary

As depicted in *The Future*, post-communist Romanians still exhibit some if not all of the traditional flaws and inferiority complexes commented on since the first written records of the nation by foreign travellers and chroniclers. They continuously struggle to deceive and take advantage of each other, deny moral values, and complain of historical unfairness. In addition, they also show some of the recognizable features of the “new man”, the result of the social engineering programs implemented by the communist regime in most of the countries in the former Eastern Block.

While *Sled* interrogates the identity crisis as a result of both colonial and post-colonial policies, *The Future* focuses on the Romanian transition to democracy and a market economy and seems to ignore the past. The consequences of communist policies and of Ceausescu’s dictatorship are, however, deeply ingrained in the characters’ sense of self and in the relationships between individuals as members of various types of collectives, from the family to the national levels. Zografi’s play mirrors the image of a national collective, which has inherited an acute state of identity crisis from the previous regime, acknowledged in several studies of the communist period (Verdery 1996: 83-97, Mungiu-Pippidi 1995: 131-3; Pralong 229-31). The “average Romanian” is portrayed as a remnant of the “new man,” “homo sovieticus” or “homo communistus,” whom Ceausescu’s dictatorial regime strived to
create until the end of his dictatorship, still emulating in the late 1980s the Soviet social strategies that predated Stalin’s death. As I explained in Chapter 1, this type of citizen was defined by an alienating duplicity. One on hand, he/she expected the state/Communist Party to take care of his/her basic needs. On the other hand, individuals rebelled against the patriarchal authority of the Communist Party and state, not through public actions, but rather through political innuendos, small talk around the dinner table, and most of all through the rather widespread attempt to cheat the system, steal from a state perceived as an abstraction and a common enemy, while paradoxically despising each other and the country they were born in. These social habits and collective mentalities came under attack during the post-communist transitions, as the examples I gave in Chapter 1 proved, and many people found themselves in the situation in which they needed to change their behaviour but did not know how. From this perspective, The Future concomitantly documents the persistence of communist mentalities and cynically indicts the Romanians’ long acknowledged collective flaws.

The Western assessment of the post-communist nation is mainly carried on by the Swiss/Evil TV producers, who are assigned the role to comment upon the moral and economic contradictions. In addition, The Future employs a self-reflective style, which is consistent with Romanians’ open, though useless awareness and self-mockery. All of the play’s Romanian characters undergo identity crises of which they are paradoxically aware but cannot explain or resolve. Whereas Thompson eventually cuts the more explicit “Barbeque Dream” scene and chooses to “show, not tell” (Fletcher) how state policies affect the individual and collective self-definitions, Zografi includes in his play several transparent allusions to some of the contemporary theories in nationalism, history, social and political
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sciences, which are debated in Romania and internationally. I believe this meta-theatrical character of *The Future’s* representation of identity crisis is a very special characteristic of the play and it deserves further analysis.

The beginning of the play simultaneously asserts and denies a national identity crisis, although it does not elaborate on its sources and forms of manifestation. During the ad-hoc public meeting, the Speakers’ statements range from declaring a mystic compassion for “our God-blessed country [that is] cursed by the rest of the world” (7) to the firm indictment of “an economic, political, social crisis. But, most of all, a moral crisis” (Zografi 7) that is affecting Romania. While Thompson re-enacts the collective crisis and denial metonymically, Zografi employs a local form of collective meta-denial, easily traceable in Romanian satire starting from the nineteenth century onward and particularly in Caragiale’s works. According to Eviatar Zerubavel, as I stated in my first chapter, collective denial implies “deliberate avoidance, since otherwise it would be quite impossible not to notice it. Indeed, to ignore an elephant is to ignore the obvious” (33). A secondary level is, however, implicit in this collective phenomenon, which he calls “the denial of denial,” arguing that “the silence itself is never actually discussed among the conspirators. […] A perfect example of such silence about silence, or meta-silence, is the secrecy typically surrounding secrets” (Zerubavel 53). In contrast, the Romanian style of meta-denial is a paradoxical and loud public acknowledgement that defeats in advance any attempt to uncover and accept a hidden truth. In other words, the truth is always in the open and no one cares about it. At the beginning of *The Future* and consistently throughout the play, the impossibility of having a collective identity crisis is ironically proven:

SECOND SPEAKER: If we had an identity, then we’d talk about our identity crisis
FIRST SPEAKER: But we talk so much about our identity!
SECOND SPEAKER: Lack of self-awareness! Listen to me, if, by chance, we’d produce pineapple, there would be a huge pineapple crisis. But pineapple trees don’t grow here. (Zografi 8).

This cynical assessment is immediately indicted as meta-denial and political propaganda. Cezar paradoxically accuses the Second Speaker of being a closeted nationalist, who has painted his bedroom in the colours of the national flag, and the First Speaker of being nothing less than a “spy. Even more, a foreigner” (Zografi 9). Placed at the beginning, this short scene establishes the tone of the play and the socio-political context. On one hand, Cezar’s assumptions embody the residual fear of foreigners nurtured during communism (Mungiu 1995: 146-8). On the other hand, they express the common perception of nationalism as the politicians’ strategy to masquerade personal interests as collective ideals. Both features are widely discussed in the analyses of Romanian post-communism. In one of her anthropological studies, Verdery, for example, comments on the frequency of the equation “nationalism equals Securitate plus Communists” (1996: 90) in the media, political, and popular discourses. She argues that the newly founded political parties capitalize on the people’s fears inherited from the previous regime. In search of political legitimacy, they designate their opponents as “communists” and “securisti” [secret police agents], while presenting themselves as “the true defender[s] of an anti-Communist national interest” (Verdery 1996: 90). Verdery, however, uncovers a second layer to these common insults. She explains that what might first appear as only an election strategy actually reflects the reality that in the 1990s most of Romania’s communist elite was indeed struggling to
preserve their privileges. Thus, they actually were former members of the RCP, who abruptly changed their political allegiances. Cezar, and implicitly the playwright, shares this point of view, and explains that the Second Speaker’s public denial of the collective identity crisis is in fact a political stratagem meant to drive his listeners’ attention away from the country’s bad situation, using the previous regime’s belief that what is officially ignored ceases to exist. This is in fact consistent with the play’s overall message, launched from its very first scene: in spite of what officials believe or only want people to believe, post-communist Romania undergoes an identity crisis, which impacts not only on individuals, but also on the national community itself.

The beginning of Act 2 re-affirms this perspective and the play’s intertextuality. First Speaker and Second Speaker express their opinions on issues concerning the nation and its identity, but this time they chat alone, while playing chess. First Speaker parodies Eric Hobsbawm (*The Invention of Tradition*) and others’ views of invented traditions, reviewed in my first chapter, and denies the existence of national identities: “If you read history books among the lines… […] You immediately discover that the past is an invention […] and we are wallowing in illusions: that we have an identity, that we have a destiny” (Zografi 47). In response, Second Speaker mockingly paraphrases the definition of collective denial and praises it as the actual solution to the crisis. From his perspective, a coffin, a symbol of the dreadful state of the country and an actual element of the set on which First Speaker and Second Speaker play chess, replaces the “elephant,” which is to be ignored in Zerubavel’s definition: “Any crisis is bearable if you don’t think of it. […] That’s the secret of a great civilization: to pretend. Not to see the coffin. The coffin is in the middle of the room and you don’t care” (Zografi 47). The discussion continues on the same note and leads to the
conclusion that Romania’s own denial makes it a “great nation” (Zografi 48) of individuals who would always choose doing nothing over doing anything else but in a metaphysical way: “To stay still and do nothing. You look up at the ceiling. And beyond the ceiling at the sky. And beyond the sky. And beyond the beyond” (Zografi 48). The parody of the national character, most likely obvious for the audience members and readers who know Romanian folklore and popular culture, deepens when the two Speakers take off their disguises and reveal that they are in fact Aldo and Willy, two of the Devils/Swiss TV crew members who claim to “really like it here” (Zografi 49).

However, Zografi not only mocks the Romanian identity but generally the postmodern idea of national identity as well. Echoing Anderson’s definition of the imagined community, the Statistic Man candidly states that you could not have a real interest in the lives of millions of unknown people “who sleep in the same city with you” and of “the tens of millions of people who speak the same language as you” (25-6). Consequently, according to him, any attempt to imagine one’s national community will fail, as everything that one can see from a distance is only “a splash of colour” (26). Although Willy and Aldo claim Romanians do not have an identity and, thus, cannot experience an identity crisis, Rougier seems to acknowledge and deplore it on a serious note. Self-victimization is often described as characteristic of several East European peoples, including the Polish, Hungarian, Czechs, and Romanians: “Across the region, local historiographies represented the nation as an innocent victim, victimized always by other nations” (Verdery 1996: 96). Following past conflicts with historical empires, including the Ottoman, the Habsburg, the Russian ones, communism was perceived as “the latest in a long series of victimization by other nations” (Verdery 1996: 96). In addition to the political and social consequences, communization also
deepened self-victimization at the individual level through the “frustrated and discouraging lives” (Verdery 1996: 96) it forced people into. From a Western external point of view, validated by his Swiss residency, Rougier notices the persistence of the victim mentality doubled by people’s alienation in relationship to each other, commonly acknowledged in the analyses of Romanian post-communist society (Pralong 230). From a Romanian internal perspective, Bistran paradoxically agrees with his comments, exhibiting the well-known self-mockery:

ROUGIER: Since I landed, I discovered three things. First: you all behave as if the end of the world is tomorrow. Second: you all believe that you have a unique disease and no one understands. And third: you’re all unable to love each other. BISTRAN (laughing): That’s correct. You got it right, Mr. Rougier, we don’t love each other. (15, my italics)

From a foreign point of view, the Devils’ description of Romania surprisingly mirrors the documented portrayals of the country shortly after the fall of communism, “when chaos replaced dictatorship” (Betea 65). When Rougier asks his assistants for their first impressions, they enthusiastically describe a country where the infrastructure is ruined and people lack any kind of morality and faith. In other words, a “hell on Earth,” where They feel at home:

ROUGIER: Do you like it? […]
WILLY: It’s nice. It’s wretched.
ALDO: Everything is upside down.
WILLY: Trains are paralysed, the roads are only lines of potholes, the telephones are sick…
ALDO: There’s no running water, houses crumble, plains crash…

ROUGIER: Yeah… And people?

WILLY (cheerful): Everybody steals everything that can be stolen, is ready to lie and cheat anybody. […]

ALDO: No one believes in anything. (20)

This economic and moral decay is usually explained as the result of the bankrupt socialist economy and the attitude towards work developed during Ceausescu’s dictatorship, when the state’s sole management inhibited personal initiative and led towards the concept that everything could be carelessly wasted. Consequently, “[a]ll adult citizens able to work had jobs – most of them performing meaningless tasks –, in which, after long breaks, they pretended to be working, the lack of personal initiative being a characteristic of “the new [communist] man” (Betea 65). A paradoxical “cult of nonwork” gradually formed, while stealing from an abstract state, perceived as the collective enemy, was actually deemed acceptable (Verdery 1996: 23, 27). During the first post-communist decades, the market economy principles and Western self-defining strategies were disseminated by the government and official institutions and embraced by young people and a small intellectual elite. When the average net income decreased by half, $162U.S. in 1990 and $87.5U.S. in 2000, (Betea 129), the impoverished masses of citizens with little or no political and economical education reverted to the rejection of capitalism that communism had taught them. Thus, the general poverty was blamed on private entrepreneurs, traditionally associated with dishonesty. Zografi ironically echoes this new form of self-victimization in relationship to one’s fellow citizens and ironically cites one of the most popular complaints, “The country is full of crooks!” (Zografi 65). At the same time, however, Romanians attempt to perpetuate
the survival strategies acquired during Ceausescu’s regime only to discover that “what it had once been unquestionably accepted as the physical and psychological definitions of its collective self are no longer acceptable under new historic conditions” (Pye 1971: 110-111).

_The Future_ re-enacts this state of things. Not surprisingly, the employees of The Ecumenical Philanthropy are always chatting and entertaining their Swiss guests, while the only characters who are actually working are thieves and professional beggars, collectively praised as “the only lucid people” in the country (Zografi 41). Consistently, in the play’s first scene, two unnamed thieves, First Thief and Second Thief, steal the audiences’ wallets during the public meeting, only to discover in them plenty of business cards, national identification cards, and even a passport, but no money. As he glances over the official pictures, First Thief expresses his disappointment: “Look at their faces. […] Screw-ups! A shame for our species!” (Zografi 11). As I already mentioned, the Devils share his grim perception of Romanians. Moreover, they also make it clear that, in their view, thieves are generally representative of their fellow citizens. Towards the end of the play, Willy and Aldo meet the two thieves on the street, search them pretending to be policemen, find the stolen identification cards, and jokingly claim that all of them belong to the two men:

WILLY: How many people are the two of you?

ALDO: The entire people. (_They spread the identifications cards on the ground and look at them delighted._) […]


According to the reviewers, this view of Romanians was further emphasized in the 2002 production at the Little Theatre in Bucharest. The show started in the house, among the spectators who in this way were integrated into “the circle of evil and chaos,” while a
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tragicomic though authentic folk song, a *bocet* [lament], expresses grief for “a country of idiots and thieves” (Michailov 2002). In the play, Vera re-affirms the same belief that Romanians are appalling individuals, who share dreadful traits, most of which were developed or at least aggravated during communism. When Rougier and his team are late for a meeting at the foundation, she cynically explains their lack of punctuality through their ethnicity. In her view, they lose the appearance of superiority adoptive Switzerland has given them and reveal their true nature:

BISTRAN. Where are they? They had to be here an hour ago! Swiss precision!

VERA. Swiss? They’re *Romanians like us!* (Zografi 55, my italics)

Eventually, Zografi questions the essence of the nation itself. When Bistran worries about the authenticity of the material they are recording, Aldo laughs at him:

BISTRAN: Are the beggars authentic?

ALDO: As authentic as *all Romanians!* (Zografi 15, my italics)

Aldo’s remark cynically signals the persistence in the collective identity of the doubleness developed during communism. In her anthropological study of socialism, Verdery explains the paradoxical nature of this phenomenon: “Self-actualization in socialist Romania seems to me, rather, to have been much more situationally determined than North Americans⁵ find acceptable, such that people could say one thing in one context and another in another context and not be judged deceitful or forgetful or mad” (1996: 96). Once again, what began as a survival strategy during communism has become a collective flaw during post-communism, yet again confirming Pye’s perspective on the mechanisms of collective identity crisis. Interestingly, the new Western perspective is not only enforced by the state at the pedagogical level but also employed by the young generations at the performative one. In
real-life, Mungiu records the students’ opinions that “Romanians are lazy,” unreliable, and they lie all the time (Mungiu-Pippidi 1995: 131-3). In The Future, the Devils’ Western point of view as Swiss residents, which I already discussed, is paralleled by the young Romanians’ perspective, who are more receptive to the new concepts and, thus, exasperated by the communist legacy. Whereas Vera only complains about it, David, the computer programmer, is more analytical and attempts to study it. Towards the end of the play, the two thieves who appear on and off throughout the play break into his office, and do not find anything valuable to steal. Thus, the First Thief resolves to take David’s big folders, which hold his conclusions on the nation’s “delinquent collective imaginary” (68). As he starts reading, the thief discovers that David’s report describes what will happen “with us. […] With this country. With the world” (77) and agrees with his point of view. He then concludes that the folders do not have any market value because, financially and metaphorically, “The future is garbage” (Zografi 77), the line which gives the play its title. Ultimately, Zografi expresses the Romanians’ fatalist acceptance of their own fate, nature, and inner conflicts. Stanica patiently advises his frustrated boss and, indirectly, the audience: “That’s how our people are, mister president, we can’t fire them all and replace them with others” (37).

Sled and The Future embody the individual and collective crises determined by the coexistence of competing definitions of the national identity. Less than one and multiple, as opposed to Bhabha’s “less than one and double” colonized subjects, post-colonial and post-communist individuals need to discover new strategies to re-invent themselves and their collectives. Imagined exile appears as a temporary but efficient way to regain the sense of belonging to a national community, albeit a community of alienated individuals.
4.5. The Continental and National Levels of Imagined Exile

In addition to reflecting various aspects of the identity crises, *Sled* and *The Future* also depict the transformation of the actual and/or inner exile into an imagined exile. More than the plays with historical subjects, which I discussed in the previous chapters, the re-enactment of the post-colonial and post-communist transitions in Canada and respectively Romania shows how the consciousness of a shared estrangement acts as a strong, though negative connector of the national community. Accordingly, it temporarily compensates for the absence of a common definition of national identity and of a shared will to nationhood, which usually define ethnic nationalism. The process that leads to this stage and its dramatic expressions take different forms, according to the specific conditions in each country and to the playwrights’ writing styles. In both *Sled* and *The Future*, however, inner exile articulates the re-enactment of individuals as part of communities. Not only are the people depicted as foreigners to themselves and to their fellow citizens, but the two countries themselves are also identified as the Other in an exile-within-exile format. In Thompson and respectively Zografi’s dramatic depictions, Canada’s relationship to the U.S. is comparable to Romania’s position in relation to Western Europe.

In theoretical and historical texts and also in the popular imagination, there is a recurrent perception of Canada as an American nation, “a province of the vast American ‘informal empire’” (McNaught 295), and sometimes even as a future nation of the U.S., which was “kept back by the British, fettered from adopting its true, North American nature” (Mathews 9). Among many others, Robin Mathews challenges this stereotype in his study, *Canadian Identity*. Talking about the Canadian perspective, he argues “the part of the Canadian psyche that sees itself as American, uses a very Canadian reading of what
American is” (Mathews 3). Talking about Americans, he notes their overt emphasis on their Northern neighbour’s alterity: “U.S. criticisms of Canada, looked at clearly, are criticisms of Canada’s failure to be the U.S.” (Mathews 107). From the perspective of this study, however, the interesting consequence of these positions is that both of them imagine the United States as the Other, in relationship to which Canada is perceived as an internal exile on the North American continent.

Indirectly, Thompson echoes these conflicting points in Sled, re-enacting the country from a post-colonial perspective. The assertion and denial of a specific national territory are consistently embedded in Annie and Joe’s stories and in details regarding the play’s setting. From a homogenizing, and in this case commercial perspective, Canada is assimilated into the continent, as the obnoxious neon sign of the Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge advertises it as the “Snowmobiling Mecca of North America!” (Thompson 1997: 29). In contrast, Annie explicitly acknowledges her presence there as being in “the middle of Northern Ontario” (Thompson 1997: 30) and regards her walk through the woods as one of the few Canadian things she has done: “I’ve never swam across Lake Ontario. I’ve never run across the 401. I’ve never driven across the frozen ice. But I am here” (Thompson 1997: 30). The play addresses several other stereotypes, including the “Canada as Nature” image (Rutherford 278), the role the mythical wilderness played in shaping “a distinct, a unique, a northern destiny” (Morton 4). Annie and Evangeline feel like reconnecting with the country’s mythical ancestors during their walk in the woods, while to Kevin the wilderness represents “the most beautiful place on this earth. From the Bering Strait to the Tundra there, it’s like nothing you’ve ever seen” (Thompson 1997: 52). However, after he taints the woods with his crimes, Kevin reverts to the stereotypical complaints about harsh Canadian winters: “I can’t
take the cold no more. I never felt such cold. This fuckin’ country” (Thompson 1997: 108).

In Joe’s stories, Canadians’ ambivalent attitude towards their country is further emphasized from the newcomers’ perspective. As he remembers, his Italian-born mother prayed to her new country as to a mythic mother-like figure able but unwilling to fulfill its parental duties. However, she did not address Canada, but a more generic America, as if she would assimilate the two North American countries, with the likely predominance of the U.S.: “‘America Bella! Si abandonare a me!’ That’s what she used to say whenever things were fallin’ apart. My mother. I don’t think she ever said the word ‘Canada.’ It was always ‘America.’ ‘America bella’” (Thompson 15). Joe echoes his mother’s cry, “America Bella! Si abandonare a me!” several times in the play as a reminder of his mother’s failed expectations and prejudices. This attitude could recall the stories of immigrants who settled in Canada because they did not obtain entry in the U.S., but also the integration of the two countries into a homogenizing North American stereotype, which still occurs today as a parallel to Orientalism. In Canadian drama, Verdercchia’s Fronteras Americanas, which I will discuss in the next chapter, also challenges this preconception from the perspective of South American immigrants. Thompson, however, only alludes to this conception a few times, using it as a general frame for her characters’ alienation.

While Canada is geographically situated on the North American continent but shadowed by its southern neighbour, the Balkans, including Romania, are also “part of Europe, although, admittedly, for the past several centuries its provincial part or periphery” (Todorova 17). As I explained in my Introduction, the region is commonly perceived as the backward and poor Other in relationship to the Western countries. This point of view, generally acknowledged as “Balkanization,” has become “one of the most powerful
pejorative designations in history, international relations, political science, and, nowadays, general intellectual discourse” (Todorova 7). Some theorists, including Balkan ones, consider the West countries’ colonial and neo-colonial attitudes towards the former overseas colonies as similar to their relationships to their continental neighbours. Accordingly, many of the studies of European national identities and power structures appropriate Said’s notion of Orientalism and regard Balkanism as its “structural variant” (11). From a similar perspective, The Future suggests the similarities between post-colonialism and Balkanism in the Western imaginary. Zografi makes Romania’s internal exile within Europe apparent from the Swiss/Devilish television crew’s perspective. Like several real-life Western journalists⁷, Rougier comes to Romania with the intent to observe and showcase its misery. His crew records the beggars, the crippled and the handicapped, the homeless and the orphans, the alcoholics and the mentally ill (15). The parallelism between Orientalism and Balkanism, colonialism and communization is further emphasized when the Swiss TV crew describes its work philosophy and research strategies:

ALDO: In the West, people need convincing images to fill in their imagination…

WILLY: Images are everything!

ALDO: The authentic!

WILLY: That’s why we desperately run through Africa, South America, Asia…

(Zografi 16)

At the end of the play, the Swiss TV producers are to be replaced by a team of Swedish journalists (Zografi 80), most likely promoting the same grim but marketable image of Romania as an uncivilized and amoral European Other. As depicted by Zografi, most of the Romanians, or at least most of its so-called elite - most likely members of the previous
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communist nomenklatura- enthusiastically and unanimously embraced this kind of propaganda, most likely for the sake of personal benefit. The Swiss TV crew is welcomed on all levels of the government and civil society:

ROUGIER (stands up): That’s it, guys. We have work to do. (Will and Aldo stand up instantaneously).

