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LITERARY MODERNISM AND MODERNITY IN ROMANIA. RECOMPOSED COMMUNITY AND PAST/ PRESENT FILIATION MODELS

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Abstract – Drawing upon Modernist and Kinship Studies, this essay argues that nowadays community is not dissolved by modernity, nor was it century ago. Literary modernism is one of the places where the modern urbanized community starts to be reassembled based more on ties of affinity than on consanguinity. Even though today this regrouping is more apparent due to the practices of digital coexistence provided by social networks, it was not less of a reality one century ago. Dezrădăcinare *[Uprooting] (2022) by Sașa Zare, and* Rădăcini *[Roots] (1938) by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu have more things in common when it comes to memory and filiation than could be visible to the naked eye.*

Keywords: Modernism, Modernity, Community, Memory, Legacy

After a century in which the humanities and social sciences attempted to imbue individual and collective existence with significance using the category of *the modern*, whether with or without a prefix, it is now imperative to reconsider this concept from a contemporary perspective. What does it mean today to be enrooted or uprooted in a society where the domestic space itself is subject to resemantization, and where the conventional nuclear family, as viewed through the lens of kinship studies, is often supplanted or complemented by structures based on personal choice and affinity? This paper aims to trace the evolution of family representations in modernist literature, beginning with the language of uprooting presented in Sașa Zare's novel, *Dezrădăcinare* [Uprooting] (2022).

In spite of the broad and flexible characterization of modernism established by Modernist Studies in the past three decades and facilitated

by a transdisciplinary, transnational, and transhistorical expansion of modernism's boundaries, the definition we employ in this paper is derived from a historical approach to modernist literature. As mentioned by Jean-Michel Rabaté and Angeliki Spiropoulou in *Historical Modernisms: Time, History and Modernist Aesthetics*, in order to maintain a certain historical "grounding"[1] when discussing modernist literature, it is necessary to consistently differentiate modernism from modernity and a *modernist* artist from a *modern* one. Assuming that modernity is the result of the experience of social acceleration triggered by the Enlightenment, intensified by the Industrial Revolution and persisting throughout the 20th century to the present day, than, according to a proponent of the Frankfurt School like Hartmut Rosa[2], modernism's beginnings, as arbitrary as those of modernity, are either at the end of the 19th century, more precisely in 1890 (according to Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane[3]), or at the beginning of the 20th century, in 1910[4] or 1913[5]. As such, the modernism implied in this paper spans from Sofia Nădejde's work, *Părinți și copii* [Parents and Children], published in 1907, to Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's 1938 novel *Rădăcini* [Roots]. When it comes to modernism, Romanian modernism included, we can generally agree on its emergence at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. However, determining its endpoint is more challenging today due to the proliferation of conceptual categories associated with modernism that arose after the decline of postmodernism – late modernism, metamodernism, remodernism, hypermodernism, etc. As such, if "modernism has not yet come to an end"[6] and "history [of modernism – m.n.] is not stable or written in stone, it is still in the making"[7], and "we have to keep historicizing it"[8], then the most effective approach is to reconsider modernism through the lens of contemporary modernity, particularly from an interdisciplinary point of view, at the crossroads of fields such as architecture, literature, and cinema, to name a few.

Relocating Space. The Family As a Community Relay in Contemporary Modernity

Urban sustainability models today aim to establish a framework where both humans and nature can coexist harmoniously over time. Moreover, they seek to reimagine communal spaces as social platforms