WILLY (apologizing): Everyone’s waiting for us: the government, the parliament, the TV stations, the radio stations…

ALDO: Plus four-five NGOs. (Zografi 17)

In spite of its black humour, Sci-Fi and magic characters, The Future proves once more its accurate depiction of the Romanian post-communist society. From a social perspective, this attitude suggests the persistence of communist mentalities, which regarded and exploited the people as an internally-colonized Other. An example of this kind of attitude, Bistran’s charity foundation, The Ecumenical Philanthropy, is a parody of the new type of non-governmental non-profit organizations that appeared shortly after 1989 in order to evade taxation and to use for personal gain the charity donations received from Western countries. According to Sandra Pralong in her article “NGOs and the Development of Civil Society,” there were approximately 16,000 to 17,000 associations and foundations officially registered in Romania in 2002 (232). Although there are no statistics available as to how many of them are fraudulent, Pralong gives worrisome examples of individuals having “as many as 20 NGOs registered in their name” (234). According to her, these “‘foundations,’ mostly staffed by local government officials, are mere fronts for thriving black-market business” (Pralong 234).
Similar to these real-life observations, Bistran and Stanica, the president and respectively the expert advisor, embezzle charity funds, report false donations, and cynically treat some of Romania’s internal exiles as marketable Others: “Don’t forget our only wealth is misery. We have to take advantage of it. […] Did you see those faggots with crooked mouths and swollen eyes? […] They’re our bread and butter!” (Zografi 17, 51). They exceed the expectation of the Swiss television crew and arrange meetings with administrators of several other social institutions, whose managers most likely prosper on Western charity donations:

BISTRAN: … When they arrived, they only knew of the children with AIDS… I also found a school for retarded children, a retirement house… We’re taken them to the nuthouse as well. What won’t we do for our country’s image! (Zografi 51)

While commercializing the pain of their patients, Bistran and Stanica paradoxically claim that they promote the “real image of the country,” as they “are Romanians and feel like Romanians” (Zografi 16). The country’s alienation and insulting image are not only accepted as natural but also promoted by its elite, as the only way to counteract the curse to belong to “a people of anonymous individuals, whom no one bothers to notice” (Zografi 30).

In both Sled and The Future, the Otherness of Canada and Romania from the U.S. and respectively Western Europe’s perspectives is mirrored by the citizens’ shared estrangement within the two countries. In addition to incriminating government initiatives and narratives of the nation, Thompson and Zografi also suggest how other public institutions designed to protect and support the population, such as the police and the Church, stop fulfilling their roles and sometimes even deepen the individuals’ estrangement. On the
other hand, both playwrights suggest people’s alienation within traditional collectives, such as the family, the working group, the neighbourhood, and the national community. The family, the neighbourhood, and the country itself gradually emerge as clusters of alienated individuals, who simultaneously accept and deny their belonging to any kind of collectives. *Sled* focuses on “the confusing multicultural reality of Canadian urban life” (Walker 409) and depicts “the way the Canadian nation can victimise internal ‘others’ on the basis of race, culture, gender or class” (Mackey 12) and, thus, transform alienation into one of their strongest common features. From this perspective, the identity crisis of the descendants of the first Europeans to come here, such as Annie, Jack, and some of the “Barbeque Dream” scene’s lost characters, and especially the stories of Joe and his Italian family illustrate the development of immigrants’ actual exile into the subsequent generations’ imagined exile.

The most compelling metaphor of alienation and, in my view, also an act of asserting imagined exile is the description of the cowherd walking through Toronto towards the slaughterhouse. Introduced in Joe’s first speech at the beginning of the play, this image inscribes the urban space as an area of general insecurity and foreshadows the death and violence that subsequently take place in the play: “The whole of what you see now of Clinton Street, wasn’t nothing’ but a cow path […] we’d come up here to the pastures and we’d watch as the cows walked down the cow path to the slaughterhouse, to become ground meat” (Thompson 15). The unknowing animals appear as the symbol of the individuals, who are walking towards their death, such as Annie, killed during her walk in the woods, and towards an alienating future, little Kevin, kidnapped by his babysitter, when she was supposedly going with him to a park. The parallelism is reinforced through Joe’s description of his two acts of watching. As a child, he “loved sittin’ on the fence and watchin’ all these cows
walkin’ down” (Thompson 1997: 15). As an adult, he is looking at people and perceives this as a paradoxical duty: “I got to watch the street. That is what I am here for” (ibid 15). He regards his act of witnessing and telling the story of what he watches as a way to unite the community and attest to its existence.

Joe’s awareness that many people and particularly many immigrants and children of immigrants undergo a similar alienating process confirms his consciousness of exile as a common feature of their new Canadian identity. The story of his religious conversion is one of the most relevant examples of his alienating duplicity, a source of his alienation. Instead of being a source of spiritual comfort, Sled depicts organized religion as a way of further segregating people and coercing newcomers to adapt to the Anglo-Saxon norm. According to regular standard policies, his fighting in the Second World War should have confirmed his belonging to the Canadian nation and citizenry. In contrast, when he returns home, Joe discovers himself rejected in the name of religious differences: “When the war was over I come back to Toronto. And Eatons, they got signs up everywhere ‘We want vets’. ‘Vets please apply’. Well I went down to apply, with a few of my buddies, other vets. […] They all get the job, right off. They were called the next day. I didn’t get any calls, nothing” (ibid. 94). After a friend warns him, “You’ll never get a job if you’re Catholic. Not in Toronto. Not in Ontario” (94), he decides to mimic the Anglo-Saxon majority and change his religion: “I told him [the priest] I wanted to change religions and he was very accommodating. He made me an Anglican. […] And I got the job the next day” (ibid. 94, my italics). Joe’s conversion points out once more the conflict between his desire to erase his Otherness and the impossibility of doing it on a deeper level: “to tell you the truth, although I was an Anglican, I was still a Catholic. You always are” (94). The acknowledgement of his spiritual
doubleness and the priest’s attitude, which gives the impression that this kind of request was frequent, assert the Anglican Church as an agent of assimilation and a site of imagined exile. In addition, his exclusion on religious criteria echoes the post-war worries about the possible effects of mass migration and the exacerbation of the attempt “to maintain British cultural hegemony” (Mackey 52), reflected by Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s 1947 speech, in which he overtly stated that Canadians “do not wish to make a fundamental alteration in the character of their population” (in Mackey 52).

Although the “Barbeque Dream” scene was cut from Sled’s printed version, I think it is worth mentioning once again in my analysis because it openly re-enacts what I qualify as a collective act of imagined exile. As Thompson’s characters confess to each other their alienation, their different perspectives represent some of the common ethnic types from second-generation Canadians to the descendants of the English and French so-called founding nations. Following the implementation of multicultural and new immigration policies, people born and raised in Toronto find themselves overwhelmed by the society’s new ethnic make-up and, as I showed, by the city’s new linguistic and physical appearances. In the name of his “unmarked, non-ethnic, and usually white, ‘Canadian-Canadian’ identity” (Mackey 20), Jack, for example, deplores the Balkanization of Toronto: “It’s like Istanbul. My family has been here five generations, I feel like a stranger. A foreigner. I was walkin by the Christie bus today and I looked and I listened and there was no English. It’s not my city anymore” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”). His resentments appear founded in “anti-immigrant and anti-multicultural sentiments” (Mackey 12) similar to those of some of the white Canadians Mackey encountered in her ethnographic research, who “construct themselves as victims of multiculturalism” (20). One of the interviewees openly pleads for the immigrants’ willing
and grateful assimilation, while another explains her perception of the Canadian mosaic as “a pile of rubble” (Mackey 105). Both Mackey’s subjects and Thompson’s characters that express these opinions speak in the name of a homogenous national community that they imagine are threatened by cultural differences (Mackey 104).

Alternatives to this attitude still exist. Three generations after his family settled in Canada, Carl also feels alienated by the disappearance of ethnic homogeneity, “This is not the country I grew up in” (Knowles, “Great Cuts”), but still employs the newcomer’s tolerance and perceives the changes as a positive development: “In most ways, it’s much better” (ibid.). Although also a descendant of early settlers, Annie has a similar point of view: “I think Toronto is a wonderful place to live. I love walking down the street and hearing fifteen different languages” (ibid., my italics). While these statements may be considered only proofs of some individuals’ personal estrangement, I argue that they also represent their authors’ active engagement in an act of imagined exile. Thompson’s characters discuss their feelings with their neighbours and, moreover, assume they talk in the name of everyone else.

Although open political commentary was avoided in the final draft of Sled, the few direct references to Canada re-assert imagined exile as one of the active links among its people. When Jack, for example, deplores Annie’s death, he projects his experience onto his fellow citizens whom he imagines as collectively betrayed by a state unable to protect them: “They [tourists at Pickerel and Jake Lake Lodge] think because they are in the woods, in their own country, and there is a warm fire back at the lodge, they are safe. They’re not safe” (Thompson 59, my italics). In his case, however, Thompson sarcastically indicts Jack as one of the state representatives responsible for perpetuating violence and fear. From the
beginning of the play, Kevin identifies Jack as an abusive policeman: “He’s a cop, man. I see it in the whites of his fuckin’ eyes. He’s one of those, that shoves ya up against the car and bangs your head over and over” (Thompson 1997: 25). Jack has his one-word response to Kevin’s accusations: “Diablo” (ibid 26), which he explains shortly after. Without knowing she is not there, he confesses to Annie his inappropriate behaviour as a policeman: “The local punks callin’ me ‘Diablo.’ What I did to those kids [Kevin and Michael] tonight and that thing with Pochinshky on Eglinton” (Thompson 1997: 41). His redemption comes too late, as Kevin has already killed Annie to take revenge on her husband. In her case, the perception of imagined exile evokes a feminist point of view, alluding to the victims of serial killers that went undiscovered for many years: “It happens in Canada all the time, a disappearing woman, nobody minds” (Thompson 1997: 105). Although not a central theme in *Sled*, the police appear to be one of the state’s institutions that not only fail the common citizens but also sometimes abuse them, therefore aggravating the estrangement. Given the more recent memories of official forms of abuse, the depiction of police plays a more important role in Zografi’s depiction of post-communist Romania, as I will show in the next section.

*The Future’s* re-enactment of imagined exile shares, however, many aspects with *Sled* although its causes are different in Romania. Diachronically, it is the result of the national identity crisis inherited from the communist period, which I already discussed. From this perspective, imagined exile compensates for the lost capacity to associate and cooperate willingly with each other (Pralong 230). Shared alienation and self-mockery act as unusual but efficient connectors. Romanians sympathise with each other in the name of their unavoidable bad character, widely mocked in local popular jokes and foreign travellers’ diaries and noted in collections of such texts, but also scientifically analyzed in a few
academic texts. Traditionally, inferiority complexes are doubled by self-indulgence and
Romanians are quick to excuse their lack of efficiency, this time in adapting to democracy
and a market economy. When the Devil himself is appalled by the country’s terrible
economic situation, Bistran and Stanica, the caricatures of the post-1989 entrepreneurs, adopt
a fatalist attitude and describe a national community of useless but relaxed individuals:

STANICA: You know how things are here, people talk, complain or make jokes.

But no one manages to put things in order…

BISTRAN: We move chaotically and never forward. (13)

From his Western and also non-human perspective, Rougier notices the same features
but concludes that their common flaws give Romanians the conscience of a nation: “It’s like
they’d been born in hell, and their intimate essence would faithfully copy it. […] They all are
one and the same being. There’s no other people so closely united” (Zografi 21). In the
Romanian post-communist context, Rougier’s statement reads as a parody of the communist
stereotypes and mentalities and, most of all, of Ceausescu’s obsessive references to “our
entire people” and its cheerful harmony. The long-claimed unity is finally reached but in the
name of evil, not of the general good. Paradoxically, public institutions, which are supposed
to support the communities and protect the people, implement the chaos and act as sites of
imagined exile.

The representatives of the Romanian civil society and government perpetuate the
abusive relationships between the people and its leaders that defined Romanian communism,
encouraged by the chaotic suspension of laws and the defiance of moral and spiritual values
that followed the 1989 Revolution. Some anthropologists such as Caroline Humphrey and
Katherine Verdery observe these phenomena in other post-communist countries, including
the former Soviet Union. In “‘Icebergs,’ Barter, and the Mafia in Provincial Russia,”
Humphrey describes the paradoxical transgressions towards feudal forms of organizations,
“suzerainties,” run by local self-appointed leaders in a mafia style. In this context, a power
and legislative void occurs: “It is impossible to rely on the law, or even to know what it is
these days; and at the same time government […] has ceased to be universally or even
generally obeyed” (in Todorova 1996:205). Consequently, policemen perpetuate the
strategies and abuses of Ceausescu’s internal affairs agents. Mimicking this type of
behaviour, Willy and Aldo, the devil’s helpers, pretend to be policemen. They stop people on
the street and search them, using the absurd but humiliating excuse that they talk and, thus,
they think (Zografi 54). Whereas this was just the devils’ game, the Thieves describe the
actual police forces’ attitude, confirming the close supervision and feudal-like behaviour:

FIRST THIEF: The streets are full of policemen who out of the blue ask for your

ID.

DAVID: They what?

SECOND THIEF: They don’t have anything better to do. They ask for our
documents and scorn us.

DAVID: Why?

SECOND THIEF: Because they’re bad people. I shouldn’t have to explain to you
how low they fell. (Zografi 69)

The First Thief’s inclusive “our” and “us” attest to his consciousness that policemen treat not
only him but also all of his fellow citizens in this way. He, thus, imagines an entire
community of abused people, degraded to a status similar to that of illegal aliens, in their
home country.
The depiction of common people’s relationship to the Church suggests another aspect of the bond achieved through shared alienation. Once again, Zografi uses a parodic perspective. On one hand, invoking God and Christian mercy appears only as a way to swindle public funds or beg professionally. On the other hand, several unlawful scenes take place in front or inside of a church, deeply conflicting with its traditional significance. Like in many other circumstances, people’s attitudes towards organized forms of religion have been significantly determined by the communist legacy. Several Romanian and international studies explore the Church’s status before and after 1989, analysing its strategies of survival, including the compromises made, and its oppression by a regime, which glorified itself as atheistic. It should be noted that *The Future* gives the impression that it particularly refers to the Orthodox Church, self-declared as Romania’s “National Church” (Mungiu-Pippidi, “The Ruler”) and religion of 82 percent of the population as a 1995 pole recorded (Ramet 282). Whereas it is not my purpose to look at this topic in-depth, some details are necessary for a better understanding of the post-communist conflicting feelings towards religious institutions, which *The Future* re-enacts. Sabrina P. Ramet, for example, states that the Romanian model of Church-state relations during communism is defined by a pattern of “co-optation, in which the given Church allows itself to be thoroughly penetrated, its clerics to be drawn into the web of surveillance and reportage under the guidance of the secret police, and its newspapers to be written or screened by the secular authorities” (275). Among other evidences, Ramet quotes the testimonies of Traian Sima, a high-ranking intelligence operative of the secret police, who stated that the Church’s cooperation with the communist regime involved “the direct collaboration of perhaps as many as 80 percent of Orthodox clerics with the Securitate [the Romanian secret police]” (276). The priest-agents provided
the secret police with information on their flocks, while the country’s religious leaders “were expected to defend the country’s human rights record in international forums and were also expected to sing the glories of Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu and of Romanian Communism itself” (Ramet 276). Exceptions, however, existed. Among other studies and documents, *The Final Report of The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania* explains the mechanisms and the extent of the anti-religious repression, emphasizing the number of arrested and imprisoned priests, closed down monasteries, and demolished churches (Tismaneanu 2007: 258-288).

*The Future*, however, focuses not on the Romanian Orthodox Church’s sacrifices and resistance but rather on its lack of credibility at the time the play was written. Mimicking the communist regime’s unscrupulous use of religion “to provide useful propaganda for internal and foreign audiences” (Ramet 277), Bistran founds an Ecumenical charitable organization, which intermediates the export of spiritual traditions on the Western market. As an example, he tells Rougier how he gave a Spanish tourist a tour of several churches and even “a lecture on our ancestral faith” (Zografi 29) and offers to organize the same kind of “show” (ibid 29), if requested. In response to Bistran’s cynicism, the Devil paradoxically defends religious beliefs and mentions the many people he has seen crossing themselves on the street. Bistran mocks him: “And you took them seriously? *(laughing)* It’s obvious that you left the country a long time ago” (ibid 29). Once again, his cynicism proves that he obviously imagines his national community as spiritually alienated, “nobody here believes in God” (ibid 28), and hypocritical: “Here, even the devil crosses himself and goes to church” (ibid 29). Cleo and Cezar, the two professional beggars, confirm this view. For them, the few people attending the church service are nothing but targets for deceit and a source of income.
Ironically, Cleo deplores the small size of churches (59) because small means there are fewer people to scam. The violent insults they throw each other, when they fight over the begging spot in front of a downtown church (Zografi 33, 58), ironically contrast with the exaggeratedly pious thanks for the people who give them money (Zografi 58-9).

When the action moves inside the church, the conflict between the illegal acts and/or the cynical attitude and the sacred setting deepens. Close to the beginning of the play, the same thieves who pickpocket during the first scene break into a church and struggle to open the Charity Box, cursing its lock and praying to God to help them succeed. Later, they return and steal the shoes of dead people awaiting burial in the church. Paradoxically, the First Thief is also the one who appears to long for a caring Church. He points out the priests’ failure to fulfil their traditional role: “I asked a priest why our church, in its unending kindness and justice and perfection and clairvoyance, doesn’t do anything for the poor, for the sick, for the thieves” (Zografi 24). The answer he has received, “a priest’s only job is to make God’s words heard in the church” (Zografi 24), recalls the priests’ self-protective detachment and obedience during the communist regime, when “Party authorities set the theme for church sermons” and most of the hierarchs did not attempt “to criticize injustice or to defend the persecuted” (Ramet 276-7). In contrast to Bistran, however, First Thief questions the priests’ probity but does not deny people’s faith. Similar to many other Romanians, he notices that priests collectively ignore the ordinary citizens, who, in response, learn to cope with that and relate to the Church as to a site of imagined exile:

FIRST THIEF: You know what the asshole [the priest] told me? That the priest’s job was to give the sermons, make God’s word heard in the church.

SECOND THIEF (disappointed): That’s all?
FIRST THIEF: Yeah. I told him he should play a tape [...] play a tape and leave, leave people alone in the church, they know what they have to do…

(Zografi 24)

Impoverished and humiliated by their economic circumstances and elites, abused by the police, and ignored by the priests, more and more people started feeling entrapped in 1990s Romania. In *The Future*, Vera openly expresses these feelings and claims her dreams to emigrate: “All I want is to leave this damned country and forget that I had ever lived here” (Zografi 72). Moreover, she claims that everybody else shares the same desire: “*We all* want to escape from this country” (32, my italics). The same attitude is recurrent in newspapers articles, published letters and diaries of the time, and even more academic texts. Over the first Romanian post-communist decade, Romanians are appalled by the actions of both communist and post-communist governments and politicians and, consequently, tend to deny their belonging to the country itself. H.R. Patapievici, for example, recalls his “disappointment with my own nation, in which I passionately believed until around 1984” (17), followed by an even deeper discontent shortly after the 1989 anti-communist Revolution: “I’m ashamed of being Romanian almost all the time and this angers me because, although it’s undignified, it’s still not fair” (23).

Official statistics and unofficial reports attest to the social effects of this attitude, not only in regard to Romanian but also East European peoples in general, from where legal and illegal immigrants flood to the West\textsuperscript{12}. *The Future* consistently re-enacts the denial of the national identity as a paradoxical bonding gesture. To this end, Zografi uses identification cards as symbols of one’s national allegiance, ironically recalling their exaggerated importance during communism. For decades, “the traumatized Romanian population used to
present their national identification card [buletinul de identitate] to receive various kinds of allocations” (Mungiuk-Pippidi 1995: 169), which secured their actual survival. More than a formal document, the national identity cards gave the state the means to control where people lived, went to work, and even got married, enforcing within Romania’s borders, rules and regulations that are usually employed between nation-states. In the first post-communist decade, the apprehension toward any forms of state control over its population still persists.

While his kidnapper changes Kevin’s social identity, by hiding his birth certificate and keeping him away from his biological family, some of The Future’s characters struggle to change and/or deny their social identities. Rougier disguises his hellish origin under the character of a Romanian emigrant who in turn adopts a Swiss name and mimics a Western identity. Vera despises her Romanian nationality and is looking for a foreign husband who would help her leave the country and acquire a different residency and, thus, a new national identity. With a more extreme gesture, Cezar, the rebel beggar, burns all of his official documents, “I destroyed them so that nobody could identify me or know who I was” (Zografi 18), and enjoys the moment as a celebration of independence: “I’ve never seen more beautiful flames. And the smoke that was rising to the sky” (Zografi 61).

Whereas imagined exile helps several of The Future’s characters feel a connection to their fellow citizens, David’s experience transforms it from an abstract concept into a concrete reality. At the beginning of the play, he avoids any type of collective, similar to many Romanians at the end of the communist dictatorship (Pralong 230). He takes refuge in the computer’s virtual world and creates the Statistic Man and Woman to alleviate his loneliness. Paradoxically, Rougier/the Devil pleads against his self-imposed exile and advocates one’s need to connect to other people: “You need to touch people. To bump into
them. To swim in the same water as them. To make them suffer. To suffer because of them.

[...] You need to leave this place [the office]. As soon as possible. The world that screams, hopes, struggles, makes love ” (44-5). Under Rougier’s influence, David escapes his fears, abandons his digital shelter and his job at the charity foundation, and, gratefully acknowledges his help: “You saved me!” (Zografi 58). At the same time, however, he discovers that his official identity, most likely the one acquired during communism, does not represent him anymore: “Today I feel like someone else. My ID card is out of date” (Zografi 61). Hoping “to be free” (Zografi 71), David follows Cezar’s example and burns his identity card. This decision and his subsequent attempts to make friends and to start a family mark his efforts to find a real-life community to which he could belong. His attempts fail however. Cezar and Cleo, the professional beggars, reject him as their friend, while Vera declines his marriage proposal: “At city hall you need your documents. You don’t have an ID card, you don’t exist. Who should I get married to?” (Zografi 73). David gradually discovers that the kind of social non-existence Vera attributes to him is in fact the characteristic he shares with his fellow citizens, a collective of self-exiled invisible individuals: “We live like moles. […] Everyone is digging his tunnel in the dark. […] No one has the courage to pull his head out of the ground” (65). When David tries to share his conclusions, the Devil considers his attempts a danger to his plans to save and then corrupt Romanians and forcefully commits him to the hospice. Far from feeling exiled in the mental institution, David finds people he can relate to through “something inexplicable… Powerful and mysterious” (Zografi 87). Like his previous imagined communities, his newly-found collective is also linked together by negation. At the end of his journey, David comes to share the ultimate denial of the Romanian nation with the other patients: “MADMAN 2: Nothingness is the most beautiful
thing in this part of the world!” (Zografi 84). In the name of this bond, David declines Vera’s proposal to leave the hospice with her:

VERA: I’ll take you to my place.

DAVID: How could I leave just as I discovered the essential? (Zografi 87).

In a way that I consider similar, Evangeline refuses to leave the woods, when Kevin asks her to go back to Toronto:

KEVIN: Take me home. I want to go home.

EVANGELINE: We have no home. You know that. (Thompson 1997: 108)

The Northern wilderness overseen by the ancestors’ dead spirits and respectively the urban hospice are the post-colonial and respectively post-communist playwrights’ cynical solutions to the identity crises, the sites that materialize internal exile and facilitate the re-imagining of the self as part of a national community. Sadly, as one of Zografi’s characters states, “Redemption is in schizophrenia” (Zografi 52) or in death (Thompson 1997: 109). The ancestors’ spirits, represented by the Northern Lights, and the patients of the hospice have overcome the identity crisis and integrated the imaginary space of collective exile into a physical reality. As they feel welcomed by their new communities, Evangeline and David recuperate their innocence and sense of self. David liberates himself from the post-communist alienation and identity crisis. Evangeline breaks free from various identity models that are forced upon her, including the Anglo-Saxon one, and the life of incest, prostitution, and crime, Kevin corrupts her into. He concludes that “the absolute does exist” (Zografi 84), sharing the madmen’s mystical delusions.

She finds peace in the woods, awaiting death surrounded by the Northern Lights, the spirits of her paternal ancestors according to First Nations traditions: “Cheeppyuk
Neemeetowuk. They’ve finally come for us. Oh. Dancing spirits. Yes. They’re every bit as lovely as you said, Kev” (Thompson 1997: 109). The act of imagining a community of exiled individuals has helped Evangeline transcend this world, overcome her identity crisis, and find grace. If there is redemption for one post-colonial and respectively one post-communist individual, there might be hope for entire national communities that undergo political transitions.

NOTES

1 As Mackey explains, relying on primary sources and other commentaries, the 1987 Multiculturalism and Citizenship Act reiterates many of the previous imperialist concepts, but justifies the new policy in the context of globalization (67-69).

2 The logo and the mascots of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games confirm this type of cultural appropriation of pre-contact monuments, artefacts, and cultural markers of the native civilization in order to identify the more recent Canadian nation and market the sports event. The logo represents a First Nations’ inuksuk, while the mascots are inspired by traditional First Nations creatures, according to VANOC’s official declaration but actually recall closely popular Asian cartoon-style characters, according to everybody else (“What do you think of Sumi, Quatchi, and Miga?”).

3 A quick search on Google on April 27, 2009 finds advertisements for the traditional cuisine of “Little Italy” in several countries, including Aberdeen, Scotland (www.whatsonwhen.com), Baltimore, U.S., (Townsend), and Toronto, Canada, while a “Little Jerusalem” can be found in Tuscany, Italy (Burshtein).

4 Plant makes this distinction on his analysis Frederick Niven’s novel The Flying Years (1935), which chronicles “western settlement up to the early twentieth century” (220), and whose main character, Angus, is the victim of idyllic visions of his native Scotland and adoptive Canada, only to be disappointed by both.

5 As a side note, please observe Verdery’s inclusive view of a North American identity, which would refer to both the US and Canada.
In addition to Canada’s *Otherness* in relationship to the US, the production of Thompson’s plays in the UK has made apparent the perception of its alterity in relationship to its former *Imperial Mother*. When Ann Wilson analyzes the reviews of Thompson’s *Lion in the Streets* and *The Crackwalker*’s production in London, England, she is surprised to notice that theatre critics perceived plays as representative of “some sort of sign of ‘Canadian – ness’ which functions only as the alterity which allows an implicit re-affirmation of some unexpressed notion of Englishness” (Wilson). Moreover, if *Lion in the Streets* was still read “in relation to British experience: these characters could be living in Glasgow or even Kingston on Thames,” the characters’ despair in *The Crackwalker* was perceived as strange and foreign, and led to an essentialist perspective of Canada as the Other, as “an urban nightmare to be watched from afar” (Wilson).

In his online article “Ceausescu's Children: The Process of Democratization and the Plight of Romania’s Orphans,” Peter J. Gloviczki gives a list of Western newspaper articles, which is representative of this tendency: 1990. “A Ceausescu Legacy: Warehouses For Children” by Mary Battiata (Washington Post 1990), “Romania’s Tunnel Children” by Louise Branson (McLean’s Magazine 1993) and “Ceausescu’s Orphans” by Massimo Calabresi (TIME International Online 1996).

On a side note, I find interesting that a play that challenges North-American stereotypes simultaneously reinforces the stereotypical perception of Balkan countries.

Some of the recent studies are discussed in the *Final Report* of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, in the chapter “Regimul communist si cultele religioase” (“The Communist Regime and the Religious Cults”, in Romanian, 258-88).

In addition to the compromises still fresh in people’s memories, the reputation of the Church suffered further when Teoctist became the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, a position he held until his death in 2007. As “a prelate morally compromised” (Tismaneanu 2007: 282), Teoctist “made a final statement lauding Romania’s ‘greatest son’ [Ceausescu]” (Ramet 283) less than a month before the collapse of his dictatorship.

A movement promoting worldwide unity among religions through greater cooperation and improved understanding

According to EU statistics, the number of Romanian and Bulgarian immigrating to Western European countries grew from 690,000 in 2003 to almost two million in 2009. Unofficially, however, it was estimated that around two million Romanians are in Italy alone (Pausan).
CHAPTER 5
Borders/Borderlines/Borderlands

5.1. Why Borders?

For me, borders bring about confusion and even fear. The image of soldiers patrolling the Black Sea beaches after sunset, the stories of people being shot while trying to run over the border to Hungary or swim across the Danube to Yugoslavia mingle with the memories of visiting my home country after immigrating and acquiring my second citizenship. Like many others, on the way there I switched between my Canadian passport, which I showed when crossing the border in Toronto, and the Romanian one I presented to the customs officer after landing in Bucharest. In other words, I left Pearson International Airport as Canadian, and arrived at Otopeni International Airport as Romanian. I could not help but wonder if the physical gesture of choosing one official document or the other to represent myself held any significance beyond the practical considerations of not having to identify myself as a foreigner in either country. How relevant were my citizenships to my inner sense of identity? Was I more or less Canadian while in Romania and vice versa? I remember that I had suddenly perceived myself as a Canadian when I first went to a conference in the United States. As my nametag stated, I was representing the University of Toronto, having my social and my cultural identity spelled out in black and white. More than that, my first encounter with American fellow students, theatre researchers, and professors made clear to me that they were different than the community I was used to at the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, although in many respects they were the same. The common professional interests were rendering the differences less important while paradoxically...
making them more visible in an international theatrical space that contained us all, regardless of which part of the world we came from. However, when I think of Canada’s border with the U.S., the image of Zavikon Islands, two of Ontario’s Thousand Islands on the banks of St. Lawrence River always comes back to me. Next to a little island there is an even smaller one, both linked by a narrow bridge\(^1\). On the first island, there is a house. On the latter, the house’s additional yard and what seems like the dock. Although official Canadian maps certify that this information is inaccurate, tourist guides and agencies, including the 1000 Islands’ website, <www.1000islandsinfo.com>, perpetuate the myth that the Canada – U.S. border cuts between the two, unprotected and, for what it is worth, ostensibly unthreatened.

Stranded in between these two completely opposite perceptions of state borders, it has been somewhat natural for me to become aware of and then analyze their relevance to the new definitions of identity. Furthermore, I could not help but notice that while literature, arts, and fiction movies\(^2\) are frequently investigated in the scholarly analyses of borders, drama and theatre have been addressed from this point of view mostly in occasional reviews of shows that directly dealt with the issue and only in very few scholarly analyses.

Consequently, an exploration of a number English-Canadian and Romanian plays from this perspective seemed both tempting and justified. However, before carrying on my analysis, a review of current terminology is necessary, as borders take on different meanings, according to individual and collective cultural, social, and political beliefs.

In the last couple of decades, the dismantling of some colonial and communist borders, such as the Berlin Wall, the creation and expansion of the European Union, the rise of transnational corporations and the international flow of capital, safer and faster travel and communications, and most of all the internet, have generated an optimistic image of a
borderless and deterritorialized world (Newman 144). In turn, this perspective has paradoxically triggered an extensive scholarship, striving to redefine the concepts of borders and to assess their contemporary relevance in various fields, from geopolitics and history to psychology and international relations.

In the 2006 article “The Lines That Continue to Separate Us,” David Newman pursues an extensive exploration of current border terminologies and semantics, at the end of which he also provides a list of 14 centres for Border Studies and an over five-page bibliography of academic articles on this topic. In addition to acknowledging the presence of field-specific concepts, such as the ones used by international lawyers, Newman’s taxonomic review is framed by the traditional contrast between the points of view of hard-core geographers, who “are unable to grasp the idea that a border can be a non-territorial construct,” and respectively of other social and political scientists, who “are equally unable to fathom why territory should play such a dominant role in our contemporary understanding of borders” (154). Newman identifies two corresponding main opposite scientific perspectives of borders. On one hand, classic studies of geography regard borders as “the physical and highly visible lines of separation between political, social and economic spaces, [between] States in the international system and, in some cases, the administrative lines separating municipalities and planning regions” (Newman 144, 154). From this static and deterministic perspective, the border is only the “outcome of the political and historical process” (Newman 145). On the other hand, sociologists and anthropologists identify borders as abstract lines “indicative of the binary distinctions (us/them; here/there; insides/outside) between groups at a variety of scales, from the national down to the personal spaces and territories of the individual” (Newman 147, 154). Accordingly, they note that there are
“personal, often invisible to the eye, borders, which determine our daily life practices to a much greater extent than do national boundaries – across which the majority of the global population do not even cross once in their lifetime. (Alvarez, 1995)” (Newman 148). These observations eventually reflect back onto the discipline that initially homologated the concept, and a “geographical refocusing of the border away from the level of the State, down to internal regions, municipalities and neighbourhoods” (Newman 148) occurs.

According to Newman, this approach is partly determined by the realization that “it is the bordering process, rather than the border per se, which affects our lives on a daily basis, from the global to the national and, most significantly, at the local and micro scales of sociospatial activity” (144). Consequently, all disciplines, geography included, now share the understanding that “borders determine the nature of group […] belonging, affiliation and membership, and the way in which the processes of inclusion and exclusion are institutionalized” (Newman 147). Accordingly, for those who construct and enforce them, borders are “institutions that enable legitimation, signification and domination, creating a system of order through which control can be exercised” (Newman 149). For those who experience them, including blue-collar citizens, migrants and refugees, and various types of native minorities, borders function as barriers and means of oppression and enclosure. The means that this hierarchal system employs may take different forms, from passport and tourist/immigration visas to membership fees, initiation rituals, baptism ceremonies, admittance procedures, and even high living costs that grant or deny an individual the possibility to belong to a country, club, a religion, a school or to reside in a particular neighbourhood.
At the end of the twentieth century, post-colonial and post-communist transitions, as well as the waves of migrants and refugees change the make-up of the Western nation (Bhabha 8-9) and the modernist concept of a homogenous “imagined community” becomes generally inaccurate. To accommodate the new structures, the theoretical discourse of identity and difference emphasizes process over pattern, dynamic phenomena over static ones, and hybridity over homogeneity. As many other terms I discussed and used in this study, the concept of border changes. On one hand, it re-negotiates the inclusion/exclusion criteria in order to accommodate the “hybrid cultural space” (Bhabha 11) on the local, national, and transnational levels. On the other hand, as Newman notes, in the new world economic and political order, it becomes apparent that crossing the border “may serve the fiscal interests of border managers, the political and economic elites, much more than the maintenance of a closed and sealed barrier” (149). Regardless the discipline, the current tendency is to depart from the perception of borders as two-dimensional artificial constructs meant “to demarcate a secure and identifiable place for the validation and nurturing of a sense of self in terms of the shared values of a cohesive community” (Worthen 118-19 in Nothof 4). In contrast, the term borderline, which I use in this chapter, is defined as a more concrete cultural construct meant rather to connect than to separate, opening the possibility for mutual influence and exchange, in other words for the borderlands. The latter is the main concept of this chapter. According to Newman, borderlands are currently understood as “transitional spaces, which cross the boundary and take in areas and people on both sides of the formal line of divide […] where people or groups who have traditionally kept themselves distant from each other, make the first attempts at contact and interaction, creating a mixture of cultures and hybridity of identities” (Newman 150). When comparing the two terms, W.
H. New concludes that “the borderlines construct conceptual edges and the borderlands construct territories of translation” (5). Whereas they usually have an economic base, such as the Canadian-American Free-Trade Agreement, or a political purpose, such as the EU preparations towards opening the continental borders, borderlands also lead to “a gradual movement from one cultural norm to another [resulting in] cultural, linguistic and social hybridity” (Newman 151). As the movement from one side to the other becomes more frequent, the individual may develop a borderland hybridity, which allows him/her to inhabit the transition zone and to encounter an Other to whom he becomes more alike. From a less geographical and more psychological perspective, Bhabha argues that “the borderland is symptomatic of the contemporary condition, a condition of ‘interstitality,’ in-betweenness, and experiential territory of intervention and revision” (New 27). Newman’s brief overview convinced me once more that borders remain relevant in today’s world, as they “create order” (Newman 143) and act as markers of similarities and differences, whether challenged or respected, rigid or porous, two or multidimensional. In his conclusions, I also recognized my own tendency to consider the effect of abstract concepts at the individual level rather than the general.

Newman’s final plea is to complete, if not replace, the study of borders as abstract sociological and political constructs with the exploration of what borders, difference, and *Otherness* mean to people at the local and individual levels, as expressed in “their personal and group narratives” (154), in “some of our mundane daily life practices and activities [that] demonstrate the continued impact of the bordering process on societal norms” (152). The dramatic texts I chose to discuss in this chapter respond to this appeal, as they reflect some of the ordinary English-Canadians and Romanians’ attitudes towards borders, which influence
their individual and collective definitions of national identity. In my analysis, I will explore how physical and cultural borders and borderlands influence the construction of English-Canadian and respectively Romanian national identities and eventually determine the employment of imagined exile as a collective and individual defining strategy. The first two plays I will discuss address the borders’ effect on communities, from families to the entire population of a city, and are set in what the classic geographical discourse traditionally classified as a territorial borderland, i.e. “the region or area in relative close proximity to the border within which the dynamics of change and daily life practices were affected by the very presence of the border” (Newman 150). Kelly Rebar’s Bordertown Café addresses the border through the drama of a mixed American-Canadian family, the owner of the Bordertown Café, which is set near the U.S.–Canada border. Petre Barbu’s God Bless America takes place in Romania’s South-Eastern extremity, i.e. “a city on the coast” (78) of the Black Sea, depicting the endeavours of the Hermeneanu family, their friends and neighbours, all of which dream to emigrate to the U.S.

The plays I will analyze in the second part of this chapter focus on the individual immigrant experience and take place in what post-colonial and post-modern discourses identify as a cosmopolitan urban borderland, “a sort of frontier/transition world between, and across, the more rigid lines that separated us in the past” (Newman 150). Guillermo Verdecchia’s Fronteras Americanas discusses the border experience from the perspectives of two Argentinean-Canadian and respectively Mexican individuals, who currently live in Toronto. Saviana Stanescu’s Waxing West re-enacts the tragicomic story of Daniela, who arrives in New York to pursue an arranged marriage to an American citizen she has never met.
In my analysis, I will focus on how living in a territorial or imaginary post-colonial/post-communist borderland forces upon the characters the interrogation of the *us/Them* dichotomy, followed by the integration of *Otherness* and the employment of imagined exile as one of the main ways to imagine the self and the national community to which they belong. Eventually, the final comparison between the two sets of plays, the first two which are set closer to colonial/communist periods, and the latter two, which are set toward the end of the post-colonial/post-communist transition will lead to interesting observation regarding the ways in which the new definitions of the nation are reflected by the borders’ new significance. In addition to considering the more general approach, this chapter will also take into account the English-Canadians and respectively Romanians’ specific views of their national borders. Whereas a detailed outline of these positions would take up too much space, a brief review of the main issues will clarify each playwright’s treatment.

### 5.2. English-Canadian Perspectives of Borders

To discuss Canadians’ perspectives of borders means inevitably to examine their attitude towards their only land frontier, the one with the U.S. and, implicitly, towards their southern neighbours. Disputed several times in open confrontations (see New 36-37 for a brief summary) and still the object of occasional political tension, the geographical border between the two countries seems now settled, while the cultural borderline continues to be negotiated, mainly from its Canadian side. More than their common beginnings as British colonies, geographical proximity and the predominance of the American popular culture on the entire continent has led to the continuous comparison of the two North American countries and to the Canadians’ urge to define themselves in comparison to the Americans.
Historians and theorists of nationalism have continuously posed the question “Canada - An American Nation?,” the actual title of Allan Smith’s 1970 book, and come to various, and often opposite, answers. Media outlets, especially the publicly funded ones, continue tackling this issue on a regular basis and still manage to stir up passionate reactions from both the participants in the debates and the audiences, being either readers, listeners, or viewers. In this ongoing debate, a somewhat common perspective is that of Canada as a country “kept back by the British, fettered from adopting its true North American nature” (Matthews 9), and even, sometimes, as a sort of Northern U.S. Diaspora or a future U.S. state. In contrast, English-speaking Conservative historians, such as W. L. Morton, present Canada as “very un-American or other-American” (Rutherford 279). In his study The Canadian Identity, Morton explains that the main differences are determined by their opposite political systems, as America “is united at the bottom by the covenant, Canada is united at the top by allegiance” (Morton 85).

As W. H. New explains in Borderlands: How We Talk about Canada, quoting Martin Kuester’s evocative phrase, “Canada is unthinkable without its border with the U.S.A.” (6). According to New, its Southern neighbour provides Canada with the national alternative, to follow or not the American model, which helps it be less hierarchical and rigid. The principle of choice extends from the level of macro politics and national culture to the micro level of everyday life, as the people of both countries have the possibility to decide on which side of the border they want to live. To support this argument, New recalls the historical waves of American immigration to the North, such as “the United Empire Loyalists during the Revolution, the ‘underground railroad’ during the Civil War; the Aboriginal peoples who crossed the ‘Medicine Line,’ or the Vietnam War draft-resisters during the 1970s” (40). In
response, he also mentions the large number of Canadians who migrate to the South, to the extent that, according to him, “Los Angeles, by one system of measurement, is Canada’s second largest city” (New 40). Statistics Canada confirms the persistence of this phenomenon in the twentieth century: “Between 2000 and 2004, an average of about 68,900 Canadians departed for the United States every year; in contrast, an annual average of about 6,100 U.S. residents immigrated (obtained permanent resident status) to Canada during the same period” (Michalowski, “Canadians Abroad”).

The permeability of the Canada-U.S. border determines Marshall McLuhan to redefine the concept in his analysis in “Canada” A Borderline Case”. The essay’s very first sentence states: “A border is not a connection but an interval of resonance” (226). From this viewpoint, he discusses several “psychological borderlines” (230) that Canada and the U.S. share, such as the public/private space dichotomy, “the great vortex of interface between inside and outside” (243), the attitude towards nature perceived as “wilderness” (230), and the duality of the English language, partly inherited from England, and partly developed locally (230). In addition to these continental characteristics, McLuhan also acknowledges some of Canada’s specific internal and external borderlines, which influence the people’s sense of national identity, including the fall of Quebec in 1759, followed by the continuous presence of the French language and culture (239-40), paralleled by “the royal commissions, which serve as mobile interdisciplinary and intercultural seminars” (246). As such, Canada’s consciousness of sharing its history with the neighbouring American colonies is counterbalanced by its unfortified “coastline which represents the frontiers for Europe on one side and the Orient on the other” (244) and on which “the process of Canadianization also takes place” (245). McLuhan’s final conclusion anticipates the image of Canada as
borderland, “a land of multiple borderlines, psychic, social, and geographic [that] maintain an attitude of alertness and mutual study which gives [it] a cosmopolitan character” (244-5).

At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first, the dominant image is that of a country with “Giddy limits [that] are mobile ones: not necessarily where you’ll find tidiness and order, but where you’ll find uncertainty and exchange, a discourse that moves between elf-possessed and self-possessed, always interrogating where it stands” (4), as W. H. New explains in *Borderlands: How We Talk about Canada*. In this 1998 book, he argues that “the various Canadas that ‘Canadian Studies’ discuss in large part derive from – not just ‘use’- various forms of boundary rhetoric” (5). New identifies the “Walking the Border” social condition, able to “reiterate our cultural separateness from the U.S.A and (perhaps more obliquely) also from the rest of the world” (41). As the main forms of difference, he discusses similarity and difference in the two countries’ history, commerce, irony, and ways to achieve national coherence (New 41-69), and concludes that Canadians prefer multiple alternatives to binaries, and cultural flexibility to fixed rituals and symbols: “We walk the border […] by making choices and by drawing on stereotypes […] by the irony we use to acknowledge the differences between appearance and belief” (New 45).

In addition to recognizing the importance of the American border, New also reminds us of the country’s other borders, the “polar border with Russia, the Atlantic border with Europe, the Pacific border with Asia” (6), which he considers relevant because each of them leads to specific social, political, and cultural expectations. While I will not explain in detail their consequences, let me note that this more encompassing perspective breaks Canada’s isolation on the North American continent next to its only but also overwhelming neighbour
and addresses the country on a more global level. From a position similar to other contesters of the inclusionary character of official multicultural policies, New asserts that the “internal boundaries – treelines, poverty lines, time zones, language lines, and bloodlines” (7) have become more important than the external cartographic delimitations. Founded on the inclusion/exclusion rhetoric, the former tends to contradict the latter by articulating a Centre, consisting of Southern Ontario and Quebec, that ignores the geographical middle and “produces an illusion of a uniform culture, or at least of a uniform agreement as to what constitutes social priority and social value” (New 7). Post-colonial writers and theorists challenge this essentialist attitude and support the borderlands metaphor, as I will show in my analysis of Fronteras Americanas.

5.3. Romanian Perceptions of Borders

Starting with the 20th century, historians and geopoliticians focus their attention more consistently on the relationship between the country’s geographical position and its destiny as a nation-state. At the beginning of the 20th century, Simion Mehedinți, one of the first Romanian geopoliticians, addressed this topic in a study whose title pointed towards his vision of a peripheral country, Romania on the Edge of the Continent: A Romanian and European Geopolitical Question (1914). In his academic course Universal History (1933-34), Nicolae Iorga argued the importance of geography in general: “A people’s role is determined not only by its hard work, but also by its location, by its geographical position. (…) There is a strong relationship between the man and the land where his ancestors lived” (Dungaciu 272).
Historically, Romania perceived its position in Europe from two contrasting viewpoints. On the optimistic side, it regarded itself as “the political crossroad” between East and West (Vintila Mihăilescu in Dungaciu 300), “the liaison for the Western culture” (Iorga in Dungaciu 278), the farthest stronghold of Latinity, and the defender of Christianity against the Ottoman Empire, as I explained in Chapter 2. During the Second World War, this perspective was reactivated, this time in relation to Hitler’s expansion in Europe. Bratianu appealed to his countrymen in the name of Romania’s strategic importance, explaining that the country was “on guard here in the name and interest of the entire Europe behind it” (Bratianu in Dungaciu 294). Consequently, he asked Romanians to be aware of their role: “The thought of the frontier, power and international economic appetite, autarchy and independence, has to be on everybody’s minds, like an obsession” (Bratianu in Dungaciu 294, my italics). On the pessimistic side, Romania was identified with a “passage country” (Ion Conea in Dungaciu 292) on the outskirts of the Roman, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and subsequently Soviet Empires, and thus the World Powers’ pawn to be disputed, shared, run over, or simply forgotten. In the 1940s, Gheorghe I. Bratianu, one of Iorga’s disciples, adopted a similar position: “We live here at the crossing of roads, cultures, and, unfortunately, at the crossing of invasions and imperialisms. We cannot be taken out of the geographical complex, which (…) encloses us and at the same time determines our destiny” (Bratianu in Dungaciu 294). Because of these beliefs, he was arrested by the communist secret police and died in prison shortly after.