that diverge from the rational-utilitarian model inherited from the Enlightenment. Not only the utilitarian aspect but also the aesthetic and the sensible become today constitutive elements of the social. There is a wide range of examples, from the increasing number of spaces for public interaction and conversation in institutions, the already well-known lobbies equipped with sofas and vending machines, to the abundance of green areas, seating installations in the most arid regions within urban areas, designated areas for smokers, ranging from markets, airports, universities, to theaters, cinemas, and even children's playgrounds situated within residential complexes. When viewed from the perspective of architecture, the concern is not inherently tied to the expansion of the public sphere, even less so in a post-pandemic world where the Heideggerian *In-der-Welt-sein* is integrated into everyday life to the same extent as routine grocery shopping. It is the configuration of the domestic ecosystem that necessitates a reevaluation in relation to the notion of community. The residential complex *8 House*, for example, on the outskirts of the Danish capital, aims to stimulate interaction between tenants through an edifice designed as an infrastructure for socialization[9]: it combines the idea of terraced houses with that of a ten-floor building in a residential complex consisting of two hundred housing units organized in steps on an inclined slope. The result is a community structured around the idea of proximity[10], resembling the layout of an Italian village, where every resident, whether moving upward or downward, on foot or by bicycle, is compelled by the architectural design of the communal spaces to engage with or interact with others.

We interpret this architectural endeavor for communal (re)construction, which relies on the public space and its possibilities, not as evidence of the endurance of a community structured along the conventional concept of shared territory membership, but rather as *a symptom of a society where the idea of community itself is flexible.* Particularly after a pandemic lived in the digital age, given the ongoing connections established and sustained through virtual environments, we hold the belief that the concept of community must be reimagined today with *a primary focus on the domestic space and the significance of the family unit within the communal structure*.

From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, the theoretical exploration of kin relationships ("la parenté") was a pivotal element

in anthropology, forging a strong and inseparable interdisciplinary connection between anthropology and modernism: "anthropology in and after modernism, of necessity, could not and cannot express itself in a normative romantic narrative mood"[11]. During the late 1970s and 1980s, evaluated as being post- and simultaneously anti-modern[12], there was a perception that family bonds were considered a "non-subject", as articulated by David M. Schneider, since they were not seen as a cultural phenomenon, but rather as a tool for anthropological analysis[13]. However, in more recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in blood ties and the significance of family units in shaping one's identity. This resurgence is associated with a field of study known as Kinship Studies[14], which emerges from social anthropology. As Jean-Hugues Déchaux points out, one reason may be the increased interest in family ties in the field of sociology, coinciding with a diminishing focus on this subject among anthropologists. A more significant factor nonetheless is linked to the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the 50s-60s, which served as the essential catalyst and springboard for the emergence of a second wave of feminism in the public sphere, simultaneously laying the groundwork for the inception of gay and lesbian studies, which were subsequently incorporated into queer studies. It is in the 1970s that feminist anthropology is recognized as a subfield of anthropology and that queer anthropology starts to come to light[15]. Themes such as gender versus sex, the body, domestic space, reproductive technologies, personality traits, etc. have a double function, not necessarily obvious or sequential: on the one hand, they replaced kinship ties, which had been a focal point in anthropology until the 1960s, and on the other hand, they established new approaches to examine them[16].

The symptom of a reassembled community becomes comprehensible when considered within the context of these dual dynamics of habitation and kinship. We can encapsulate these dynamics through a chiasmus: cohabitation isn't an outcome of kinship (in fact, family members can reside apart), and yet, cohabitation gives rise to kinship (kinship isn't an inherent given; it can also be a constructed concept). This idea may be very well observed in today's literature, where filiation as a conduit for community is a central concern in fictional works. Alice Munro[17] and Annie Ernaux[18], laureates of the Nobel Prize in

2013 and 2022, write social (auto)fictions that focus on the narrative construction of family histories. For Salman Rushdie[19] and a famous Marxist writer like Philip Roth[20], the family system is contingent on a toxic political environment. One must not omit to mention here Elena Ferrante and the cult that has been created around her Neapolitan tetralogy. Ferrante is one of the writers who best captures, with the psychological acuity of the 21st century, that which can be universalized in the relationships between women, encompassing both friendship bonds and familial connections, like those shared between a mother and daughter.

Concerning the renewed fascination with the intimate aspects of family life, one can observe its significance not only in novels featuring nuclear or single-parent families, often marked by divorce, as seen in the works of the mentioned authors, but also in the narrative exploring the domestic lives of LGBTQ+ couples, literature related to migration experiences, and popular genres such as diasporic autobiography. The current inclination to place filiation at the heart of literary works is instigated by and integrated into three overarching theoretical spheres: feminism, queer theory, and postcolonialism. These theoretical approaches permeate the discourse of fictional narratives, addressing psychological and societal issues connected to gender identity, family traumas, the body as a form of inheritance, and inadequate parenting, among others.

Common during the golden age of the biparental family, where unbreakable connections, such as blood ties, were placed over shared daily life and proximity, incoherent filiation is now evident, both in theoretical discussions and the growing number of autobiographies, as a deliberate construct – an idea that modernism has extensively delved into. The emphasis has shifted away from the inherited biogenetic material, even though it remains a common source of trauma. Instead, it is now directed towards understanding how much of one's essence is shaped through an ongoing process initiated by parents, grandparents, uncles, and so on and further developed through a synthesis of individual and collective memories over time.

Romanian literature conforms to worldwide trends through the contribution of female authors in prose, such as Sașa Zare, Ioana Stăncescu, Ruxandra Burcescu, Diana Bădică, Lavinia Braniște, to

name a few. What these writers have in common is the description – sometimes in detail (Sașa Zare, *Dezrădăcinare*, 2022), sometimes in passing (Ioana Stăncescu, *Tot ce i-am promis tatălui meu*, 2020) of a mother-daughter or/and daughter-father relationship (Lavinia Braniște, *Mă găsești când vrei*, 2020). Two special cases, which document the relationship of the son (not the daughter) with the mother, are Ovidiu Nimigean's novel from 2010[21] (*Rădăcina de bucsau*), and, if we step outside the canonical frames and include Moldovan literature written in Romanian, we must acknowledge *The Summer My Mother Had Green Eyes*, by Tatiana Țibuleac.

We consider that among these works, *Dezrădăcinare*, the autobiography signed by Sașa Zare, holds the utmost significance in forging connections with interwar literature, Romanian modernism at its most standard. It accomplishes this in two significant ways. Firstly, it delves into the concept of "dezrădăcinare" [uprooting], a subject of great interest in Romanian literature and periodicals at the start of the 20th century. Secondly, it explores incoherent filiation and an ever-evolving identity, consistently fractured by the oscillation between the present narrative and a deeply meaningful past of memory, which may vary from vague recollections to exceptionally vivid experiences: „Cred că în lumea contemporană nu există niciun fel de identitate fixă, eul e doar un melanj dezordonat, neliniștit, fărâmițat, în transformare mereu"[22] ["I believe that in the contemporary world there is no fixed identity, the self is just a messy, restless, fragmented mélange, in a constant process of transformation" (*m.t.*)].

The concept of uprooting emerged in early 20th-century Romanian publications, including *Viața Românească, Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, *Opinia*, *Curentul*, *Adeverul*, and others. It was employed to signify the sense of alienation and the geographic transition from rural areas to urban centers. This perspective is viewed from an urban context, which, paradoxically, allows for the translation of this observation onto paper, serving as a „reflex al opiniei sătești"[23] ["reflection of village opinion" (*m.t.*)], and it is associated with the distancing from the values advocated by the folklore created by the romanticized and nationalized concept of tradition. Yet, there exists another form of uprooting that surfaced during the interwar era, gaining substantial momentum in subsequent years. This form is intertwined with the in-

filtration of socialist ideologies following the First World War. It presupposes a distancing from one's homeland, facilitated by tourism, an industry that flourished in the free world both during and after the wars, and it is closely associated with the Western mirage that tourism introduces and propagates.