A couple of years after the fall of communism in Romania, Lucian Boia resumed the study of the country’s geopolitical status in Romania: Borderland of Europe, first published in Great Britain in 2001 and translated and published in Romania in the following year. In
this book, Boia discussed two opposed consequences of Romania’s geopolitical position. On one hand, he argued Romania’s isolation and delayed development, “the reduced reception of various models, the continuation of traditional structures, and a mentality attached to national values” (15). On the other hand, he identified the country with a European borderland, given the openness of its territory, “the permanent instability and an ongoing movement of people and values,” “the mixture of cultural and ethnic infusions,” and the subsequent assimilations of “Turkish and French, Hungarian and Russian, Greek and German elements” (Boia 2005: 15). As early as 1915, however, Iorga foreshadowed Spivak’s perspective on subaltern nations as he defended “the right to be of small states” in front of the metaphoric tribunal of History, “the great judge of all States and Nations” (Dungaciu 271). Accordingly, until the beginning of the communist regime in 1947, Romania’s borders had the traditional function of protecting the country and its people.

During communism, however, a paradoxical phenomenon occurred: while the official discourse exclusively employed an optimistic perspective of Romanian society, the popular perception was definitely pessimistic. The lack of freedom, general poverty, communist “wilful isolation from East as well as West” (Revolt Against Silence 25), and the belief that leaving the country was equal to treason transformed the national territory into a national prison. As a result, instead of preventing external Others from invading the national space, Romania’s borders were meant to stop its citizens from leaving the country. In an interview with the French newspaper Liberation, the dissident poet Mircea Dinescu explained only few months before the overthrow of communism that “Romania has become an absurd land where the border guards point their weapons towards their own country” (v). Whereas censorship made it impossible for the public discourse to approach openly the issue of
borders and immigration, foreign officials addressed the question of Romanians’ lack of freedom at the international level. From 1975 to 1987, for example, the annual renewal of Romania’s “Most Favoured Nation” (MFN) status implies a review of Ceausescu’s respect of Human Rights according to the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which refers strictly to emigration policy.

Within the country, the topic is frequently addressed in political jokes, which function as a compensatory mechanism for the oppressed people. In the article “‘What Courage!:’ Romanian ‘Our Leader’ Jokes” that precedes the 1989 anti-communist revolution by only a few months, Robert Cochran analyzes Romanian political jokes and argues their ability to represent Ceausescu’s personality cult and also the general state of the country, including the official border policy: “Romanian jokes brim with the bitterness of life in Romania, with the bread lines and freezing apartments, the informers and closed borders, the controlled newspapers and television screens” (272, my italics). The American professor notes that, in jokes and innuendos, Ceausescu appears always conscious of the need to use drastic methods in order to keep his citizens at home: “the country would empty like a punctured balloon if its imprisoned citizens were not kept in by armed guards” (263). He cites several jokes on this topic, including an extremely succinct one that suggests the image of the crowd rushing out if such an opportunity would occur: “The briefest joke I know also centers on the frustrations of closed borders and restricted travel. ‘What would you do if He opened the borders?’ ‘Climb a tree.’” (269). During the last years of Ceausescu’s dictatorship, the increasing poverty and political oppression determine an almost collective desire to flee the country and emigrate to the West, mainly the U.S. After 1989, the interdiction to leave the country disappears and the external politics becomes oriented towards Romania’s integration.
in NATO and EU. In spite of a much larger number of emigrants, most people’s financial impossibility to travel, the visa system, and some Romanians’ unlawful deeds in Western countries\(^\text{10}\) prohibit most of the Romanians from travelling abroad and/or choosing others countries to live in and make them unwelcome when they do so.

Although Romania does not have a geographical border with the U.S., after the Second World War it paradoxically acquired a psychological one. Opposite to the Canadians’ “American Other” and the love-hate relationship with their southern neighbours, Romanians developed the collective myth of the “American Saviour,” after the Second World War. In *The Violent Imaginary of Romanians*, which I mentioned in previous chapters, Cesereanu explains how Romanians have been waiting for decades for the “arrival of the Americans,” perceived as Messiahs, “as potential new law makers (the banishers of communism), as wise men and warriors” (195). Eventually, however, people have come to accept that the overseas heroes will never come and they have been handed over to the Russians. Consequently, a centripetal idea of being rescued by the American Saviours is eventually replaced by the centrifugal and apparently more practical solution of going there, where freedom and wealth seem easily attainable. Whereas the “American Dream” and the desire to immigrate eventually become the secret goal of many Romanians who feel incarcerated within their country, imagined exile becomes to them the means to reach out and connect with their fellow citizens. During the post-communist transition, people reuse their previous surviving technique and start imagining their fellow citizens as feeling equally trapped within the national borders.
5.4. Border Crossings as Mating Rituals and Self-Defining Strategies

Rebar re-enacts the period that preceded the 9/11 terrorist attack when the Canada–U.S. physical border was permeable, in spite of the undeniable cultural demarcation between the two countries. Consequently, her characters casually go “over the line” (45, 52) to get married, have children, or simply buy cigarettes, experiencing what McLuhan identifies as an “interval of resonance” (226). Eventually, however, this type of border ambiguity aggravates the stereotypical identity crises and inferiority complexes Canadian and American characters experience in relationship to each other and forces them to choose one of the two sides.

More than everything else, Rebar’s play is a realist family drama of the Canadian so-called “kitchen-sink theatre” sort. Jimmy, a 12th-grade teenager, was raised by Marlene, his divorced half-Canadian half-American mother, the owner of the Bordertown Café, Maxine, his American grandmother, and Jim, his Canadian grandfather and owner of a farm where his grandson works during the summer holidays. The play begins when Don, Jimmy’s father calls from Wyoming on his way to Canada to pick up his son and have him move to the U.S., into “a brand new house” (Rebar 35), together with him and his new wife. From that point on, Bordertown Café explores the teenager’s struggle between continuing his life in Alberta, finishing high school and working on the farm, on one hand, and moving to the U.S. and becoming a truck driver like his father, on the other hand. The position in which Jimmy finds himself metonymically re-enacts Canadians and Americans’ possibility to choose which side of the border they want to live on, and accordingly, to what type of national community to belong. In this context, the border crossings’ depiction as unimportant everyday trips, typical in the open territorial borderlands conflicts with their embodiment as coming-of-age and life-stage rituals. In the generations of Jimmy’s parents and grandparents, the “once in a life
time” trip from one country to another plays the role of a mating ritual, while to Jimmy, several “hauls” in the U.S. followed by his refusal to join his father in one final trip become an essential part of his coming-of-age process. I will analyze Jimmy’s attitude towards the U.S.–Canada distinction in the final section of this chapter, as I first want to explore its significance for the older generations.

The permeability of the political American-Canadian border allows for the national mixing of the family, despite its position on the Northern side. The inter-national marriages start when Grandpa Jim sees Maxine’s picture on a fellow soldier while doing his military service and falls in love with her. After coming back home, he goes to the U.S. and stages his accidentally meeting Maxine in the restaurant where she is waiting tables. Jim impresses the nineteen-year old American with his old-fashioned “manners” and hilarious details such as the fact that he “took his shoes off at the door” (Rebar 43). Eventually, he marries and brings her to Canada, without ever telling the truth about why and how they met. In the next generation, the direction of the border crossing is reversed. American truck driver Don sees Marlene, Jim and Maxine’s daughter, while she is helping in the café, marries her, and takes her South to the U.S. As her mother remembers, Marlene is then only fifteen and “that sonovagun strolls in here like Johnny Cash, charms the daylights outta you and me both” (Rebar 36), this time with his cowboy-like behaviour. The bi-national marriages generate identity crises while making the process of defining oneself more urgent. Maxine, the American wife and, in the next generation, Don, the American husband, play the role of a literally imported Other in relation to whom Jim and Marlene’s Canadianness becomes more apparent. In other words, the family’s national duality reproduces the American-Canadian dichotomy, which has been acknowledged as one of the formative factors of the Canadian
national identity. Intentionally or not, Rebar challenges the opinions of some Canadians who, according to New, “claim that ‘everything important’ happens ‘there’ and ‘nothing of consequence’ happens ‘here.’ They position themselves on the edge of everything, never quite trusting the idea that the ‘everything’ that gives their life meaning might in practice be Canadian” (38). In almost the same words, Maxine voices on stage the thoughts New cites and, eventually, the realization he predicts. As the play’s only genuinely American character, she seems even more entitled to flaunt her origin and to claim that American people have a “real life” (Rebar 51) as opposed to Canadians, who are only “sittin’ up here with milk in their tea, makin’ judgements” (Rebar 51). Talking to an off-stage American truck driver visiting Canada for the first time, she paints an even more sarcastic picture of her adoptive country, effectively mocking some of the most common national stereotypes:

Well, if it’s first time up this way, buddy, you better get ready to not know how fast you’re driving, how hot it is a-outside, how hard the wind’s blowin’ or how much gas you’re getting for your so-called dollar. As for reading directions on any box or carton—it’s all in the wrist action—you’ll see a lot a mode da emploi’s—means flip it over to English—wrist action—Canadians got real strong wrists, prepares ‘em for hockey careers. (Rebar 45)

Consistent with the American pop culture, in which “size seems almost a virtue in itself” (New 44), Maxine also recalls everything in the U.S. as being stronger and bigger, although not necessarily better. Ironically, even the relatives she remembers, for example, are oversized and “the farther south you go the fatter people get” (Rebar 36). Her half-breed daughter Marlene also defines her short good times of her American marriage through quantity. For example, she recalls the country fair where Don “won every teddy bear that
fella had. Tossin’ baseballs in a basket. […] Well, those darn bears filled the back seat o’ that Chevrolet and that is no exaggeration” (Rebar 38). In spite of never being to a country fair, Maxine agrees: “back home in Minnesota we had fairs bigger’n anything you’d ever find up here” (Rebar 38) because to her American superiority is unquestionable. Her attitude echoes a more general stereotypical contempt, analyzed, explained, and often scorned, by Canadian theorists. Morton, for example, ironically explains Americans’ awe and derision towards their Northern neighbours through their more general inability to understand anything that is different: “What Canada was, was unclear; it was covered by none of the definitions in the text books in the State Department. It corresponded to none of the experiences of the American people” (Morton 61). Given the fact that Maxine is an American character imagined by a Canadian playwright, her sarcasm, predictably, disguises an inferiority complex, as she often reveals: “Maxine, she’s just a dumb American. S’what you-all think deep down, I know you do” (Rebar 59). Even after forty years of living here, she is still intimidated by the differences: “My folks didn’t have sit-down meals” (Rebar 59). Her dual feelings towards her family and adopted country re-enact what Wasserman identifies as a “complex love-hate relationship with the American behemoth next door” which determines the “passive-aggressive ambivalence” of both peoples (Wasserman 27), and, in Rebar’s play, of all the family members.

Although she could go back to the U.S. at any point, Maxine perceives herself as being exiled to Canada and does not feel welcome: “Am I always gonna be alone in this family?” (59). Her attempt to compensate this alienation leads her to a family version of imagined exile, as she relates to her daughter and subsequently grandson as to people with whom she shares the status of American exiles in Canada, and actively strives to induce this
belief on them. Maxine does her best to raise her daughter American. While her
determination is impressive, though hilarious, the result is disappointing: “Well, I can’t
understand it—I teach my daughter her presidents age o’ nine, I breathe on her, I spit on my
Kleenex and wipe the Hershey Bar off her face and what does she turn around and do on me.
End up Canadian” (Rebar 46). In spite of her short-lived hopes that at least her grandson
inherited her genes, “kid’s got my stamina” (42), and his father’s and her allegiance, Jimmy
follows in his mother’s steps and does not seem eager to identify himself as American. He
hesitates between his paternal and maternal heritages and the corresponding ways of life of a
“normal decent Albertan” and that of a “cowboy” (Rebar 49), respectively. Acknowledging
his mixed blood, habits, and family ties, he perceives himself as being trapped in between
two countries, burdened by his ethnic and cultural duality. Eventually, Jimmy rebels against
the permanent fight over national issues that take place in his family: “It’s just total stress in
here, all the time. […] American, Canadian—back, forth—like it mattered what a guy was—
why couldn’t bin born in Australia, nowhere near the American border?” (Rebar 49). In his
case, imagined exile does not compensate for his alienation. As Dykk puts it, the “old 49th
parallel cuts right through the family” and overwhelms for a while the teenager in search of
“emotional security” (41) and a clearer identity.

Paradoxically, only when her grandson is actually about to move to the U.S. to live
with his dad, Maxine starts questioning American lifestyle and politics, “nine a-outta ten
American… carry guns. […] America had no business even goin’ to Vietnam. Or any of
these other trouble spots countries, in my opinion” (Rebar 52), and suddenly praises
Canadian culture, which she consistently perceived as the Other: “You wanna know the
name of a good program on TV and it’s been on for twenty, thirty years and it’s Canadian,
it’s not American, it’s on the CBC” (Rebar 52). After imagining herself and any fellow American estranged in the U.S., Maxine appears to have a similar image of any fellow Canadian who would move to the U.S. The American-Canadian territorial borderland heightens the inner borders of a mixed family but at the same time depicts the two national identities as clearly distinct, confirming what Morton states: “What differentiates the two people are things far deeper than the mass culture of North America, which both countries share and both created (81).

5.5. The Hermeneanus’ Underground Travel to America

Among other Romanian post-communist playwrights, Barbu re-enacts the tension between the desire to leave the country and the impossibility to do so in many of his plays. Accordingly, as Marian Popescu notes in his preface to the playwright’s 2003 collection of plays, the border becomes one of the recurrent topoi in his drama, perceived as “the horizon line of the national detention space before 1989” (Barbu 12). Similar to Zografi’s style in The Future, previously discussed, and to Stanescu’s choices in Waxing West, as I will explain, Barbu also incorporates the naturalistic representation of post-communist realities in absurdist scenarios, in which he freely uses shocking images and metaphors to convey his messages. In spite of their stylistic differences, God Bless America is similar to Bordertown Café from at least two perspectives. First, both are set in transitional places along national borderlines, and second, both are family dramas. In God Bless America, the present or absent, alive or dead, actual or possible members of Hermeneanu family are the main characters.
Two years after the 1989 revolution and after running away to Bucharest, Marius, the Hermeneanus’ oldest son, supposedly calls Domnica, his mother, from Washington D.C. and makes everybody, but his father, dream that he is going to help them immigrate there. Cristina, his girlfriend, who died while having an illegal abortion before its decriminalization, haunts the play, and relays his imaginary comments from America and Somalia, and his return home. Ilie, his father, strives to destroy his internal affairs file to hide his previous position as a secret police informant. To obtain this, he is willing to have his daughter Luiza marry Dugan, a rich man his age who also dreams of moving to America. In the midst of this, the Russian naval fleet arrives and is taken for the American one; a Boeing 747 crashes into the water and sinks; and the apartment building they live in is mistakenly half demolished. Longing for her lost son, Domnica loses her mind, takes a delusional trip to America, and ends believing that a bag of ground meat is Marius’s baby Boy: Eventually, the entire family boards the sunken airplane and arrives in an underwater America, a metaphor of Luiza’s actual drowning at the end of the play, mostly probably as the result of a joke gone wrong. God Bless America’s complicated plot re-enacts some of the main characteristics of Romanian post-communism, including collective mistrust, the individuals’ alienation in relationship to each other and themselves, and the national identity crisis, which all the characters perceive. Remus, the manager of the hotel where Domnica works as a cleaning lady, is suspected of being Jewish, Hungarian, and communist. This apparently random list of possible designations expresses the confusion that defines ethnic definitions in post-communist Romania, while it subtly recalls the communists’ tentative replacement of the ethnic or civic nation with the socialist nation in the collective self-defining project, which I have discussed in Chapter 1. After receiving an anti-Semitic threatening note, Remus
strives to explain to Luiza his Romanian ethnicity and atheism. Her reaction proves once more the common perception of one’s communist political orientation as an ethnic identity:

Remus: I swear, I’m not Jewish. I don’t belong to any Church.

Luiza: Then you’re a communist (Barbu 85).

Similar to the role the Canadian-American border has in Rebar’s *Bordertown Café*, the *God Bless America*’s setting in a border city on the coast of the Black Sea aggravates the characters’ identity crises and makes them rely on imagined exile in order to regain the sense of belonging to a community. The Black Sea is generally considered one of the essential elements in the creation of Romania and the Romanian identity, next to the Danube and the Carpathians. In the course *The Black Sea and the Oriental Issue* he taught in the 1941-1942 academic year at the Bucharest University, Gheorghe I. Bratianu is one of the first modern historians who explores its role. From a geopolitical perspective, he argues that the commercial route towards the Black Sea determined the very foundation of Moldova, one of the Romanian provinces. From a historical point of view, Bratianu affirms that the attempt to control, limit, or even take away the country’s access to the sea has actually been one of the major causes of the subsequent territorial conflicts with the neighbouring empires. Bratianu concludes that the free access to the sea is one of the “elements of our very existence” whereas “a closed sea strangles our freedom and national life” (Bratianu in Dungaciu 296).

In *God Bless America*, Barbu paradoxically re-enacts the Black Sea’s double role, as a border and as an identity marker, which highlights the characters’ entrapment. Symbolically, the Hermeneanus live as close as possible to the water, but its proximity makes them uncomfortable: “in winter it’s cold ’cause the wind blows from the sea” (Barbu 88) and constantly reminds them of the freedom lying just in front of them but out of reach.
Furthermore, when the play starts, the apartment is being mysteriously flooded, as the water is not coming from the apartment above, but “from nowhere” (Barbu 91). A carpet hung out to dry in front of the window symbolically obstructs the direct view of the sea (Barbu 83) and visually reinforces the claustrophobic sensation. Long after the flood has stopped, the carpet is still in the same place (Barbu 102), as if once severed, the access to freedom cannot be regained.

In spite of the geographical distance, the Romanians’ so-called “obsession with America” is no less a reality than Canadians’ preoccupation with their Southern neighbour, as Marian Popescu states in his introduction to God Bless America: “Caught between the experience of the ghetto before 1989 and the present one, (…) this world lives in a traumatic reverie: the departure to America” (Barbu 11). In real life, the hope to immigrate to any Western country and particularly to the U.S. has played during communism the role of a coping mechanism. Tismaneanu, Patapievici and many others remind us, however, that actual exile was not possible and, thus, inner exile became the usual escape. Barbu recalls this compensatory survival technique through Remus, who relies on his inner “America” to overcome his prosecution as a former member of the Romanian Legionary Movement. After 1989, in contrast to the other characters, he does not consider going to the U.S. because he still clings to his own version of it:

Why should I go to America when America is in here? (points to his forehead) I suffered enough because I held it prisoner. This is the greatest achievement of my life because, while living like a prisoner in one country, I hid another country as a prisoner inside me. If I wouldn’t have succeeded living like this, I might’ve killed myself a long time ago. (Barbu 111)
God Bless America’s other main characters, however, dream of physically moving to the U.S., which they perceive as an empowering paradise. When imagining Marius upon his hypothetical return home, for example, Luiza describes him looking at them as at Lilliputians, while showing off his newly-assumed American identity and self-confidence: “you’ll slip in some English words to show us that you adapted there, to make us forget what was before. (…) You didn’t miss anybody and anything. You came back as Gulliver” (Barbu 93). Somewhat similarly to Rebar’s characters who are simultaneously repelled and attracted to the U.S. and their American relatives, she feels both diminished and comforted by Marius’s imaginary American stories:

You’ll take a step back and watch us for a while, a passive, helpless herd. (…) You wouldn’t stand this disgusting image too long. In haste, you’ll start telling us. We’ll believe to your last gesture with which you’ll show us how big a loaf of bread is across the Ocean. Your stories will first warm up our stomachs, legs, and hands. And after you take a breath, you’ll give each of us a kind word. (Barbu 92)

The most striking common trait of Rebar and Barbu’s depictions of the Americans is their paradoxical absence. Whereas American truckers stop for a rest at the Bordertown Café and Maxine talks to them offstage, joyfully reminiscing about her home country, and Don makes a final phone call to postpone his arrival, the U.S. presence in the Romanian city is even more elusive. The overseas endeavours of Marius, the lost son and presumed immigrant, are depicted only through his sister’s delusions and a parodic newscast only his mother is able to see, in which he is a U.S. soldier deployed in Somalia. In spite of its absent physical presence, Barbu embodies the collective nostalgia through the permanent line of people, waiting in the front of the local Consulate to apply for a visa, and through the mass
hysteria that takes over the city at the thought that an American naval fleet arrived. In addition, a few poetical delusions attest to depth of the individual obsession. When, for example, it snows on a summer day, Boby, a would-be journalist, explains the phenomenon as the materialization of a desire: “It’s Luiza’s wish for it to snow American snowflakes. Look, the clouds arrived from America!” (Barbu 113). Eventually, the goal to immigrate to the U.S. and even the remote possibility to achieve it eventually becomes an identity marker. Pușa, the church museum curator, is horrified when he discovers a contemporary nameless grave and reads its inscription: “‘This woman’s husband is in America.’ I lived to see that, Vladimir, not even the dead don’t want to keep their names on the crosses!” (Barbu 138).

Given the intensity of the collective obsession, geography itself surrenders and the play allegorically embodies the 1990s idea that “many borders are no more than social constructions and that they are often more imagined than real” (Newman 154). In the 1998 Belgium film Le Mur (The Wall), which Newman summarizes in his taxonomic review (154), this belief helps the main characters escape literally through the wall from the Flemish side to the French one. Similarly, in God Bless America the belief in the borders’ permeability provides a miraculous exit from the country. Barbu’s play starts and ends in the courtyard of a thirteenth-century Romanian monastery, a designated historical monument, where the entrance of a tomb magically becomes the access to an underground tunnel to the U.S. The end of the play is parodically triumphant, as the entire country manages to slip through the tunnel and to come out in America, the land where everyone’s dream comes true.

Feeling imprisoned in their home country by the communist closed borders and subsequently by their poverty and paradoxical status of Europe’s Third-World citizens, Barbu’s characters imagine themselves as immigrants in the U.S. and achieve their dream
through absurdist means. The sharing of both the actual alienation and the delusion structures the collective state of imagined exile, which helps them regain the consciousness of a community that defines itself in national terms.

5.6. Life in an Urban Canadian Borderland

After investigating the territorial borderlands’ effect on the families and communities’ national self-definitions, I will now discuss the case of post-colonial and respectively post-communist individuals who have physically left their birth countries and strive to adapt to an alien environment. In this section, my purpose is to explore how immigration determines the integration of Otherness and the perception of oneself as a borderland. The attempt to validate the new perspective of self leads them to the employment of imagined exile as one of the coping strategies. In the Canadian Fronteras Americanas, the playwright’s perspective is determined and complicated by his exilic condition, on one hand, and, on the other hand, by the post-colonial redefinition of the country as multicultural, which I discussed in Chapter 5. Long after I selected this play as one of my objects of study in this chapter, New’s text confirmed the appropriateness of my choice. In his Borderlands: How We Talk about Canada, which I already mentioned several times in this study, he mentions Fronteras Americanas next to Guy Vanderhaeghe’s The Englishman’s Boy and Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient, as some of the first works that come to mind in order to illustrate the attempt of Canadian writers situated at “the edges of otherness” (67) to assert their identity through what he calls the “Walking the Border” condition. From this perspective, borders are regarded not as a means of restricting the self but as “confirmations of the cultural need for a contact field, a place and a condition of
negotiated affinities” (New 67). The place that *Fronteras Americanas* re-imagines is similar to McLuhan’s *borderland*, the intersection of “multiple borderlines, psychic, social, and geographic” (244) that assert a specific form of Canadian post-colonial coherence, which in turn thrives on the diversity of its elements. This vision of the country is similar to Newman’s later definition of the hybrid cosmopolitan centre, situated in “a sort of frontier/transition world between, and across, the more rigid lines that separated us in the past” (150).

*Fronteras Americanas* has prompted very interesting academic approaches that explore this particular aspect. In the article “Healing the Border Wound,” Mayte Gómez, for example, discusses various aspects of multiculturalism and the consequences of Pierre Trudeau’s policy (28-30) and argues that *Fronteras Americanas* “has brought to life some profound contradictions latent in Canada as a country and in Canada and in Canadians as individuals” (Gómez 27). The play expresses the drama of many Canadians, and most likely of many citizens of post-colonial countries, who, like the playwright himself, struggle to come to terms with their multiple roots and cultural allegiances, learn “to live the border,” be the *Other* and live with the *Other*, while inhabiting a cultural space of continuous translation. In *Fronteras Americanas*, the balance of similarities and differences between North American individuals belonging to different peoples/ethnicities is regarded as even more fragile, as Verdecchia simultaneously limits and expands the discussion of borders and Otherness in comparison to Rebar’s more traditional play I discussed. On one hand, he centres his play on a single, though two-sided character, “Verdecchia”/Wideload, to be performed by the same actor. On the other hand, he broadens the geographical settings and the corresponding perspectives, from Toronto to Argentina via Chile, and from the clash of
two somewhat similar Western-like North American mentalities, in *Bordertown Café*, to the confrontation of North and South American views. Consequently, the characters’ horizontal duality is both defied and contained within their vertical psychological multiplicities, which in turn simultaneously affirm and mock post-colonial strategies of identity construction. Actually, *Fronteras Americanas* opens with a quote from Simon Bolivar, which speaks of the ambiguity of belonging to one people or the other and explicitly points toward Verdecchia’s political standpoint: “It is impossible to say to which human family we belong. We were all born of one mother America, though our fathers had different origins, and we all have different coloured skins. This dissimilarity is of the greatest significance” (19). However, *Fronteras Americanas* goes on to challenge Bolivar’s idealistic affirmation of an ideal “mother America” that supersedes the reality of continental states, and emphasizes its racial multiplicity and the presence of cultural and psychological borders.

Largely autobiographical, the play mainly re-stages “Verdecchia’s” psychological and physical journeys “home,” the first one to Argentina, the birth-country he left when he was two years old, and the second one back to Canada, his adoptive country. As Gómez argues, the playwright’s national status is ambiguous, responding to that of his white character: “He is a Latin American of European (Spanish) descent, is white, speaks ‘unaccented’ English and has been in Canada for most of his life. In sum, many might see him as a ‘non-ethnic’ Canadian” (33). The fact that the playwright does not perceive himself or his namesake fictional “Verdecchia” as *Latino* is made obvious by his choice to counterpoint him to a stereotypical ethnic character, Facundo Morales Segundo, who calls himself “Wideload,” and whose sarcastic rambling parallels the more dramatic confessions of his counterpart. As Barbara Crook notes in her review of the Vancouver production,
Wideload “introduces and plays with a number of Latin-American stereotypes, from bandito to Latin lover to evil drug lord” (Crook 6), whose descendant and representative he ironically claims to be.

Both characters are, however, performed by one and the same the actor who physically embodies the Anglo-Saxon vs. non-Anglo-Saxon dichotomy, essential in the American identity model. Thus, whereas Rebar re-enacts the American-Canadian opposition in Bordertown Café, Verdecchia deliberately erases this distinction and re-imagines Canada and the U.S. as a Western homogenous entity in contrast to the rest of the Americas. However, he refers to one of the most often acknowledged differences between the two countries, the cultural one. From this perspective, the American-Canadian border is regarded as “a social and cultural line of defence against the hegemony of American popular culture” (Nothof 5), which might supersede the permeability of the territorial one and the Western stereotype. “Verdecchia” challenges, however, the relevance of the American-Canadian cultural distinction: “Where does the U.S. end and Canada begin? Does the U.S. end at the 49th or does the U.S. only end at your living room when you switch on the CBC?” (Verdecchia 21).

In Fronteras Americanas, the political border, “this line in the dirt, stretching 5,000 kilometres” (Verdecchia 21), is drawn between the U.S. and Mexico, i.e. between the First World countries and the Third Countries that inhabit the Americas. Although this is not the subject of this study, I cannot help but notice that in the process of deconstructing the Western stereotypical gaze, the playwright does not seem troubled by his own essentialist treatment of the people he challenges. This detail aside, the righteousness to dispute the North American homogenizing viewpoint is indirectly confirmed by Said’s Orientalist
theories, as well as by the numerous investigations in post-colonial, feminist, First Nations, subaltern studies. From a similar point of view, Verdecchia denounces racially profiled terms such as “Latino,” “Chicano,” and “Hispanic” which Wideload assesses as “inaccurate because dey lump a whole lot of different people into one category” (Verdecchia 27). Also mentioned are the “Exotica Factor” (41) and the “Latin Lover Fantasy” (Verdecchia 42-47), represented by stars such as Antonio Banderas, Carmen Miranda, and Rudolph Valentino as some of the most common Latino stereotypes promoted by fashion and women’s magazines and Hollywood-type movies, which “trade on the lok, the feelm de surface of things Latin” (Verdecchia 47) in order to amuse their readers and audiences. As he summarizes some adulatory comments on Banderas, Wideload sarcastically points out the imperialistic attitude and the ignored political reality of Latino countries: “Especially, when, as also described in the Mirabella article, he wipes his mouth on the tablecloth and asks, ‘What can I done?’ Don’t you just want to fuck him? I do. I wonder though if it would be quite so disarming or charming if it was Fidel Castro wiping his mouth on the tablecloth?” (Verdecchia 45).

In order to deconstruct ethnic and racist clichés and “the mystique of the ‘other’” (Newman 152), the playwright employs “the use of stereotypes as a performative strategy” (Gómez 31), reverses the perspectives, and re-imagines North American Anglo-Saxons as *ethnic* and *exotic*. His re-enactment of the difference parodies some of the most common Western stereotyping mentalities. To make his approach more effective, he directly engages the audience, for example at Tarragon Theatre, “in Toronto, at 30 Bridgman Avenue” (Verdecchia 20). He first mimics a cheerful inclusionary attitude, “We are all Americans” (Verdecchia 20), which he subsequently deconstructs. Wideload challenges the stereotype of Canadian-Canadian Anglo-Saxons as the unmarked majority (Mackey 104). In the urban
multicultural context, which I described in Chapter 3 in more detail, the simple act of naming as a specific ethnic group effectively puts them in a subaltern position: “… sometimes, I’ll be out with my friends from de [sic] Saxonian community and we’ll be out at a bar…” (Verdecchia 40, my italics). From the same perspective, Wideload mockingly re-enacts his amazement when he first met his host family in Toronto, the Smiths, and his relief when he discovered they were normal: “I mean sure at times it was my first contact with an ethnic family and I got really good look at the way dey live. I mean sure at times it was a bit exotic for me, you know de food for example, but mostly I just realized they were a family like any other wif crazy aunts and fights and generation gaps” (Verdecchia 34, my italics). The parody of the white English-Canadians as the Others continues with Wideload ironically describing how Saxons dance, “like nothing gets in your way: not de beat, not de rhythm, nothing” (40) and have sex, “a mind-expanding and culturally enriching experience” (41). He also disguises mockery under seemingly enthusiastic praises, which he directs at his audiences: “I do like you Saxons. Really, you guys are great. I always have a very good time whenever we get together” (39), and condescending comparisons: “I have the greatest respect for your culture… […] You have the Morris dance and we have de mambo, de rumba, de cumbia […] shall I continue?” (42). Eventually, Wideload forces his spectators to acknowledge their feelings when treated as an ethnically homogenous group: “I am generalizing, I am reducing you all to de lowest common denominator, I am painting you all with the same brush. Is it starting to bug you yet?” (75). The parody of the majority’s Orientalist point of view is, however, counterbalanced by the sudden acknowledgement of the ethnic diversity of his spectators whom he directly addresses: “some of you are from Asia, some from el Caribe, some from Africa, some of you de Annex, and you ended up in
dis small room with me” (Verdecchia 53). As re-enacted in *Fronteras Americanas*, the multicultural Toronto illustrates the textbook definition of the urban borderland, “where cultural and ethnic residential ghettos enforce the notion of border on the one hand, but where daily mixing on the streets, in the subways, in workplaces and in apartment blocks creates the frontiers of cross-border and transboundary interaction on the other [hand]”, as Newman describes it at the end of his extensive taxonomic research (150).

Whereas Thompson’s *Sled*, which I discussed in Chapter 4, paints the image of ethnic communities that compete and sometimes even fight each other, reinforcing the social and physical demarcations among them, *Fronteras Americanas* asserts borders not as lines of separation but as actual habitats. Wideload explains, “I live in the border—that’s Queen and Lansdowne for you people from outa town. Ya, mang, I live in de [sic] zone—in de barrio—and I gotta move. Is a bad neighbourhood” (Verdecchia 24, my italics). The Latino immigrant embodies a summary of cultural clichés, “an inflated stereotype designed to deflate stereotypes” (Kareda 10). Correspondingly, the city’s ethnic neighbourhood to which he belongs is also depicted through a series of stereotypical crimes, through which Wideload claims to have had gone on his way to theatre: drug dealing, pick pocketing, abusive arrests, stabbings, car accidents and stealing. Like in a cartoon, he manages to survive, the only inconvenience being that he has to “walk the rest of the way” (Verdecchia 24) to the theatre. Furthermore, Wideload emphasizes the contrast between the ethnic “bad neighbourhood,” on one hand, and the middle-class usually white “nice neighbourhoods,” such as Toronto’s Forest Hill and the Annex, Montreal’s Westmount, Vancouver’s Point Grey or Kitsilano, on the other hand. Crossing over the social borders may be, however, more difficult than the going over the territorial ones. Wideload ironically describes his possible whereabouts in a
middleclass neighbourhood, emphasizing his out of place identity markers: “I’m moving in next door to…. You… and I’m going to wash my Mustang every day and overhaul de engine and get some grease on de sidewalk and some friends like about twelve are gonna come and stay with me for a few… Years” (Verdecchia 26). The ethnic differences are doubled by the social ones, with which they share unexpected similarities not only in Canada but also everywhere else in the world. Newman, for example, compares the use of borders in two of the papers he reviews and argues the existence of borderlands that reinforces the barriers in spite of the physical freedom:

For Palestinians to cross into Israel, or for the blue-collar labourers to cross into the world of the high-tech professionals, the borders are very difficult to negotiate. When eventually crossed, the feeling of constituting the inferior other, the constitution of difference and the feeling of not belonging is so great that they cannot wait to finish their work and return to their ‘own’ side of the separation line, to the groups, cultures and homes within which they feel familiarity and safety. (151).

Wideload similarly makes the city’s inner borderlines visible when he imagines himself as alien in the white majority’s urban space.

Although less confrontational than his Latino counterpart, “Verdecchia” experiences the same type of crisis, whose only possible solution seems to be the cultural community of the cosmopolitan metropolis. He recalls how he felt “almost at home” in Paris, although he actually was “undocumented, extralegal, marginal,” while in Kitchener, Ontario, where he grew up, he was only dreaming of going “elsewhere” and was even asked to leave when he tried to make things better: “There in Kitchener, where once I wrote a letter to the editor and suggested that it was not a good idea to ban books in schools […] and a stranger responded
to my letter and suggested that I go back to my own country” (28). As some of the Romanian
post-communist playwrights, Barbu and Stanescu included, Verdecchia chooses to represent
his uneasiness in a sarcastic post-modern way, using naturalist details: “I’ve thrown up in
most of the major centres of the western world” (48). The same happens in his grandmother’s
apartment in Buenos Aires, which he clearly perceives as a foreign place: “I throw up in the
bidet and I just want to go home—but I’m already there—aren’t I” (50).

In a world he perceives as an alienating borderland, “Verdecchia” reaches out to his
audiences, which he imagines similarly alienated and conflicted: “Do you have two
countries, two memories? Do you have a border zone?” (78). The double identity model is,
however, gradually replaced by a more recent “model of the multiplicity of identity”
(Chauduri 216), which appears to define the immigrant and post-colonials experiences,
particularly in multicultural societies such as Canada and the U.S. In other words, the
colonial binary “us/other” becomes obsolete, as each term is endlessly multiplied. In
Fronteras Americanas, Verdecchia expresses this new state of the contemporary identity
project from a manifold perspective: post-colonial but also multicultural, exilic through birth
but also Canadian through upbringing, intellectual but also common. As Joanne Tompkins
argues in her study Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre, the
“frontier signals the anxiety of absence, even as it tries to suppress it” (Tompkins 33), by
usually separating us from the Other and asserting our presence at the expense of the Other’s
absence. In contrast, Fronteras Americanas asserts our presence as Others, given the
acknowledgement of hybrid identities (Newman 151) but also of the current existence of
social and cultural borders that are difficult to negotiate. This multileveled perspective
determines Gómez to argue that “Frontera’s most powerful ideological subversion, however,
is its final suggestion for a new way to imagine Canada” (26) and rethink it as a multicultural borderland, which nurtures difference while trying to negotiate its acceptance in the daily lives of its citizens.

By calling the audiences on their varied non-Saxonian national identities and by interrogating their doubleness, as Canadian residents and also aliens, both the fictional characters and the playwright perform an act of imagined exile, through which they reconnect to an imagined community of psychologically displaced persons for whom the birthplace and blood ties stopped being satisfactory sources of the national identity. Although having gone through a different type of experience, post-communist playwrights and their dramatic characters exhibit a similar need to search for different strategies to define themselves and their national communities and also for a solution to help them get through the temporary identity crisis.

5.7. East-European Immigrants and Exiled Vampires

Although Waxing West is set in New York, one of the archetypical urban borderlands at the end of the twentieth century, Stanescu focuses on its effect on the development of her main character, rather than making her acknowledge it. The play is a parody of the Romanian dream to immigrate to America written by an author who has experienced firsthand exile in the U.S. As I previously explained, after 1989 Romanians gained the freedom to travel abroad and even leave the country but the majority of them did not have the financial means to take advantage of this right. Consequently, as Krishnaswamy argues, discussing East European former communist countries in general, in Romania emigration also “increasingly became the supreme reward for citizens of impoverished or repressive ex-
colonies. Millions of people dream of becoming exiles at any cost” (96). In the case of the very few for whom this dream comes true, post-colonial and respectively post-communist identity crises are aggravated by the exilic self-renegotiations. As a reaction to this traumatic state, some of the even fewer authors who continue writing after leaving their home countries consciously situate themselves in the borderless but uncertain territory of not-belonging. From this position, most of them express the double love-hate attitude towards both their birth and host countries and re-enact the tragic or ridicule of the exilic condition. Whereas Verdecchia grew up in Canada and showed in *Fronteras Americanas* how he perceived returning for the first time to his home country as a tourist endeavour, Romanian-born and current New York resident Stănescu is a Romanian citizen and only a relatively recent resident in the U.S. In spite of the tough American immigration policies, she was accepted for her academic and literary abilities, which placed her among the foreigners that are not only tolerable, but even necessary: “I came to the U.S. a Fulbright fellow in 2001, and now I am an ‘alien with extraordinary skills in arts,’ meaning I hold an O1 visa for exceptional artists” (Stanescu, “American Visa”). *Waxing West* speaks to Stanescu’s special position, not quite an immigrant but living in exile by choice for an indefinite period, and expresses the double perspective of an exiled author who turns to her home country a North-American gaze, while still retaining her Romanian view of the U.S. Having been produced, read, and published in both Stanescu’s host and native countries, this play appears equally accessible to Romanian and American audiences and speaks to both of them. Consequently, I argue that *Waxing West* is situated in the domain of transnational dramatic literature, which paradoxically reinforces the cultural and political borders, while its mere existence defies them. In this analysis, I am interested, however, in the Romanian perspective *Waxing West*
employs more than in its characteristics as a transnational play. Consistent with this chapter’s main theme, I will analyze Stanescu’s treatment of border-crossings as geographical and psychological markers in the process of the play’s main character, Daniela, to redefine herself as an immigrant\textsuperscript{15} and in the re-enactment of her imagined home country from an exilic point of view. My final purpose is to explore the relationship between actual exile and imagined exile.

\textit{Waxing West} depicts a stereotypical story of a mail-order bride, who fails to achieve the dream to become an American citizen. On one hand, pressured by her mother and most of her acquaintances, the Bucharest-born cosmetologist Daniela comes to New York to marry the American-born Charlie although she has never met him before. On the other hand, Charlie was also pressured by his mother, Mrs. Aronson, as she was the one who wanted a Romanian daughter-in-law and found Daniela using her personal connection. Coincidentally, Mrs. Aronson dies shortly before Daniela’s arrival in New York on an American fiancé visa. After living together for a while, their relationship proves unsuccessful, Charlie does not feel compelled to marry her, Daniela’s American tourist visa expires, and she plans to return home. At the last moment, however, she decides to continue their relationship and implicitly give her American life another chance. Her plan proves impossible as Charlie most likely dies in the 9/11 terrorist attack, as the end of the play suggests. \textit{Waxing West} is structured as a series of flashbacks, which re-enact the events that took place both in Romania and the U.S. and have led to her present status as illegal immigrant. Although most scenes are naturalistic, the play in general is not. Daniela plays the role of a bitter storyteller who directly engages the audience, ironically introducing each re-enactment: “Me… At my dad’s grave. Bellu Cemetery, Bucharest. Smoking like a Hamletian vamp. Hiding in the smoke”
(Stanescu 2004: 23). A similar alienating effect has the ongoing presence on stage of the Romanian dictators “Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, the former Romanian president (…) and Academician Doctor Engineer Comrade Elena Ceaușescu” (Stanescu 2004: 8) as exiled vampires, who “miss home and are nostalgic about going back to Romania and sucking some delicious Romanian blood, the blood of their human life, the blood of their ‘childhood’” (Stanescu 2004: 816). The Ceaușescus watch Daniela’s re-enactment of her story, sarcastically commenting on what is happening to her and, eventually, physically interfere, attacking her while at her father’s grave.

The parodic frame helps Stanescu challenge some of the most common political, social, and cultural clichés that appeared over the last few decades, in the literature by and about exiles. The result is a tragicomedy whose cartoon-like characters lack psychological determination and parody the immigrants’ “need to reassemble an identity out of refractions and discontinuities” (Said 179), the American prejudices against second and third-world citizens, and also the common East-European and specific Romanian infatuation with the U.S. I have previously discussed in the section about God Bless America. The multiple and often contradictory perspectives are intertwined, and result in paradoxical hierarchies, hybrid value systems, and unstable identities, linked together by a sarcastic perspective.

Corresponding to the double status of her author and main character, Waxing West’s parody is twofold. On one hand, America is recreated from a stereotypical Stalinist point of view, alienated by boredom and sexually frustrated. On the other hand, Daniela conforms to the stereotyping perspective of a native North-American audience and appears to accept, in Kristeva’s words, the “multiplying masks and ‘false selves’” (8) that are imposed upon her, in accordance to the official U.S. assimilation policy and the common prejudices towards
immigrants. From the very beginning, she is introducing herself from an American official viewpoint, as if reading her INS file: “I am Popescu Daniela, nationality: Romanian, age: 32, height: 165 centimeters, color of eyes: black, passport number 2670222, sex: female, tourist visa number 555257, expired, accent: strong, hair: long, place of birth: Bucharest, place of death: to-be-announced…” (Stanescu 2004: 3). The character’s attempt to redefine herself according to the American standards structure the play. Her inner journey, however, shows that Daniela is unable to leave behind her East-European identity, although she gradually drifts away from it. Furthermore, she makes tremendous efforts to adapt to the twenty-first century U.S. and develop a new American identity, which seems close, but remains unattainable. As a result of her unsuccessful efforts to reconstruct herself, she starts perceiving herself as the Other in relationship to herself, to Americans, and to her family and the people left behind in Romania.

Whereas in *Fronteras Americanas* Wideload rejects and mocks the Canadian stereotypes of Latino people, Daniela strives to adopt a folkloric/exotic mask, which does not correspond to her genuine identity but to the expectations of her American partner. Consequently, her grotesque efforts ridicule not only the host society’s stereotyping perspective but also the immigrants’ submissiveness. Charlie and his mother’s attitudes speak of “parameters of admissible immigrant placement within the American symbolic configuration” (Marciniak 54). Mrs. Aronson loved Romanians because she “had a Romanian cleaning lady for 20 years” (Stanescu 2004: 6). Thus, she decided to intermediate her son’s marriage to a Romanian woman who is expected to make him happy, fulfilling the stereotypical duties of a domestic worker. In her selection process, she disregarded the mail-order bride’s identity, while perceiving her housekeeping skills as an affordable commodity.
After his mother’s death, Charlie denounces Mrs. Aronson’s old-fashioned values and refuses to marry Daniela and, thus, legalize her status, while taking advantage of her. His attitude mirrors the openly acknowledged American duplicity towards second and third world immigrants, which Marciniak, among others, observes: “The United States eagerly utilizes many Mexican migrant workers as a cheap labour force for gruelling seasonal jobs in fields and sweatshops but conveniently keeps them within the discursive and material space of alienhood” (39). Moreover, Charlie’s refusal to have an East-European wife reveals the more general North American rejection of non-Western immigrants, similar to the Canadians’ reluctance to accept a Latino neighbour, which Wideload indicts in *Fronteras Americanas*. In both cases, however, the host communities perform an act of reversed imagined exile, through which they stereotype immigrants and raise impenetrable legal, social, and psychological borders to keep them segregated. After her arrival in the U.S., Daniela discovers very quickly that Charlie shares this attitude but struggles to live up to his clichéd image, against her own natural tendencies. As Mackey observes of Canada, Americans also regard food as one of the main markers of ethnic identities and expect immigrants to use it as a form of representation and, thus, to make their national dishes accessible for the consumption of the majority. Furthermore, the American borderland is comparable to the Canadian one Wideload mocks in *Fronteras Americanas*. In both, Otherness is translated in terms of class and professional status in addition to ethnicity, as the majority attempts to isolate the aliens within firm social borders. Whereas Wideload does not even attempt to cross into the “nice neighbourhoods,” Charlie assigns Daniela to the stereotypical category of migrant workers, without even enquiring about her previous social status. Accordingly, the American demands that his East-European fiancé cook traditionally
for him, regardless her skills and culinary preferences. If her desperation is genuinely tragic, Daniela’s attempts to fulfill Charlie’s wishes are hopelessly ridiculous:

I hate Romanian food, Charlie, I hate ‘sarmale’ and ‘mamaliga’ and the Romanian traditional smell, and the Romanian exotic flavours, and the Romanian claustrophobic kitchens, but for you Charlie, I stick two cotton pads in my nostrils, I play my energizing tape with applauses, and I do it for you Charlie, I cook for you. (12)

Stanescu uses a similar type of parody in depicting Daniela’s attempt to change her sexual identity. The “silly Thanksgiving-game” (12), in which Charlie takes on the role of the turkey and Daniela the one of the cook, involves the two characters in the mockery of a specifically North American deviant sexual routine, reminiscent of Soviet propagandistic depictions of the U.S.: “I play this silly part, Charlie, and see you coming and shouting out of PLEASURE when I start cutting you with the plastic knife, and I have to say ‘Oh, you're such a good turkey, yum-yum, but I don't yum-yum, and I don't like to yum-yum, and I generally don’t eat meat, so I yum-yum only for your sake’” (Stanescu 2004: 12). After being rejected by Charlie, Daniela attempts to use sex once again to secure an American visa. She tries to change her sexual orientation and become Gloria’s lesbian lover but fails (62). Her various efforts to remodel herself according to the liking of her possible American relatives determine a gradual destructuring of her identity. Daniela traps herself in a carousel of interchangeable masks, accepting to give up completely her sense of self as a price for American residency: “I am your ashtray. Your tomb. Your Disneyland. Your past. Your present. Your future. You can do with me whatever you want. I am here to stay. I am here to endure. I am here to live…” (Stanescu 2004: 59, my italics).
In addition to depicting an immigrant’s personal crisis, Stanescu also gives Daniela the capacity to represent metonymically her fellow citizens whose value scale, self-respect, and identity have been shattered by communism and the subsequent post-communist transition. The playwright chooses to express this in a grotesque style that ranges from playful to violent scenes that bring to mind Dinulescu’s historical parody *A Day*, which I discussed in Chapter 3. As I mentioned, the ghosts/vampires of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu represent their former dictatorship, responsible for the collective alienation and desire to leave Romania. To this purpose, Stanescu parodies in grotesque limericks the couple’s documented contempt of the people they led:

“They nod at each other and start dancing and singing in a vaudeville style.