Contemporary literature uses memory as a form of spatial-temporal location. It is usually a memory related to the space of self-reflection where psychotherapy takes place and, being activated as a primarily narrative approach, extends outside the controlled medium of reflection that is the therapist's office[24]. The power the narration acquires in our century, especially through the hybridization of the fixed categories of "imagination" and "science", until recently read in epistemological and even ontological opposition, is reflected in the way in which Sașa „repoziționează cele mai adânci părți"[25] [repositions the deepest parts] of herself and tries to remove the mother as her „voce a minții"[26] [mind's voice] by verbalizing a problematic filiation both within the sessions with the psychotherapist Camelia and beyond them, in the space of writing. Moving from Chișinău to Cluj as a student, Sașa breaks from a mother-body, -home, -gossip. The emotional and physical detachment from a mother who primarily views the child as an extension of her own body, a gauge of her own well-being, and motherhood as the sole feasible social role, signifies a separation from the established community, particularly the close-knit community. This disconnection becomes most evident through the disparity of language:

> După ani de zile în care am locuit în România, acum, când ajung în Moldova, mă simt mai mult ca niciodată falsă și ruptă de casă cu *vorbitul* acesta *frumos*, care între timp mi-a devenit natural. Prețuiesc mult felul de-a vorbi al mamei și al tuturor de acolo, dar nu-mi mai iese ca înainte. Stăm la masă în bucătărie și în câteva clipe îmi dau seama că mă chinui să-l imit. Nu-mi vine să vorbesc românește, dar râvnesc. Fiecare cuvânt e un performance. Iau propoziția și o îndoi o dată – tot românește sună[27].

> [After years of living in Romania, now, when I arrive in Moldova, I feel more than ever fake and torn from home with this nice speech, which in the meantime has become natural to me. I really appreciate my mother's and everyone else's way of speaking, but I cannot manage it the way I used to. We're sitting at the kitchen table and I soon realize

> I'm struggling to imitate it. I don't feel like speaking Romanian, but I crave for it. Every word is a performance. I take the sentence and I fold it once - it still sounds Romanian (*m.t.*)].

The dual estrangement, from the mother, and from Moldova, which is initially introduced and seemingly resolved in the first part of the novel, persists as a perpetual and unhealed wound throughout the narrative. For this reason, prior to categorizing Sașa Zare's novel as a recent addition to queer literature, we must acknowledge it as one of the most profound and strongest syntheses of the mother-daughter relationship in the history of Romanian literature. *Dezrădăcinare* unfolds as a narrative centered on kinship through affinity rather than by blood, as defined in psychology and sociology in the 21st century: „Mi-aș dori ca formele de rudenie să fie scoase din blocajul familiei tradiționale. Ca tu să ai o comunitate de prietene acum și o casă mare, în care să huzurești împreună cu ele"[28] ["I wish the forms of kinship were removed from the gridlock of traditional family. That you would have a community of girlfriends now and a big house to thrive in with them" (*m.t.*)]. Sașa's separation from her mother is not a detachment from her existence as a living human being, but rather a disassociation from her role as an institutional figure, a being subjected to societal subordination: „Mi-aș dori atât de tare, mămică, să desființăm cultul mamei, să pot să-ți dau viața înapoi"[29] ["I would so much like it, mommy, if we abolished the cult of mother, so that I could give you your life back" (*m.t.*)].

This is a circumstance that literature also depicted a century ago, although it had fewer psychological tools at its disposal. The sophisticated methods that are now available, like those provided by cognitive psychology and narrative psychotherapy, were not available to writers of that era. As Jürgen Straub highlights, contemporary approaches emphasize the importance of memory analysis to bring repressed desires and thoughts to light, and they are less reliant on the physical setting where therapy occurs. What holds primary significance today is the process of transforming memories into narratives, both within and beyond the therapist's office[30]. This is why the therapeutic aspect of literature should not be disregarded when discussing modernism, just as it cannot be omitted from contemporary literature and literary

aestheticism. It underscores the importance of considering it alongside the ethical dimension of storytelling as a form of therapy, rather than treating them as separate entities. Interrogation of Zare's novel within the context of contemporary modernity reveals that there is no aestheticizing essence to modernist literature, but rather that this aestheticizing essence belongs to a critical discourse.