CEAUS.ESCU

I am a good dictator

Everyone can confess

The tender fine impalements

Relieve you from the stress

ELENA

Report for us dear comrades

Describe your DYING seasons

We need to know exactly

For scientific reasons.” (Stanescu 2004: 35, original upper cases)

The Ceausescu vampires employ the stereotypical communist point of view, “No American husband… (…) No aristocratic houses in my socialist republic!” (Stanescu 2004: 24), and treat her as one of people they strived to depersonalize: “A bunch of worms. No
spines, no brains. We should have kept them in the darkness forever. Send them all to Prison. Starve them to death. Crash all those ugly dirty pipsqueak-thieves, those Romanians” (Stanescu 2004: 34). The torture scene, the “Second Nightmare” (Stanescu 2004: 33), enacts Daniela’s rape by the communist dictators, which recalls the famous Romanian Dracula but also the anti-communist jokes, swearing, and innuendos that expressed the inefficient, and maybe cowardly, anti-communist protest that occurred during their dictatorship:

ELENA: I know! She must be impaled. In her vagina.

CEAUSCE: That’s not impaling, it’s rape.

ELENA: Whatever. Let’s have her impaled and put an end to this.

(Stanescu 2004: 34).

Daniela’s post-communist memories, however, speak of the series of collective attempts to regain self-respect and freedom, which unpredictably followed the 1989 revolution: “‘We work, we don’t think!’ – remember the miners storming into THIS square ten years ago? Shouting and singing in the rhythm of hitting us, the anti-Ilieșcu protesters. What a joke. That communist ‘with a human-face’ elected after the revolution” (Stanescu 2004: 38). During the uprising Stanescu recalls, thousands of miners came to Bucharest to “protect” the government, destroying the offices of the Opposition parties and violently attacking anyone who looked like a protesters or an intellectual, such as men with beards. The event is considered by many analysts as one of the government’s most violent attempts to preserve the communist regime in Romania. Among others, Vladimir Tismaneanu and Matei Calinescu describe the two days when “Bucharest lived under terror, with miners’ squads patrolling the city, ransacking the headquarters of independent parties, groups and newspapers, and molesting all those who have even appeared to have been engaged in anti-
NSF\textsuperscript{20} activities” (57). Their conclusion emphasizes the subsequent international perception of Romania as a country “unable to get rid of its despotic heritage” followed by a new stage of isolation,” and thus once again “dramatically isolated, both in the West and in the East” (57). Romanians’ freedom is now restricted from the outside, as the democratic world appears to reject the troubled post-communist country and exile it within its borders. Whereas communism closed the borders to protect its dictatorial powers, after a first stage of massive immigration to the West, post-communism isolates people through Romania’s bad international reputation and internal poverty, i.e. the visa system and the financial incapacity to travel abroad, as I have explained at the beginning of this chapter. Subsequently, the ordinary citizens develop even more conflicting attitudes towards their national identity and their collective inferiority complex and the need to escape is aggravated. As “Verdecchia” and Wideload in Toronto, Daniela is a victim of Western stereotypes in New York. Whereas the Canadian characters actively and ironically struggle to liberate themselves, the Romanian immigrant perpetuates the obedience induced by the communist dictatorship and strives to adapt to the images projected onto her. The multiple definitions of self she pursues further alienate her and the intersection of several political, social, and psychological borders transform her into a victim. In her case, the North-American cosmopolitan borderland becomes similar to a \textit{no-man’s land}, where she desperately searches for a place and a way to belong.

\textbf{5.8. Real and Imaginary Border Crossings}

In the short concluding section of this chapter, I will look at all four plays discussed in this chapter in the attempt to emphasize the similarities and differences in their depiction
of the border crossings and borderlands as active factors in assuming and overcoming national identity crises through the employment of imagined exile as a coping strategy. Each author’s treatment of national geographies and also of the characters’ physical and psychological journey is, however, different, corresponding to the specific aspect of reality they mirror and to the personal writing style. As I showed, *Bordertown Café* proposes a generational perspective of the American-Canadian dichotomy. In the everyday reality of Rebar’s characters, crossing the border between the two countries has become a frequent event, sometimes feared, most of the time ignored. Actually, the border is so close to their home that when Maxine is intimidated by her Canadian mother-in-law and her china tea service, she literally walks across it, trying to go back to the U.S. (60). However, she chooses to remain in Canada, although always bickering about the disadvantages of the life here and the Americans’ superiority. In the next generation, Marlene has two opposite attitudes towards the nearby border. As a young woman, she felt it natural to leave for the U.S. following the man she had fallen in love with, although she returns to Canada when the marriage fails. As a mother, however, she is intimidated by Jimmy, “the one bin carted all over the western part o’ the United States? Knows Texas like the back’ his hand” (Rebar 44). In the third generation, her son comes to integrate the border as part of his identity and to accept his belonging to the more traditional but also more ambiguous Canadian borderland, similar to “Verdecchia” in *Fronteras Americanas*.

The two English-Canadian playwrights stage, however, opposite journeys for their characters: an inner journey, in Jimmy’s case, and a one-time long delayed actual trip, in “Verdecchia’s” case. In contrast to Rebar’s older generations who relate to border crossings as to mating rituals, Jimmy and “Verdecchia” live them as initiation rituals, unrelated to
getting married and starting a family. Jimmy greatly enjoys his trips in the U.S. with his father, “these hauls are the highlight of my life,” which give him self-confidence, “How many of my friends get to ride in a truck higher’n any ole building we got around here?” (Rebar 33), and eventually the chance to choose where and how he wants to live his life. Family and teenage issues aside, his situation also recalls a choice that many of his fellow citizens can make, “the archetypal Canadian dilemma: stay home in Canada with its all obvious flaws or join the brain drain, the talent drain south to the Land of Opportunity” (Wasserman 27). When Don is late to pick him up, waiting forces Jimmy into an inner journey, at the end of which he becomes more mature and asserts himself in front of his father: “I bin waitin’, I had to—to miss hockey, I couldn’t do chores for fear of missin’ you, and it turns out you weren’t even gonna phone to let a guy know? When I got a crop to get off? That wasn’t fair, Dad” (Rebar 65). Contrary to his previous boyish eagerness to join his father, teenage Jimmy declines the offer to move to the U.S., “I’m thinkin’ that maybe I’ll take a pass on movin’ down there actually” (Rebar 65), in favour of a more traditional lifestyle, “I can’t be takin’ off on no haul, I got a crop to get off” (Rebar 33). He also settles for being a Canadian, although, like most of his fellow citizens, he is not very proud of what that means: “it’s just too late, the damage is done, I’ve already grown up. Canadian” (Rebar 51). Life within a family that embodies a Canadian-American borderland helps him understand and accept his identity.

Whereas an inner journey leads Jimmy to his self-discovery, imaginary crossings of the border have disastrous consequences in *God Bless America*. Among the delusional trips to the U.S. of several characters, Domnica’s excursion concentrates the play’s message in an absurdist metaphor. Although she represents the Romanian typical mother and wife who has
never wanted to leave the country, the thought that her son might be in America is so intense that it makes her believe that she has gained direct access there. In other words, Domnica describes how she simply walked into a thirteenth century tomb and came out on the other side of the planet in the U.S. Although a bit long, I decided to translate and reproduce the entire tragicomic account of her imaginary trip by a friend to whom she has confessed. I find this story representative of the Romanian post-communist identity crisis and collective appropriation of the American Dream, which eventually makes material achievements appear more important than traditional values. In the excerpt below, Dominica mistakes a bag of ground meat, a much-desired item during communism, for Marius’s hypothetical child:

…she told me that she lived the most beautiful night of her life, she had been in America. (…) She showed me, I went to America through here! I saw with my own eyes two sewers going out from the crypt’s wall, and your mom left through one of them to America. She crawled, but not for long. The sewer is vertical, we’re at one pole and they, the Americans, are at the opposite one. Your mom rather fell like a garbage bag down the chute in our building, she fell from us to them, and she came out in the street at the other end, a lot of people, cars, dazzling lights… (…) She went into a grocery store. She found Marius there who was looking at the shelves full of food and pulled his hand. God forgive me for what I’ll say now! “Marius, my sweetheart, you have a baby-boy!” And your mom took the meat bag from him and started cuddling it: “Hushaby baby! Hushaby baby!” And she added: “Marius, give me your baby to raise him ’cause you’re too busy with your work!” She didn’t wait for the answer and ran with the ground meat bag through the other sewer. It was easy
for her to come back because earth is continuously revolving and she fell back here.

(Zografi 138-139)

In addition to the character’s personal reasons, Domnica’s withdrawal into her American delusion may also be perceived as the extreme result of a waiting period that started after the Second World War, when Romanians discovered themselves incarcerated in their own country under the guardianship of local communists and the Soviet army. If this state was difficult for the entire population, living near the border acted as a permanent reminder of the freedom beyond reach, even more intense when the sea physically embodied it. Whereas the Bordertown Café as a commercial establishment naturally strives to take advantage of its position as a rest stop on the highway in between two countries, the Hermeneanuus discover an expected benefit of their unfortunate position on the seashore. Taking advantage of the collective obsession, they sell tickets to the crowd willing to watch the sea from their roof. This unusual business cynically recalls the communist period when “the external mirage was (...) vigorous, the Romanians longing for the Western paradise of the consumer's life” (Cesereanu 201). As Hermeneanu remembers, the slimmest chance to take a glimpse at the Other was enough to make the entire population hysterical “in 1975 when an asshole spread the rumour that Turkey could be seen from the roof on clear days. The entire city climbed on the roof” (Zografi 101). In the post-communist present, however, the crowd’s reaction is not much different. When over one hundred warships appear on the Black Sea coast, everybody takes them as an American battle-fleet and celebrates the final reward of a sixty-year wait: “Shouting and chanting: ‘Americans are here! ‘Americans are here!’” (101). The enthusiasm is enormous and everybody rushes onto the roof to watch: “Any more people, the roof would’ve caved in!” (110). The disappointment that follows the
news that it is the Russian fleet that arrived is also overwhelming. Through the confusion of
the Russian warships to American ones, Barbu ironically suggests the similarities between
the world powers’ treatment of Romania: “The seventh fleet[21], which arrived in our waters
wasn’t American, it was the Russian Black Sea Fleet[22]! (…) Some blind guy mistook the
Russian flag for the American one. The idiot didn’t know that the Soviets changed their flag
for God’s sake!” (Barbu 109). This idea is common in the post-communist historical
analyses[23], confirming retroactively the popular belief in “the Yalta conspiracy (1945) of the
three iron men of the world at that time (Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt), when the latter two,
the Englishman and the American, betrayed Romania, offering it as a war trophy to Stalin”
(Cesereanu 184). On a side note, let me note the similarities of the subaltern nations’
essentialist perspectives. From the viewpoint of Central and Latin Americans, Verdecchia
identifies Canada and the U.S. as the rich Western North America, while Barbu stresses the
similarities between Americans and Russians from the perspective of a former communist
country.

The comparison of the characters’ development leads to interesting observations
regarding the ways in which identity crises might be overcome. Contrary to Rebar and Barbu
who re-enact in their plays inner journeys and respectively imaginary meetings with other
people, “Verdecchia’s” re-definition is the result of an actual trip. For fifteen years, he
limited his contact with his birth country to second-hand information, “newspapers, novels
and every Amnesty International report,” and to meeting people coming from there, such as
“former Montonero and Tupamaro guerrillas” (37). When he finally decides to go back
home, the horizontal trip across physical borders has become imbued with the existential
value of a vertical trip across memory lanes and of a rite of passage: “I Am Going Home—
all will be resolved, dissolved, revealed, I will claim my place in the universe when I go Home” (Verdecchia 36). When he arrives in Santiago, however, “Verdecchia” behaves more like a tourist than like a returning Prodigal Latino Son. He is overwhelmed by the discrepancy between the clichés he was fed and reality, as he cannot help but compare his hotel’s description in a tourist guide to its location in a neighbourhood where crimes are ordinary: “I check into the Hotel de Don Tito, listed in page 302 of your Fodor’s as a moderate, small hotel with six suites, eight twins, eight singles, bar, homey atmosphere […] in front of the moderate and homey Hotel de Don Tito, there on the road, directly below my window, there a man in a suit, his shirt soaked an impossible red” (38). Starting with his feeling uncomfortable and eventually sick, “Verdecchia” gradually discovers that he does not belong to this birth country anymore: “I just want to go home—but I’m already there—are n’t I” (50). The journey to Latin America unexpectedly aggravates his feeling uprooted, a victim of simultaneous and opposite allegiances: “All sides of the border have claimed and rejected me” (51). This experience attests to the existence of hybrid identities, whose formation Newman explains as the result and the facilitator of borderlands: “the person in transit from one place or group to another undergoes a process of acclimatization and acculturation as he/she moves through the zone of transition, so that the shock of meeting the ‘other’ is not as great as he/she feared” (151). As a multicultural post-colonial society, Canada acts upon its citizens like a borderland, “a place of contact where difference is diluted and reconstructed as a sort of borderland hybridity” (Newman 151), which is more and more often accepted as the country’s non-traditional but actual national identity. As cultural re-enactment, Fronteras Americanas attests to its existence.
His alien condition in his birth culture determines “Verdecchia” to accept that coexisting with the Other and perceiving himself as the Other on a daily basis has changed him. Eventually, he recognizes his natural belonging to Canada, which he imagines as a: “this is where I make the most sense, in this Noah’s ark of a nation” (73), to whose borderland condition he has actually adapted. The play’s optimistic acceptance of the individual and collective hybridity and the character’s solution to his identity crisis express what New identifies as a specifically Canadian “Walking the Border” condition, “a way of demonstrating that ‘walking the line’ is not a preliminary activity that leads up to a fixed fence but an ongoing action, a working social premise expressing a [Canadian] culture held in common, an act of faith in the future, a cast in mind” (68). As Nothof explains, “this erosion of frontiers and borders is both a personal and political condition” (9).

Beyond his specifically Canadian message, *Fronteras Americanas* also pleads for the more general perception of borders as bridges instead of barriers, as “Verdecchia” asserts a newly discovered extraterritorial identity and imagines himself as a link of peoples: “I’m not in Canada; I’m not in Argentina. I’m on the Border. I am Home. […] I am the Pan-American Highway!” (Verdecchia 74). As such, the play not only re-enacts the identity crisis of a hyphenated Canadian but also proves the efficiency of imagined exile to bring post-colonial individuals together in “a hybrid cultural space” (Bhabha 11) beyond national borders and facilitate their search for political and social agency. *Fronteras Americanas*’ representation of difference is not the attempt to re-inscribe a minority’s pre-existing ethnic or cultural traits but, as Bhabha explains in the cases of other minorities in the U.S. and U.K., “a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (3).
In contrast, opposing stereotypical expectations enforced upon her force Daniela outside all communities. Whereas Rebar and Barbu’s characters hopelessly wait for the arrival of the Americans, Stanescu’s characters are luckier. Mrs. Aronson actually arrives, looking for a bride for her son, and is regarded as the saviour of Daniela and eventually the entire family: “Your sister has the chance to marry an American. An American BUSINESSMAN. Mrs Aronson’s son. Charlie! Rich, decent, well-educated. American! The luck-rain has come down over Daniela. She is going to go to America and take all of us there!” (Stanescu 2004: 7). Elvis, Daniela’s brother, highlights the cynicism of the transaction the two mothers agree upon: “Just don’t sell Dani for less than a VCR, a DVD player and a video camera!” (Stanescu 2004: 8).

The interaction between the Romanian mail-order bride and his future American family belongs, however, to the type of borderland, which reinforces the ethnic, social, and cultural barriers. Determined by the long-term communist-Western dichotomy and even more so by the Americans’ superiority complex, Charlie’s meeting with Daniela gives a concrete form to the inherited animosity and dislike and further nurtures them. As Newman states, “The experience of meeting the ‘other’ for the first-time, especially after long periods of fear, suspicion and distrust, can in some cases heighten the mutual feelings of animosity” (151). Forced into the position of the inferior Other, Daniela decides to go back “To Romania. Back home” (Stanescu 2004: 44) but cannot do so. Assuming her mother’s point of view, she perceives her return as a major failure: “I’m not sure of this going back … Mom will have a heart attack… she tells every neighbour and his uncle … everyone in the elevator, in the peasants market, all the saleswomen in the supermarket know how HAPPY I am with my American husband…” (Stanescu 2004: 56). Furthermore, her return would deny
her family the opportunity to imagine themselves following her and living happily in the U.S. ever after. As in *God Bless America*, in *Waxing West* the post-communist imagined exile does not consist of imagining the national community as alienated not only at home but also abroad, “*elsewhere* versus the origin, and even *nowhere* versus the roots” (Kristeva 29) and preferably in the U.S.

In all four plays I discussed in this chapter, the main characters benefit from the actual freedom to travel, previously denied by communism, and by the life in “a hybrid cultural space” (Bhabha 11), disregarded by colonialism. They challenge political and social borderlines and try to re-evaluate themselves as a part of a collective, from the family ones to the national communities, only to discover that, as Newman concludes, “the transformation of the borderland into a space of transition cannot be taken as given just because the borders have undergone a process of physical opening” (152). Overcoming inclusion/exclusion stereotypes and accepting the borderland condition comes with unexpected challenges and sacrifices. During the self-discovery process, as Verdecchia reminds us, the feeling of being lost is one of the most common traits: “I’m lost and trying to figure out where I took the wrong turn… and I suppose you must be lost too or else you wouldn’t have ended up here, tonight. I suspect we got lost while crossing the border” (20). From this alienating position, however, the one’s most obvious choice is to benefit from the proximity of geographical, cultural, and/or psychological borders because “[t]he presence of margins […] gives a culture choices” (New 27), as well as an individual.

Whereas in the 1980s *Bordertown Café* Jimmy gives up on his American cowboy-like father and accepts his Canadian identity, in the 1990s *Fronteras Americanas*’s “Verdecchia” deconstructs this concept and reclaims himself from a larger multicultural and
borderless America. In early 1990s Romania, Remus still finds important to clear his name and be recognized as Romanian, while most of *God Bless America*’s other characters search for actual or delusional ways to become Americans. Arrived in the U.S. at the beginning of the twenty first century, *Waxing West*’s Daniela loses her identity and eventually accepts the underground existence of an illegal immigrant. Paradoxically, when confronted with physical and/or psychological conventional borders, both post-colonial and post-communist dramatic characters perceive themselves as belonging to and/or being a borderland. Verdecchia, however, is also the only one who celebrates this discovery. According to him, the new geographies of identity are centred not circumscribed by borders: “We can go forward. Towards the centre, towards the border” (Verdecchia 78). This new perspective deconstructs the *us/them, inside/outside, and majority/minority* binaries through which difference is traditionally constructed. Subsequently, political borders, bureaucratic criteria, and the physical bonds of the self become obsolete because “the precise coordinates of the spirit, of the psyche, of memory” (Verdecchia 51) cannot be mapped out. A view of the world as an interstitial passage and in-between space becomes possible and allows for “the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 5).

As a *borderland* and *interval of resonance*, the individual remains a “reformed, recognizable *Other*” (Bhabha 125), “both and neither” (Naficy 13), and eventually learns to accept him/herself as “not-neither” (Verdecchia 51) and to live on “No side” (Rebar 53) of traditional borders. By asserting this new perspective of identity, the playwright actually manages to change imagined exile from a negative connector of post-colonial and post-
communist people into a positive link of a global borderland in which we are all lost and at home at the same time.

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NOTES

1 The bridge is advertised as “the smallest International Bridge in the world” at <www.1000islandsinfo.com/pictures.htm>. A picture is posted online.


3 Newman mentions which studies assert each perspective but I considered the long lists of references extraneous for the purpose of this study. Please refer to his article for exact details.

4 Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) was one the foremost Romanian historians. He was executed by the Nazi Romanian Party.

5 Dr. Gheorghe I. Bratianu (1898-1953) was a professor of world history at the universities in Iasi and Bucharest, a member of the Romanian Academy, and the director of the “Nicolae Iorga” World History Institute.

6 Iorga’s study has the title: *The Right to Be of Small States* (Bucharest: 1915).

7 One of the most popular puns during communism goes like his: “Romania is a very beautiful country. It’s such a pity it’s inhabited!”

8 Many texts discuss Romania’s MFN status, the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, and the human rights abuses during communism, including Constatiniu’s study *An Honest History of the Romanian People* (Univers Enciclopedic 2002); the report *Human Rights Issues in United States Relations with Romania and Czechoslovakia* (U.S. Senate Committee for Foreign Relations 1983); and the *Revolt Against Silence: The State of Human Rights in Romania* report (U.S. Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe 1989).