Romanian modernists frequently deconstruct the image of the mother as a social function and, at the same time, as a transcendental figure of romantic nationalism. They achieve this deconstruction through two methods. Firstly, by exemplifying it through an act of death, as emblematically depicted in the ballad of *Meșterul Manole* [The Master Builder Manole]. Secondly, by portraying a cold conflict between the mother and her daughter, which is more comprehensible to the father. This latter theme harks back to an ancient literary trope, as seen in *Fata babei și fata moșneagului* [The Old Man's Daughter and the Old Woman's Daughter]. In a manner akin to some literary works from the first half of the 20th century, which today can be described as migration literature, focusing primarily on the migration from rural to urban areas, often centered in the grey area of the slums, Sașa's displacement is testamentary. If the mother "always wanted the city, to get rid of the wretched village where she had no roots, no relatives, the village that had tricked her, held her captive for thirty years" [31] (*m.t.*), the daughter fulfils the mother's undertaking: she goes beyond Chișinău. In a prose from 1921 narrated from the father's perspective, *Domnișoara din Strada Neptun* [The Young Lady from Neptun Street] by Felix Aderca, Nuța tries to fulfil the father's aspiration to "urbanization" [orășenire]; that is why when she „împlini cincisprezece ani, pricepu și suferi că neamul ei nu fusese totdeauna orășenesc"[32] ["turned fifteen years old, she realized and suffered that her family had not always been urban" (*m.t.*)].

The idea of a community of friends (whether it be a community of writers or a queer community, as in Sașa's case) that extends and complements the existing kinship ties first appears through the "literary families" of romantic writers in the 18th century[33]. It gains extensive usage in literature with the advent of socio-economic and technological developments at the onset of the 20th century, and it aligns with the responses that modernism provides to the challenges of modernity. This alignment is not about outright "embracing" or "condemning"

modernity, nor does it create an opposition between these two stances[34]. Instead, it serves as a platform for the simultaneous coexistence of their inherent contradictions. The *modern* family may (or may not) resemble the *traditional* one. On the other hand, tradition and history are not divergent, family and nation are not suddenly replaced by party and class "cells" (massified). Memory ensures a networking of the social and the individual. Furthermore, whether we are discussing literature from the interwar period or contemporary works, the given examples demonstrate that it is seldom a matter of nostalgia for a lost community: *the community is "lost" only to the extent that this loss participates in a form of regrouping*. In modernity and modernism, *the community does not vanish, but some of their traditional structures are replaced by new ones*. As urbanization becomes more prominent, communities become less closely connected to specific or inherited locations, social status, or shared names. Instead, they rely more on shared affinities and common principles. As such, literary modernism is a way of writing about living in a world undergoing urbanization. This world, without ever losing its essence, perpetually recomposes and revitalizes itself, serving as a reservoir of cultural memory that imparts significance to the contemporary aspects of both the past and present.

Lineage in the Romanian Modernist Community

In a study that serves as a manifesto for reevaluating the concept of modern community, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (2001), Jessica Berman emphasizes that the prevailing view throughout most of the 20th century was that community characterized pre-industrial societies rather than the nation-state in the modern era[35]. There are numerous factors at play, but we particularly highlight the significance of two of them: the first pertains to the traditional definition of a community, and the second relates to the academic field that examines it. To begin with, the unbreakable connection between family, language, geographical location, religion, and national identity forms the foundation of the concept of community. Rising nationalist movements that arose following the French Revolution of 1789 saw the rural community as a realm highly entwined with people's values, customs, and faith, whether in Europe or the Americas.

Secondly, in the context of the exchange of ideas within academic disciplines that evolved towards the end of the 19th century, we regard anthropology's influence as crucial to our current discussion. From the pioneering work of Henry Lewis Morgan in the second half of the 19th century, with a detour through British social anthropology represented among others by Bronislaw Malinowski and Meyer Fortes, and including the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss after the 40s, the communities examined and analyzed for the study of kinship, along with the social role of family microstructures, were predominantly tribal in nature, with a few exceptions, such as those noted by Morgan, which included rural societies. While John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, both pragmatist philosophers, had been discussing the potential for the presence of a community within the urban environment since the early 20th century, their contributions received limited attention in the first half of the century. It was only later, in conjunction with the post-modernist avant-garde of the 1960s, that their ideas were reevaluated and recognized as anticipatory moments[36].

In contrast to the common stereotypes linked to the characterization of community as a pre-modern social entity, even in light of post-modern cultural theory, it's important to acknowledge that *modernist literature succeeded in shaping diverse community structures*[37], precisely in the spaces that anthropology indicated as lacking them. In conflict with both restrictive theories of community and with the very way of understanding history[38], modernist literature recreates communities from and within urban life. We are "modernists", in Geo Bogza's terms, „numai întrucât ne menținem într-o permanentă agitație"[39] ["only because we maintain ourselves in a state of constant agitation" (*m.t.*)]. Agitation, haste, hustle and bustle, the acceleration of time, all chronic symptoms of the modern, are very well preserved in the urban prose of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

Depending on the gender categories in which we choose to evaluate modernity, we can find examples that support both the masculine and the feminine. The myths of modernity are outlined by Rita Felski as follows: the masculine is associated with progress, the autonomy of the bourgeois subject, a dynamic life, always in motion, in relation to a public domain of the manifestation of communal individuality; while female modernity is fundamentally centered on a passive individual, situated between societal

roles and emotional instincts, wherein the private sphere, and by extension, family bonds, play a role in the mechanisms of modernization[40]. Our approach does not involve the assessment of Romanian literary modernity through the lens of gender frameworks, nor does it give preference to a feminist viewpoint. The authors we are re-examining encompass both women and men, whether they hold canonical or non-canonical status, and they actively participate in reshaping modern society. Within this context, lineage retains its significance amid a multitude of external influences, including social, political, economic, and cultural factors. A century after the *annus mirabilis* of modernism, the narrator of *Dezrădăcinare* makes a similar statement regarding the recomposition of society: „și sistemele familiale, și sistemele sociale și politice care le încadrează pe cele familiale, sunt intersecții peste intersecții, toate dansează unele cu altele, se afectează reciproc"[41] [m.t: "both the family systems and the social and political systems that frame them are intersections upon intersections, they all dance with each other, affect each other].

The Decentering of the Mother As a Social Figure. A Bourgeoise in the Negative

Over the past few decades, the concept of motherhood has regained prominence within the field of literary studies, with feminist studies playing a pivotal role. Literature, visual arts, and cinema all depict complex relationships, often revolving around challenging parent-child connections and motherhood that is subjected to criticism or rejection. Based on Elizabeth Strout's novel of the same name, the family miniseries *Olive Kitteridge* is one of the more successful recent adaptations[42]. The family film is an industry that first took off in the United States in the 1930s, when producers took advantage of the rise of the middlebrow and of a new moral order to gain a growing audience (including children as well) [43]. What distinguishes *Olive Kitteridge* (2014) from *Little Women* (1933), the cinematic adaptation that marked the beginning of the family film industry, is that in the former, mothers and other family members are not solely tied to their roles within social, personal, and professional networks. Instead, they seek to shape and define their identities primarily through these roles, rather than relying

on their family connections. The discourse on family traumas today is possible not only because we have developed a better understanding of how to identify and describe them, but also because we have managed to detach ourselves from these traumas as we embrace a life within an expansive network.

The absence of the mother figure in urban or transitional modernist novels, as we will explore shortly, may not always be a direct indication of a patriarchal society, although this interpretation cannot be entirely ruled out. The primary consequence of this absence, in our view, is a literary imagination that seeks to demystify and redefine traditional concepts like motherhood, daughterhood, and marriage, thereby "detranscendentalizing"[44], readjusting their societal significance. This paves the way for the portrayal of urban, liberated, and independent women who, as Gail Finney highlights, find themselves caught between the suffragette movement and societal biases influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Both of these phenomena fundamentally play a role in repositioning the family as a foundational element[45] in the reshaping of women's roles in society and as a potential source of their so-called unconventional behaviors.