9 According to the 1989 *Revolt Against Silence* report, “Despite a 1985 agreement between Romanian and American diplomatic representatives, according to which Romanian would-be emigrants would not be stripped of their jobs, housing, and a range of social benefits, authorities continue to punish those who seek to leave. Prospective emigrants often still find themselves demoted in their jobs, driven from their houses, and unable to obtain medical and other services” (24).
According to Telegraph.co.uk, “More than 550,000 Romanians, or 15 per cent of the immigrant population, have arrived in Italy since 2002. Walter Veltroni, the Rome mayor, has claimed that 75 per cent of all crimes in the capital this year have been carried out by Romanians.” In 2007, although Romania has become a EU member, the death a 47-year-old Italian woman, allegedly by a Romanian man, determines the Italian government to send home Romanian workers and illegal immigrants (Moore).

In The Duellist, for example, Marian Popescu identifies the metonymical representation of the collective desire to flee Romania as “an extraordinary image: the apartment building starts moving towards West” (Barbu 10), while the main character’s father was shot during an illegal attempt to cross the border during communism.

In this paper, I use “Verdecchia,” in quotation marks, to distinguish the namesake fictional character from the playwright himself.

The first draft of Waxing West was written in Janet Neipris’s class at NYU, Dramatic Writing Department and produced as part of the Festival of New Works, Goldberg Theatre, NYU in 2003. The second draft of Waxing West was developed and performed at Lark Play Development Center, New York in 2004 and 2006, respectively. The version of Waxing West, which I analyze in this paper, is a later draft, produced by East Coast Artists at La MaMa Theatre, in April 2007. The play was awarded the 2007 New York Innovative Theatre Award for Outstanding Full-length Script. In Romania, Waxing West was produced by Teatrul Imposibil (The Impossible Theatre) and National Theatre Cluj, in 2005; it was published in Saviana Stanescu, Waxing West, translated by Eugen Wohl (Teatrul Imposibil 2004).

The preliminary version of this paper was as a contribution to the subgroup “American Theatre in Broken English” of the 2006 ASTR seminar “Exile and America,” organized by Yana Meerzon and Silvija Jestrovic. A revised version was published Performance, Exile and ‘America’, Yana Meerzon and Silvija Jestrovic, editors (Palgrave Macmillan 2009). In the latter version, I explore Stanescu’s plays as part of transnational drama, i.e. a body of works by displaced writers who write back to their home countries, addressing their problems and sometimes even challenging the political regime. They write their works in the language of their adoptive countries but target audiences from both countries.

In Waxing West, characters have different resident statuses, which range from (former) war refugees to illegal residents. On one hand, as they voluntarily live in the U.S., mostly determined by economic reasons, and are legally allowed to return to their native post-communist countries, each of Stanescu’s characters can be qualified as an immigrant, i.e. “A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another” (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language). On the other hand, they relate to their situation as to “a condition of terminal loss” (Said 173) and perceive themselves as living in exile, a term which traditionally means “Enforced removal from one's native country” ("Exile").
All the page numbers refer to the electronic copy, which Stanescu emailed to me in May 2006.

Hutcheon defines parody as “repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity” (1988: 26). Furthermore, she explains that postmodern parodic texts “foreground the historical, social, ideological contexts in which they have existed and continue to exist” (Hutcheon 1988: 24-25). I find this perspective especially relevant in the case of post-colonial and post-communist parodies whose political agendas are founded on and also determine the re-examination of their relations to reality.

In their article “The 1989 Revolution and Romania’s Future,” Matei Calinescu and Vladimir Tismaneanu make a short political biography of Ion Iliescu, the first Romanian president elected after 1989, emphasizing his communist beliefs (51-52).


NSF, the National Salvation Front, is the first political organization that emerged during the 1989 revolution as “the presumed exponent of the nation’s anti-totalitarian sentiments” (Calinescu and Tismaneanu 47-48), containing, in fact, some of the former communist leaders.

The actual United States Seventh Fleet has been active in parts of the world far away from Romania: “The U.S. Seventh Fleet was established on March 15, 1943 when the Southwest Pacific Force was renamed. Today it is the largest forward-deployed U.S. fleet and its area of responsibility includes the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans” (“History of Seventh Fleet”).

The Russian Black Sea Fleet was established in 1870. According to the Federation of American Scientists, “In 1995, the fleet reportedly had approximately 48,000 naval and marine personnel, 14 submarines, 31 surface ships, 43 patrol and coastal ships, 125 combat aircraft, and 85 helicopters” (“Black Sea Fleet (BSF)”).

In his book A History of Romanians, Bulei employs a similar perspective. When discussing the peace treatise signed at the end of the Second World War, he states “Romania has been abandoned by the Westerners in Stalin’s hands” (Bulei 156).
1. On How My Job Search Informed My Dissertation

For many years now, I have startled many colleagues and even friends with the unusual topic of this study – a comparison of the expressions of English Canadian and Romanian identities and identity crises in a number of plays written between 1978 and 2006. To this day, the idea of comparing a post-colonial G8 country and a rather poor ex-communist country raises suspicion if not the open desire to convince me that such an attempt is simply unreasonable. My research eventually helped me argue the intuition I once had as a recent landed-immigrant and still believed in, as a Romanian-Canadian with two citizenships and passports. However, the discomfort that I was the only one to find the similarities between my two countries’ identity projects and crises obvious still lingered. In the summer of 2008, my job search brought me to Guelph University, where I was interviewed for a limited-term appointment. I was not offered the position but the experience unpredictably relieved the anxiety I had been experiencing in my lonely long-term research.

Before going to Guelph, I had read as much as I could about the department and my potential colleagues and especially about the ones I expected to meet during the interview, starting with Professor Mark Fortier, the Director of the School of English and Theatre Studies, who had contacted me. That is how I discovered his essay “Adapting Shakespeare (in Canada)”, which was unlikely to have otherwise come to my attention, as it was obviously far removed from the topic of this dissertation, my main project at the time. To clarify his perspective on Canadian national identity and, subsequently, on its role in adapting Shakespeare, Fortier uses the picture on Slavoj Žižek’s book cover of *Tarrying with the Negative* and the latter’s brief comments on it, which finally bring me to the reason for telling this story. Žižek’s cover
shows a photograph of the Romanian flag with a round hole in the middle, as it appeared
during the 1989 anti-communist revolution when the rebels cut out the communist emblem
of the country. While this image was familiar to me, Fortier’s remark took me by surprise:
“In the photograph […] we see, in black and white, two dark vertical strips on either side of a
white central section missing its centre. If one did not know better, one could think it is a
Canadian flag with its maple leaf missing” (Fortier 340). In addition to the physical
resemblance, Fortier argues symbolic similarities, using some of Žižek’s concepts.

Žižek excitedly describes “the national flag with the red star, the Communist symbol,
cut out, so that instead of the symbol standing for the organizing principle of the national life,
there was nothing but a hole in its center” (1). Accordingly, he sees the mutilated national
flag as a metaphor of the absence of a “reigning Master-Signifier” (2) and, thus, of the
liminal character of the rupture from a political system, in general, and of the Romanians’
departure from communism, in particular: “It is difficult to imagine a more salient index of
the ‘open’ character of a historical situation ‘in its becoming,’ as Kierkegaard would have
put it, of that intermediate phase when the former Master-Signifier, although it has already
lost the hegemonical power, has not yet been replaced by the new one” (1).

On a personal level, as one of the many Romanians who, in December of 1989,
celebrated freedom and the brief illusion that anything was possible, I recognized my own
reactions at the time in Žižek’s explanations: “the masses who poured into the streets of
Bucharest ‘experienced’ the situation as ‘open’, […] they participated in the unique
intermediate state of passage from one discourse (social link) to another, when, for a brief,
passing moment, the hole in the big Other, the symbolic order became visible” (1). On a
collective level, testimonies from the 1990s attest to many Romanians’ consciousness of
missing the Other and needing to replace it (Verdery 1996: 94). Although his conclusions are appropriate, Žižek’s reading paradoxically relies on an inaccurate description. The symbol cut off the flag was not the communist symbol, a singular red star, as he assumes, but the national emblem, “stema”, a rather complicated design, consisting of several symbols of the Romanian natural resources and landscape, completed by a shiny sun, the symbol of the projected bright future, and also including a red star, the symbol of communism.

The theoretical perspective that structures this doctoral dissertation originates in the discrepancy between Žižek’s essentialist assumption that an anti-communist popular movement excised a communist symbol and the factual reality that the revolutionary masses discarded a metonymic symbol of their country. Thus, I read *the hole in the flag* not only as the result and the symbol of eliminating the political principle that Žižek recognizes, but also of collectively denying the official definition of the nation, which dominated the popular imaginary for more than five decades. In December 1989, Romania became not only a country that temporarily lost its political organizing principle, but a nation that lost its self-image. Long after tailors mended the flag and politicians formally adopted another national emblem, the collective mirror still reflected back to the people *the hole in the flag*. As I explained in Chapter 4, the temporary ideological and identity voids generate a superabundance of identity-projects and narratives that compete to fill it. Thus, whereas an ideological project soon re-appropriates and homogenizes Romania’s official metanarrative in its transition to democracy and NATO and EU memberships, the national identity crisis outlasts the political liminal stage.

Paradoxically, my clarifications do not contradict Fortier’s parallel between the Canadian and Romanian national flags and identity projects but rather strengthen it. In spite
of using Žižek’s inaccurate description as his starting point, Fortier subsequently explores the absence of a master signifier and not of an ideological principle, which the presumably missing communist star would have represented. Accordingly, he argues that, as a metaphor of “the master signifier [which] has been lost and not yet replaced” (Fortier 340), the Romanian revolutionary flag also “speaks to a Canadian sense of identity, or its lack” (Fortier 340). According to him, the red maple leaf, the piece to be cut off in the case of a hollowed-out Canadian flag, is a noumenal representation of “something unrepresentable in essence: nation, state, nationality” (Fortier 340). It is also a perpetual reminder of the impossibility of creating a phenomenal representation of the Canadian people. As Fortier recalls, the parliament adopted the current design after the rejection of a more phenomenal representation, which had “blue edges, representing the ocean, and three maple leaves, representing English, French, and other Canadians” (Fortier 341). Consequently, the current red maple leaf on the national flag stands for “an indefinite number of maple leaves” that would be necessary to represent “the complexity of Canadian identity as a multicultural, multidimensional phenomenon” (Fortier 341). Thus, its hypothetical removal would physically express “the sublime double unrepresentability of Canada, as both noumenon and phenomenon” (Fortier 341), which Fortier eventually argues. From this perspective, the abrupt Romanian denial of the communist master signifier in 1989 and the Canadian long-term denial of the imperial one could be similarly represented by a national flag with a hole in it.

Although brief, Fortier’s remarks have brought me not only the relief that the similarities of Canadian and Romanian identity projects and their actual or possible metaphoric expressions have become apparent to someone else, but also revealed to me
another perspective that indirectly validated my comparison as adequate. Given the ephemeral existence of the Romanian flag with a hole in it and of the political reality it represented, Fortier inevitably establishes only a short-lived and asymmetrical similarity between the two countries’ master signifiers and identity projects, the Romanian one during the anti-communist revolution and, respectively, the more general Canadian one. However, my diachronic exploration of post-colonialism and respectively post-communism has helped me uncover an incomplete sense of self and a collective identity crisis that precede and outlive 1989 in each country. As second-world countries, subaltern nations, small cultures, neighbours of the most important world powers, and former colonies, both Canada and Romania seem destined to live on the brink of becoming. As Žižek explains, quoting Lacan, during transitional periods, the theoretical discourse of the critical intellectuals aims “precisely to ‘produce’ the Master-Signifier, that is to say, to render visible its ‘produced,’ artificial, contingent character” (2). In my view, before and even after the political void has been officially filled and the hole in the flag has once again become invisible, post-colonial and post-communist playwrights continue the intellectuals and artists’ self-appointed mission. Through their works, imagined exile compensates for the absent social link, temporarily uniting people within their actively/NESSEARILY re-imagined national communities.

2. A Brief Review of My Argument

This study explores aspects of the national identity in English Canada and Romania and their expression in a number of plays, aiming to prove that the post-colonial and respectively post-communist transition from a centrifugal definition of the nation to a
centripetal one generates comparable identity crises, whose dramatic re-enactment reflects and enables similar strategies to overcome it. Among them, imagined exile became a constitutive element of national identity, SHADOWING/IN PARALLEL TO to more traditional elements, such as the shared past, territory, and community. For the purpose of this study, I defined imagined exile as the process of imagining one’s national community as a collective of individuals who share similar identity crises and alienation. Temporarily, this negative connection compensates for the coexistence of several competing definitions of the nation, which actually determine the identity crisis in each country. The close reading of ten plays revealed similarities and differences of the English Canadian and Romanian individual and collective self-defining strategies, as well as of the processes that led to the transformation of inner and/or actual exile into imagined exile. By embodying and most of all by challenging the collective identity crisis and alienation, live and imagined theatre determines their acknowledgement and, consequently, enables its spectators’ emotional and intellectual bond and, thus, the everyday re-imagining of the national community.

In both countries, re-enacting the past from post-colonial and respectively post-communist perspectives played a major role in the search for new identities. As Filewod writes, playwrights who choose national history as their subject naturally become “nation-builders” (1995: 209) especially in a country such as Canada that is “what the artists show it to be.” Whereas history “must be able to unfold a glorious past, a golden age of saints and heroes, to give meaning to its promise of restoration and dignity” (Smith 1991: 161) in order to be able to fulfil its traditional function in the national identity-project, the relationship to the past in former settler-colonies and respectively communist countries raises different problems. Post-colonial English Canadian playwrights have to overcome not only the
disinterest in the country’s past, which is generally dismissed as “boring” and lacking “revolutionary myths and heroic origins” (Swainson 21), but also its stereotypical account as either the successful or the embarrassing period of British and French colonization. Similarly, post-communist Romanian playwrights that address national history have to counteract the public mistrust in it because of its overuse and falsification by the communist propaganda. As the colonial and respectively communist past is officially ignored until the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first, the plays I discussed in this study reflect two main tendencies in English Canadian and Romanian drama with historical subjects that occur in each country’s specific social and political contexts.

1837: The Farmers’ Revolt and A Cold represent the playwrights’ contribution to the anti-colonial and respectively anti-communist discourse by setting examples of bravery and asserting the will to independence as one of the collective characteristics of the nation. Furthermore, the parallels drawn between the people’s fictional and the real-life alienation in the wake of foreign and local colonization help the audiences and readers recognize that they share this state among themselves and, thus, enable imagined exile as a possible connector of the national community. In contrast, Sir John, Eh! and A Day from the Life of Nicolae Ceausescu embody questionable acts from the two countries’ colonial and communist past. By ironically portraying John A. Macdonald and some of his political deeds, Garrard re-enacts the documented fact that the country “was created by straightforward and pragmatic politicians whose strength lay in negotiation and compromise” (Swainson 21) but also in trickery and corruption. Learning about the nineteenth century Canada, young Courtney has a chance to understand and accept herself and her country. From Dinulescu’s perspective, Romanians also need to look back and admit to the falsification of the country’s past, the
intellectuals’ complicity, and the masses’ obedience. The play’s main purpose is to reveal and indict the collective mentality of a people “under siege” (Lefter 25), which has to be overcome in the process of defining the post-communist identity. Although I did not pursue this line of analysis in my dissertation, I will briefly comment on these historical plays’ double position within/without the official colonial and respectively communist discourses. According to Slemon, “the illusion of a stable self/other, here/there binary division” (106) is absent in second world countries and the white Commonwealth and, in my view, the ex-communist. As a consequence, the “Second-World writer, the Second-World text … have always been complicit in colonialism’s territorial appropriation of land, and voice, and agency” (106), which they openly or tacitly accepted and promoted in their works. This attitude is also perpetuated in some of the sites of contestation and reinvention, which direct the post-colonial and post-communist discourse at a power structure that simultaneously belongs to the Other and the self. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, the early nationalist texts of settler colonies “tend to ignore the internal racial divisions on which their cultures have been founded” (2001: 2). The brief presence of only one stereotypical Aboriginal character and the play’s complete ignorance of First Nations’ rights to the land disputed by the farmers and the Family Compact support this statement. In other words, the fictional Upper Canadian farmers and the real life twentieth-century Passe Muraille collective exhibit what Ashcroft et al identified as the “ambiguous positions of both colonized and colonizers” (1989: 22). Although in a different way, A Cold can be also considered a text that is simultaneously complicit and subversive. In spite of considering him one of the major non-propagandistic playwrights during communism, Marian Popescu, for example, raises the issue of Sorescu’s personal relationship with Ceausescu: “when the writer launches his
‘historical’ plays (*A Cold, The Third Pole*), he faces difficulties, but his access to Ceausescu was enough to solve his problems most of the time” (2004:123). Opposing the communist regime with the approval of its General Secretary, Sorescu’s historical parodies might have actually provided a safety valve, deliberately encouraged by the regime or simply fuelling Ceausescu’s nationalistic agenda, a strategy to draw away from Moscow in order to avoid the liberalization measures U.S.SR implemented after Stalin’s death. Similarly, *Sir John, Eh!* ignores the imperialistic character of Macdonald’s policies, while *A Day from the Life of Nicolae Ceausescu* only depicts the common people as brainwashed masses, which passively obey the secret police and participate in the construction of Ceausescu’s cult of personality. In all four historical plays, however, their ambiguous and/or biased character does not annihilate the decolonising re-appropriation of the past, which I discussed in this study.

After discussing the depiction of national identity in historical plays, I decided to explore the same topic in plays that embodied the post-colonial and post-communist transitions. The plays with contemporary subjects I chose to discuss in this study are informed by the collective identity crises, which they re-enact and sometimes even directly address. Furthermore, they depict the present in a magic realist style and show how the consciousness of a shared estrangement becomes a strong, though negative connector of national communities. The analysis of Thompson’s *Sled* and Zografi’s *The Future* focuses on how individuals and communities cope with problems specific to each country, while dealing with the more general needs for love, friendship, and roots. *Sled* re-enacts the dramas of some families living in a multicultural neighbourhood in Toronto, whose members embody inner and social conflicts determined by colonization - for the half-Cree Evangeline, early settlement - for Irish Annie, biculturalism - for the French-English Jack, immigration - for
Joe and his Italian family, but who also experience the tragic consequences of a kidnapping, a shooting accident, a crime, and a hidden paternity, among others. *The Future* also takes place in a neighbourhood but emphasizes people’s lowliness and confusion after the disappearance of the patriarchal communist state, paralleled by social and economic problems determined by the transition to democracy and market economy. The play portrays a society where businessmen and politicians export the image of the poor and disabled citizens in exchange for Western money and attention, common thieves steal from churches, crooks embezzle charity money, while intellectuals isolate themselves in imaginary worlds. At the same time, Zografi stages some parodic debates on the Romanian identity crisis, which his characters consistently address in private or public dialogues.

Chapter 5 explores how borders and borderlands, in particular, influence the construction of English Canadian post-colonial and respectively Romanian post-communist national identities. In analysing Rebar’s *Bordertown Café* and Petre Barbu’s *God Bless America*, I was interested in the effect of physical and psychological inter-state borders on communities, from families to the entire population of a city. The comparison of the members of an American-Canadian family living near the Alberta-Montana border and of a Romanian family, living on the Black Sea’s shore but dreaming of immigrating to the U.S., reveals the more permeable character of post-colonial and post-communist identities as well as the global influence of the American dream and identity model. The plays I discuss in the second part of this chapter, Verdecchia’s *Fronteras Americanas* and Stanescu’s *Waxing West*, re-enact individual immigrant experiences that take place in multicultural North American *urban borderlands*. In spite of very different biographical journeys, “Verdecchia,” Wideload, and Daniela are similarly forced to reconsider the *us/them* dichotomy and the
stereotypical perceptions of national identities. Retrospectively, I can argue, however, that this was the implicit or explicit purpose of all the playwrights whose works I discussed in this dissertation. Accordingly, drama and theatre play the double role of mirrors and agents of the national identity project because their re-enactment of identity crisis makes its acknowledgement possible and, thus, enables imagined exile as a temporary way to envision the self and the national community to which one belongs.

3. Studies and Anthologies of Post-Colonial and Post-Communist Plays

Some of the comparative analyses of post-colonialism have become required readings in universities around the world and spawned several series of new studies and approaches. In contrast, post-communism is still in the process of asserting itself as a worthy object of scholarly discourse, despite some excellent exceptions, many of which helped me theoretically frame this study. In addition to an impressive number of general historical, social, and political overviews and literary analyses, a few scholars, historians, and critics have explored the contribution of drama and theatre to decolonisation/decommunization and the re-assertion of national and cultural identities. Most of these studies are, however, limited to the explorations of the productions of a particular country or of a relatively small geopolitical region, with some notable exceptions in the case of England and the former British colonies. To my knowledge, studies of drama and theatre that cross the ideological barrier between post-colonialism and post-communism still do not exist. This has assured my dissertation’s novel character but has also made it a difficult and, sometimes, even a puzzling enterprise. As I discussed post-colonial and post-communist theoretical paradigms in Chapter 1 and frequently referred to specific critical works during this study, I will now give only a
few examples of studies and collections of articles that explore post-colonial and respectively post-communist drama and theatre, attempting to resituate my study in relationship to other approaches of some of the more controversial matters.

The post-colonial character of Canada, in particular, and of former settler colonies, in general, was one of the first issues I had to address, in order to clarify my treatment of English Canadian drama as post-colonial. At the end of this study, I believe it useful to restate that in spite of still persisting terminological contradictions, the post-colonial status of former settler colonies is argued in some of the seminal theoretical texts and analyses of their literary and artistic productions. Although it does not specifically analyze drama and theatre, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s 1989 study, *The Empire Writes Back*, is one of the most important studies that inspired my dissertation and helped me frame it theoretically. Challenging the traditional perspectives of post-colonialism, as I explained in Chapter 1, this groundbreaking work discusses the literature of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand¹, as an integral part of the “writing by those peoples formerly colonized by Britain, though much of what it deals with is of interest and relevance to countries colonized by other European powers, such as France, Portugal, and Spain” (1). Their inclusive perspective of post-colonial countries, which “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcroft *et al* 2) covers not only all types of former Western colonies but also, in my view, post-communist countries.

Having a similar understanding of post-colonialism, Gilbert and Tompkins distance themselves from the essentialist views and plead for recognizing the limitations of binary
oppositions and accepting not only the similarities but also the differences of colonial and subsequently post-colonial experiences. Although they do not elaborate on this, by acknowledging its use in the former states of the Soviet Union “to refer to post-glasnost” (Gilbert and Tompkins 4), Gilbert and Tompkins further extend the theoretical boundaries of the concept and anticipate later studies of the similarities of post-colonialism and post-communism. Their 1996 *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* is “the first full-length study to examine how performance practices intersect with and develop an understanding of post-colonial theories” (4th cover), which attempts to compensate for the marginalisation of drama in post-colonial studies and argues theatre’s function as a site of resistance to imperial hegemonies and canonical traditions. Their analysis focuses on plays from former colonies of Western European countries, including Australia, Africa, Canada, New Zealand, the Caribbean and others. While national identity is not the explicit object of study, they frame their analysis from the perspective of the “constraints of subordination, inferiority, and insignificance that the colonized subject inevitably experiences” (7) and “the provisionality of post-colonial identities” (11).