In modernist novels, the mother appears in two distinct roles: (1) as a mnemonic symbol, expressing the desire to remember a deceased mother, and (2) in a contrasting dynamic with the father, functioning as a mother who falls short in offering emotional guidance, especially to the daughter. In a novel like *Trupul care își caută sufletul* [The Body Searching for its Soul] (1932), by Sarina Cassavan, if the father appears as a model for the daughter, „admirabil orator, mânuitor îndemânatec al condeiului și strălucit povestitor" [*m.t*: "an admirable orator, skillful pen wielder, and a brilliant storyteller"], the mother is viewed critically and despised, being „o burgheză incorijibilă, rămasă credincioasă tradiției de a crește copii"[46] [*m.t*: "an incorrigible bourgeoise, remained faithful to the tradition of raising children"]. In Felix Aderca's *Domnișoara din strada Neptun* [The Young Lady from Neptun Street], the narrative illustrates the detrimental impacts of transitioning from rural to urban life on Păun Oproiu's family. Within this narrative, the simple figure of the mother is portrayed in familial situations that encapsulate a common dynamic found in modernist literature: the camaraderie shared between the protective father and the daughter, whether the daughter is a nonconformist

(like Nuța) or a model of exemplary behaviour (like Elena in *Fecioarele despletite* [The Dishevelled Virgins]). Here's an example in full quote:

> Păun Oproiu, el era mândru de apucăturile orășenești ale fetei celei mari. Într'nsa el vedea răsbunate toate jignirile, toate suferințele lui de om de țară. Iar seara, la învinuirile femeii lui, că Nuța stă prea mult la poartă, că Nuța își da cu roșu pe obraji și că Nuța nu mai punea mâna pe nimic în casă, Păun întorcea ochii la ea, ochii lui albi din figura neagră de cărbune și arunca femeii priviri disprețuitoare[47].
>
> [Păun Oproiu, he was proud of the older girl's urban habits. He saw in her avenged all the insults, all his sufferings as a countryman. And in the evening, when his wife accused Nuța of spending too much time at the gate, of getting blush on her cheeks, and of no longer getting any work done in the house, Păun turned his eyes to her, his white eyes in his coal-black figure, and cast contemptuous glances at the woman (*m.t.*).]

Oproiu's position within the family can be viewed through the lens of the still prevalent patriarchal system of that era. However, these protective fathers, reminiscent of the golden era of the nuclear family, also reflect a reconfiguration of societal roles in the modern era: Oproiu knows that he is not returning to a home understood as a "peaceful haven" and a "moral refuge"[48], but to a home that can only be protected from contingency through the collective involvement of all its members. When seen from a phenomenological perspective, the endeavor to construct the family environment can be perceived as an endeavor to find one's place within the world. As such, the father is an active, dynamic element that advances „prin practica sa relațională orice cunoaștere teoretică, elaborând o comprehensiune *lucrativă* a lumii"[49] ["through his relational practice any theoretical knowledge, elaborating a profitable understanding of the world" (*m.t.*)]. Within the modernist family novel, spatial construction doesn't adhere to geometric principles. Space doesn't exist *a priori*, but it's formed through interpersonal communication. The subjects do not enter a predetermined setting within the slum; rather, they are the ones shaping its definition each time. In contrast to Nuța, who enjoys a network of friends and romantic relationships, Oproiu, while having some acquaintances who share community news with him, struggles to assimilate into the emerging quasi-urban society. This is why the place he endeavors to reshape remains the family home – the starting point from which the world unfurls and reassembles itself.

In some instances, mothers are portrayed more positively in contrast to fathers. The mother earns respect, while the father becomes a source of frustration, particularly when the narrator speaks from the perspective of an adult who has come to terms with the early loss of the mother and is upset with the father, whom they perceive as a passive figure. Radu Vrana, for example, an episodic character from *Rădăcini* [Roots], does not live in Bucharest, where we find the father who has reconstructed his life, but in Iași, because „avea și o rațiune sufletească, a memoriei unei mame moldovence, de care nu cunoștea decât un portret; cunoștea însă bine defectele tatălui lui, pe care le recunoștea cu cinism el însuși" [50] ["he also had a personal reason, of the memory of a Moldovan mother, of whom he only knew a portrait; but he was well aware of his father's faults, which he cynically acknowledged" (*m.t.*)]. In *Craii de Curtea-Veche* [Gallants of the Old Court] (1929) by Matei Călinescu, the departure from the Romanian modernist tradition is evident in the portrayal of parents' relationships. In the recollections of the adult Pantazi, the parents are remembered as conversational companions. His love for the mother takes on a distant and aesthetic quality, as she is perceived as if she were a doll, while the love for his father, similar to Sarina Cassavan's situation, appears as a distant-rational connection.