In her “General Introduction” to the 2001 anthology of post-colonial plays, Gilbert also argues the variety of post-colonial experiences but explains that she had to leave aside “significant and exciting bodies of work from the French- and Spanish-speaking postcolonial regions” (2), given the need to narrow down an enormous field and give it some coherence. The selection is consequently restricted to texts from former British colonies, including Ireland, “Britain’s oldest colony” (Gilbert and Tompkins 7), whose common denominator is “a historical and a discursive relationship to Western imperialism, whether that phenomenon is treated critically, ambivalently or collusively” (Gilbert 2001: 1). Gilbert makes it clear that
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she is aware of the danger of a homogenizing perspective and that to avoid it she has chosen plays “[d]eeply embedded in specific cultures and historical circumstances” (2001:2), which would “enable productive analysis of both similarities and differences, parallels and divergences, and lines of continuity and disjunction” (2001:2). The overall goal of her anthology is to offer material for studies of post-colonial “performance as social praxis,” which would discuss “patterns of identity, oppression, migration, political negotiation, economics and global communication” (2001:6). I think it is relevant to point out that my investigation may be included among the ones Gilbert foresees, as it discusses aspects she has mentioned as relevant and it also uses works by Judith Thompson and Guillermo Verdecchia, two of the three Canadian authors included in this anthology.

The efficacy of Gilbert’s anthology in giving a sense of drama from the former British colonies emphasizes the fact that a similar collection would also be a useful tool for suggesting the major similarities and differences of post-communist plays. New works are consistently written, produced, and published in former communist countries but, as Otoiu felt when attending a conference in Europe (88), language barriers make them unavailable for larger audiences and even for the next-door neighbours, which share similar post-communist destinies. A few collections of plays from a specific country translated into English, such as roMANIA after 2000: Five New Romanian Plays, edited by Stanesco and Daniel Gerould (Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, 2007), and Contemporary Bulgarian Plays, edited by Anna Karabinska and Josepha Jacobson (Tantalus Books, 2002), as well as occasional translations published in journals such as Theatre Research International, make the texts available in English-speaking countries and particularly in the U.S. It is, however,
unlikely that they make their way back to readers from other European countries than their native ones.

The themes of identity and the post-colonial characteristics of each country seem implicit in the few studies and personal statements available in English, which discuss theatre’s development during the first post-communist decade. As each author mentions, there are some more, though not too many studies in specific European languages but they are only available in each country’s national language. Theatre in former communist countries shares the more general fate of the small cultures, whose productions rarely breach the national borders. In his book *Estonian Theatre*, Jaak Rähesoo, for example, explains from the very beginning that he addresses “foreign readers who presumably know little about Estonian theatre, or Estonian history and culture in general [and] although the emphasis is on the present situation, a wider background is clearly needed” (7). The brief overview of theatre emphasizes that, similarly to its status in European countries in general, theatre became at specific moments in Estonian history “a focal point of national consciousness” (Rähesoo 7). The monographs of the ten state-supported theatre companies and their development after the country’s liberation is precluded by a short introduction that notes the challenges they experience during the political and economic transitions: “Theatre as a public art, in particular, had to re-think its role: for years a channel for expressing, however, allusively, opposition to Soviet rule, it now had to obtain a new function” (Rähesoo 71). Whereas I recognized some similarities between Estonian theatre, on one hand, and Romanian and generally post-communist theatre, on the other hand, Rähesoo does not explore the larger context. However, some journal issues and collections of academic papers include articles on theatre from different ex-communist countries and, even when an
introductory study is missing, their association under the same cover points out specific similarities and differences. Among the first collections in English, the December 1996 “Special Issue: Eastern-European Transitions” of Theatre Journal brings together five articles on theatre in former Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia. Similarly, Theatre and Performance in Eastern Europe: The Changing Scene, edited in 2008 by Dennis Barnett and Arthur Skelton, mixes contributions by academics and theatre professionals, interested in how political, social, and economic changes “have been reflected in, and often influenced by the response of their theatre communities” (ix). The selection offers recent studies or personal reflections on theatre and performance in Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and former Yugoslavia. At the end of their “Introduction,” the editors express the hope that their anthology “will mark the beginning of a critical discourse about the integral relationship between performance and socio-political (and by extension, cultural) transitions” (Barnett xii). It is interesting to note that my dissertation shares an analogous object of study, with a specific emphasis on the development of the national identity, although it was developed independently from Barnett and Skelton’s work. I have also found many similarities between the perspectives and theoretical frames of my doctoral dissertation and of the essays included in this anthology, most of which are determined by the common historical contexts in Romania and other post-communist countries.

Given the controversial nature of some of my theoretical premises, it was reassuring to see that the contributors to Barnett and Skelton’s anthology took the imperialistic character of the East European countries’ communization as a given and the employment of post-colonial reading strategies as a choice that did not require explanations. Vessela S.
Warner, for example, analyzes Yordan Radhikov’s play *Trying to Fly*, arguing that its “modern mythmaking and postmodern structure accomplish an explicit model of national identity and historical transitionality” (Barnett 50). In addition to employing a similar perspective of the nation, which draws on Anderson’s “imagined community,” Warner also argues internal colonialism as a complement to Soviet communization, a thesis that structures my analysis of *A Cold* in this dissertation, which she explains in the national context of her study: “The colonization of Bulgarian national culture did not only have a foreign character. From 1944 through 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party, politically serving the Soviet dictatorial regime, exercised ‘colonial’ power over local traditions and established social practise” (Barnett 67). However, with the exception of this essay, the discussion of theatre’s contribution to the redefinition of post-communist national and cultural identities, my own topic, is secondary to the analysis of particular case studies, general overviews of theatre politics and performance styles in a particular country, accounts of American scholars’ teaching or research visits, and personal statements of East-European artists.

In *Theatre and Performance in Eastern Europe: The Changing Scene*, theatre’s previous anti-communist role and message are unanimously celebrated. However, in her article on Polish theatre in education, “Looking for Politics in All the Wrong Places” (Barnett 39-45), Cynthia Goatley raises the more delicate issue of theatre’s ambiguous relationship to the communist regime, which I also mentioned in this concluding chapter. Citing Halina Filipowicz’s essay “Demythologizing Polish Theatre,” Goatley recalls that Lech Raczk, the former director of an alternative company, called for the re-examination of the heroic myth that “all of Polish theatre was anti-regime” (Barnett 40). Similar to
Rähesoo’s perspective in his overview of Estonian theatre, the dominant concern is the new place theatre has to find for itself in post-communist cultures and societies after the political liberation, when the economic hardships and the Americanization of popular culture had made it lose its relevance and audiences. Although most of these phenomena also occur in Romania, I could not help but notice that Romanian theatre did not experience an acute crisis of relevance like its counterparts from other ex-communist countries.

In the same collection, Jane Duncan’s article, “The (R)evolution of Romanian Theatre” actually starts by noting this aspect: “While the country has undergone many political, geographical, and cultural transitions over the course of its history, one thing that has remained constant in Romania’s cultural identity is the importance of theatre” (Barnett 85). Given my direct access to primary and secondary sources on this topic, I find her brief history of Romanian theatre and her account of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival somewhat superficial. However, a coincidence worth noting is the fact that Duncan briefly analyzes Saviana Stanescu’s Waxing West, which I also discussed in Chapter 5 and in a chapter of the book Performance, Exile And ‘America’ (Palgrave 2009). The interest of an American scholar indirectly re-affirmed my argument of the play’s transnational character, while some of Duncan’s conclusions resonate with my own reading.

To conclude this short review, I will briefly comment on two comparative studies. Anticipating her argument in the essay, which I already mentioned, Warner’s 2002 PhD thesis, Cultural Identity in Balkan Drama: Self-Perceptions and Representations in Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian Plays from the 1970s through the 1990s, “develops a model of transitional national and heterogeneous Balkan self-representation” (Abstract) and employs post-colonialism, structuralism, and deconstruction as reading strategies. Similar to my
approach, Warner organizes her analysis thematically, although the overall argument adheres to the chronological distinction communism/post-communism. Her study also begins with an exploration of how theatre “criticized the austere social reality of communism in the early 1970s [and] reflected the displacements in the traditional cultures caused by the political regimes” (8). It correspondingly ends with an analysis of three plays from the 1990s that, according to Warner, “indicate the critical faltering in the post-communist perception of a cohesive cultural identity” (8). In the first two chapters, Warner analyzes pre-communist histories and collective characters, as well as early pre-national and modern national myths. Whereas I discussed *A Cold* and *1837* in Chapter 2, Warner analyzes the re-enactment of the Ottoman past, exploring how playwrights “envisioned and judged the symbolic ‘birth’ of their nations” (Warner, Abstract). Her Chapters Five and Six focus on “the politicized Yugoslav individual, who perceives his postcolonial space as ‘prison’” (Warner, “Abstract”), while my fourth and fifth chapters also explore the personal and collective alienation of post-colonial and post-communist individuals. Furthermore, Warner addresses communization as a form of external and internal colonization: “the socialist entities of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia suffered political colonization from their own communist regimes, and to different extents experienced isolation from the rest of Europe in the form of a cultural self-stigmatization” (10).

The last study I will comment on is *The New Theatre of the Baltics: from Soviet to Western Influence in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania* by Jeff Johnson, which explores “the effects on the theatre first regarding the transition from the Soviet times into the era [of] independence, and then the impact of the integration of the Baltic countries into the European Union” (5). Like most of the studies of post-communist theatre, the emphasis is on
its “loss of relevancy” after 1989. What makes this book more appealing, at least to my research interests at the moment, is the author’s attempt not only to investigate a specific aspect of theatre in the Baltic countries but also to note its relevance in ex-communist countries outside the former Soviet Union, such as Croatia, Poland, and the Czech Republic but, unfortunately, not Romania. This attitude implicitly attests to Johnson’s perception of these countries’ similarities, beyond the differences in their geographical and political relationships to Moscow. Although, as I already stated, theatre did not lose its relevance to the same extent, several of the phenomena Johnson observes are similar to the ones that occur in Romania, including “the trauma of privatization and the impact of coming out of the cultural and economic isolation imposed by the Soviets (…) the dramatic irruption of possibility afforded the citizens” (Johnson 16), and the “influx (or onslaught) of popular Western entertainment” (Johnson 15). However, it is now commonly acknowledged that each country and its theatre respond differently to post-communist changes (Johnson 18).

Although Johnson is more interested in theatre as a cultural institution, his auto-ironic predictions regarding the theatre of the Baltic countries necessarily address its social and political roles:

And from the look of things, the status of theatres will play out as predictably as it does in Western Europe, Britain and the United States: politicized but domesticated, alternately stressing a national civic identity and an existential social critique while maintaining a comfortable dialectic guaranteed to satisfy the whims of the preservationists, the traditionalists, the folklorists, and those promoting history and cultural artefacts. (Johnson 19)
Looking back at my own analysis of English Canadian and Romanian plays and at my experience as a theatre professional and audience member, I cannot help but notice the validity of his forecast for both countries. The expression and/or reflection of each people’s sense of national identity in drama and theatre is, however, influenced not only by the ongoing transformations of culture in general, but also by the natural development of the national paradigm in response to its everyday redefinition.

4. National Identity: Pros and Cons

At the end of this study, I need to restate that my theoretical argument and my close readings of the dramatic texts are inevitably marked by my personal experiences, my education, which started in Romania during Ceausescu’s dictatorship and continued in Canada at the threshold of the twenty first century, my work as a scholar and educator but also as a theatre practitioner, and, probably even more so, by my double status as a citizen of both Romania and Canada, with the privilege to chose in which of the two countries I want to live. I believe, however, that my personal worldview is most apparent in the core principles of this study, the existence of national identity and, thus, drama’s ability to reflect and influence it. In addition to my extended research, whose results I have consistently mentioned and used in this study, the subjective but strong feeling that I encounter different people every time I arrive in Canada or in Romania puts me among the believers in national identity, not only as an immigrant but also as an individual whose dual citizenships locate her in two of the so-called second world countries.

My dual civic and cultural allegiance becomes relevant from perspectives such as the one Ewa Thompson expresses, when she notices that while many Western post-colonial
theorists disregard nationalism as an outdated and essentialist worldview, most of the scholars from the so-called second and third world countries consider it an important factor of the anti-colonial struggle and actually declare its contestation as an essentialist perspective. New similarly recalls that nationalism is often accused of privileging or even inventing uniformity where none exists, leading to “simplistic definition, the sort that would restrict change, or veto it” (15). From this point of view, it is also accused of representing “the exclusiveness of the dominant culture” (New 15), the one that benefits of the state’s infrastructure and funds to assure its supremacy. In contrast, Leela Gandhi, among others, argues that nationalism is “the only form of political organization which is appropriate for the social and intellectual conditions of the modern world” and that the anti-nationalist “paranoid antipathy” (in Ewa Thompson 11) of the first-world thinkers is a form of universalizing the Western structures and, thus, of Orientalism. In her “Introduction” to Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism, Ewa Thompson shares the same opinion. She suggests that “[t]he fear of essentialism, which acts against the development of a new taxonomy of nationalism, has to be overcome” (Ewa Thompson 6) and acknowledges “the legitimacy of nationalism as a way of self-assertion and an instrument shaping individual identities in modern and post-modern times” (12).

According to these perspectives, national identities, in general, and Canadian and Romanian identities, in particular, are attributes of people and national states, including multicultural ones, whose existence does not need to be defended. As such, they are discreetly embedded in day-to-day actions, habits, value systems, and preferences; they imprint national cultures, permeate the fictional medium, and anchor the artistic works on a familiar level of reality. A similar belief structures New’s perspective in Borderlands, where
he explicitly states “I see the reality of ‘Canadian culture’ as a given, not as a *feu-follet*
whose existence needs to be argued; it is the outward expression of the working principles of
Canadian social values” (40). As this study attempts to prove, I also do not need to question
or defend the existence of the Canadian and Romanian cultures. These beliefs, however, do
not imply that national identities are the only collective forms of identification or that they
are fixed.

While the contemporary individual performs more and more roles and becomes part
of more and more communities, according to Smith, one of the most consistent and
productive theorists in the field, national identity remains one of the most powerful and
everlasting characteristics, without competing with other identities: “human beings have
multiple collective identifications, whose scope and intensity will vary with time and place.
There is nothing to prevent individuals from identifying with Flanders, Belgium and Europe
simultaneously, and displaying each allegiance in the appropriate context; or from feeling
they are Yoruba, Nigerian and African, in concentric circles of loyalty and belonging”
(Smith 174). Even more so, in the case of hyphenated citizens all over the world, like myself,
loyalty towards two different countries and the belonging to two national cultures are now
possible if still challenging on an everyday basis.

In addition, contemporary theorists of national identity commonly define it as a
complex set of collective characteristics, which continuously change in response to the
development of each country and of the world at large. Particularly in the states that
officially employ or collectively gravitate towards civic types of nationalism, as opposed to
ethnic or religious ones, national identity is generally perceived as “the constructed outcome
of social, political and cultural practices” (Waxman, “Hegemony Lost”), which are
performed at the level of everyday life and are not an unalterable given. Accordingly, the citizens of a country and, in my view, the characters of plays that embody citizens of a specific country, share some social, political and cultural traits and habits, which are, however, “never fixed but always subject to being reconstructed and revised” (Waxman, “Hegemony Lost”). Consequently, a study of the nationalist paradigm such as this one may only have relevance for the society and the period in which it was pursued. As New states, “[t]he social assumptions that underlie the language of nationhood and nationalism, have, of course, changed from decade to decade” (15). From this perspective, I cannot help but wonder if English Canadian and Romanian national identities and the realities I discussed in this dissertation have not changed while I was labouring in the library. Events such as the 1998 Canadian government’s “Statement of Reconciliation,” followed after ten years by the Prime Minister’s “full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system” (“Prime Minister Harper”) and respectively the 2007 publication of The Final Report of The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania mark the gradual acknowledgement of the colonial and respectively communist legacy, which directly influence the official definition of the nation and, subsequently, the individual and collective sense of identity.

Whereas at the beginning of the 1980s, some commentators, such as Berton, Hutcheon, Mathews, and Rutherford, argued that self-mockery and denial had become part of the Canadian national identity, at the beginning of the twenty first century other explanations of its non-traditional character appeared. In his 2005 study The European Roots of Canadian Identity, Phillip Resnick, for instance, ironically recalls the well-known troubles of the Canadian nation-building project, which “seems doomed never to be fully
consummated. Canadians seem to be cursed with the fate of Sisyphus, rolling the stone of the perfect constitutional agreement up the hill, only to see it crashing down again” (34). He argues that accepting the resemblance of the Canadian and the European national identities projects would solve this ongoing crisis: “Maybe we have been searching for the wrong model. Maybe it is Europe, both the Europe of today and of the past, that more closely matches Canadian reality than the ever-present American model many seek to emulate” (Resnick 35). To support his argument, Resnick identifies several common patterns, such as the similitude of the “linguistic or cultural divisions that we think of as uniquely Canadian” (Resnick 35) and the phenomena that occur in the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Spain, among other multicultural European countries: “After all, the Scots and Welsh do not see themselves as British in the same way as the English; nor do the Flemish and the Walloons—not to speak of the Bruxellois!—always see eye to eye; nor do the peripheral nationalities of Spain (the Basques, the Catalans, the Galegos) see national identity in quite the same way as other Spaniards” (Resnick 35). More than with specific countries, Canada shares some of its characteristics with the European Union. In both cases, Resnick’s vision of citizenship confirms Smith’s assessment of contemporary sense of self and civic nationalism, as it “rests on a series of concentric or nested identities, with the local and the regional levels coexisting side by side with national loyalties and with an element of common European [and respectively Canadian] citizenship topping these off” (Resnick 94). Accordingly, living together in multinational states can be done only by accepting “a significant degree of ambiguity when it comes to defining respective national identities” (Resnick 48) Despite this, Resnick recognizes self-doubt as the dominant motif in European and Canadian political
cultures and sense of identity (89, 91, 95). His conclusion seems contradicted by the latest developments.

During the 2009 Canada Day newscast, Lloyd Robertson, the Chief Anchor and Senior Editor of CTV News, commented on the results of this year’s Strategic Counsel survey, conducted for CTV and the *Globe and Mail*, and noted that the well-known self-diminishing perspective was not as common as it used to be. According to Michael Stittle, the author of the online news posted on the CTV website, “[n]inety per cent of respondents agreed with the statement: ‘Canada is the best country in the world’” while “85 per cent of respondents agreed ‘Canadians are fundamentally different from Americans’” (“90 per cent say Canada top country”). Commenting on the same results, pollster Peter Donolo concludes that they may be considered the proof of a new stage in the nation’s sense of self: “The cliché is that Canadians have been insecure culturally, or unsure about their identity. But that’s certainly not representative of these numbers” (Stittle, “90 per cent say Canada top country”). The ambiguous or even debatable identity of Canada is more and more often accepted “as is” by its multicultural and multilingual citizenry.

The Romanians, however, or at least the intellectuals who voice their concerns in journalistic and/or academic papers, still seem troubled by major questions regarding their national identity and culture, determined by the lack of a national agreement regarding the communist past but also by the economic colonization the country experiences. In an essay focused on the Romanian identity during the post-communist transition, Carmen Marcus reviews some of the current empirical sociological studies, as well as some of the statements on this issue of cultural personalities, including Patapievici and Mungiu-Pippidi, whose works I also used in this dissertation. Her main points are the collective’s double alienation,
“the 1990s find Romanians isolated not only from the West, but also from their own past” (Marcus 50), the distortion of collective memory through the propagandistic falsification of national history and traditions (Marcus 50-51), and the physical and moral annihilation of the cultural elite and the interwar legacy during communism (Marcus 54). The current presence of civic perspectives of identity in the Romanian self-representation becomes apparent in some of testimonies, such as Patapievici’s assertion that “each of us, everyday, builds the collective identity of everybody else” (Marcus 54). In her conclusions, Marcus asserts that the Romanians’ post-communist national identity is still in the making. The opinions on this issue are, however, generally contradictory. Marcel Petrisor, for example, notes that some Romanians even deny the existence of the national identity as a concept and, “out of spite or ignorance, label it as a trifle when not directly as stupidity” (“Cercetarea”). In 2008, however, Andrei Plesu sarcastically notes the vulgarization of the discussions on the Romanian national identity, which led to the prevalence of superficial and stereotypical perspectives. While Plesu wonders which of the traditional and not so traditional Romanian symbols and works are still representatives (“Identitate nationala”), Andrei Cornea considers the one hundred and fifty year-long debate a sign of a collective disease and a “toxic preoccupation” that should finally come to an end (“O preocupare toxica”). In the same year, Ioan Stanomir deplores in his article “Despre identitate nationala, istorie si televiziune” (“On National Identity, History, and Television,” in Romanian), the survival of the communist markers in the Romanian post-communist imaginary, mentalities, and public discourse, paralleled by the hasty adoption of the market economy stereotypes, such as the mall, the tabloid, and the private media’s struggle for ratings at any cost. Several others theorists and journalists openly condemn the economic colonization, the illusion of globalization
supported through the internet, the Anglicization of the Romanian language, and the cultural kitsch, which presumably ruin any chance at a renewed Romanian identity. It is, however, becoming apparent that the communist stereotypes as well as the post-communist identity crisis are slowly fading out, while a new sense of self is forming. As an example, Vintila Mihailescu recalls the story of an old Romanian peasant from Maramures, one of the most traditional Romanian regions. While he has accepted as “normal” the departure of one son to Spain and of another one to Italy, the old man, a survivor of communism given his age, is concerned by the third son’s decision to go to Japan because “There is not like here, in our Europe” (“Exerciții de perplexitate”, my italics). More than Romania’s formal acceptance into the European Union in 2007, the integration of the European conscience in the ordinary people’s concept of self announces a new era in the rebuilding of the nation. As he ironically confesses a taxonomic perplexity, Vintila Mihailescu also admits his incapacity to define this new type of ordinary Romanian individual, such as the old man’s son, “who is not a peasant, not a worker, not rural, not urban, not Romanian, not foreign, but obviously exists!” (“Exerciții de perplexitate”).

Although for different reasons and in different historical contexts, ambiguity seems to have become a sine qua non condition of contemporary types of national identity, including the English Canadian and the Romanian ones. As I finish this study I begin to feel that what started as a synchronic investigation, at least theoretically, has become a diachronic one. The present that inspired me in choosing my dissertation topic in 2003 has slowly become the past.
NOTES

1. They exclude, however, the literature of the United States, given “its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played” (Ashcroft et al 2) although they acknowledge its importance in the creation of the post-colonial paradigm.

2. *The Final Report* is strongly criticized in the Romanian public and academic discourses, including the publication of *Iluzia anticomunismului* (*The Illusion of Anti-Communism*, in Romanian), a collection of critical responses by university professors and journalists. In spite of all its shortcomings, the *Final Report* and the President’s official acknowledgment of the communist legacy is an important moment in Romania’s post-communist history.

3. Overall, however, Romanian theorists acknowledge the existence of national identities, given that “a particular socio-cultural context induces through premeditated or unpremeditated strategies a specific personality on its members, and those, through action projection, multiply, maintain, and perpetuate the values of that context” (P. Ilut in Marcus 54).

4. I refer to Vintila Mihailescu using both his first and last names to distinguish him from Calin Mihailescu, also cited in this study.
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