This filial affection is often juxtaposed with the distance through which the modern self extends its own personal sphere in a dialectical progression characteristic of modernity: as the level of social interaction intensifies, people often seek a broader sphere of influence to better distinguish themselves. In the early 20th century, a comprehensive urban anthropology movement known as the Chicago School dedicated its research to exploring this phenomenon. According to this school of thought, society can be seen as a chamber where individual voices seek to individualize themselves[51]. The modernist community is, therefore, paradoxical but undeniably authentic; it comes into existence as long as its constituents recognize the unifying rhythm that binds them together, with each individual asserting themselves as a conscious phenomenon within it. But this does not mean that the family remains an epiphenomenon. What changes is only its transcription in the register of a consciousness phenomenon. The network continues to exist, but its description is now assumed: it exists insofar as it is perceptible and represented as a fact of consciousness.

Regardless of the extent of disparity between them, there comes a point where, as Marthe Robert observes, parents emerge as distinct individuals within the framework of existence[52]. In terms of the family fiction that the individual builds during childhood, says the author following Freud, this phase aligns with a sexual awakening, marking the clear differentiation between the mother and the father. Typically, this follows a narcissistic stage in which the child elevates themselves by transforming both parents (viewed as a unit, not as separate individuals) into protective figures. This stage is rarely found in Romanian modernist literature. We believe the explanation for this is primarily connected to the structure of the narratives. Third-person narration often lacks the depth of introspection required for emotional exploration linked to parents, while first-person narratives frequently prioritize friendships over familial connections. Additionally, it is also missing because, unlike the narcissistic perspective, the contrapuntal viewpoint doesn't carry the same dramatic potential. In Romanian family novels, whether set in rural or urban settings, the family is given significant importance only when its role generates some form of intrigue. This is exemplified in works like *Ion* (1920) by Liviu Rebreanu or *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War] (1930) by Camil Petrescu, as they address an audience whose urban experiences were still quite limited at the time.

Nuța (*Domnișoara din strada Neptun*) hates both her parents, not just her mother. This animosity, which sets the stage for the novel and propels the plot, is primarily directed at her father, who disappoints in two key ways: first, he fails to secure a future free of financial concerns for his children, and second, he does not ensure a continuous family lineage. The Romanian modernist narrative family, composed of aunts and sisters who step in for the absent mother, is one in which genealogy remains uncertain on both the maternal side − the mother is either missing or doesn't serve as a behavioral role model −, and the paternal side − the father is either divorced and therefore absent from his children's lives, or he maintains distant (often unspecified) relations with the extended family. According to Hayden White, the incapability of ensuring a paternal legacy is a characteristic of modernity, as it engenders a crisis that directly affects the sustainability of the community. In T. S. Eliot's

Gerontion (1920), the poem conveys to the historical critic an attitude of "preterition"[53] towards the institution of fatherhood. Simultaneously, it illustrates a generational disinheritance, signifying the exclusion of the son from a lineage of historical and national significance. While we contend that examining the role of the father in modernist novels challenges the commonly assumed patriarchal aspects of modernism, as suggested by White through the idea of lost "manhood"[54], the prevailing ethos is not one of exclusion. It leans more toward a relaxed approach to family bonds. These characters, whether separated from their extended family or involved in distant relationships, unburdened by the constraints of a shared family name, make more significant efforts than their counterparts in contemporary literature to foster healthy connections with those in their immediate circles. This, in fact, elucidates why Eliot's character in *Gerontion* lives as a tenant, which is an uncomfortable reality in the context of the stability often associated with old age.

Frequently, this nuclear family structure is recomposed of elderly aunts and sisters who take on the responsibilities typically attributed to the mother, reconstituting a fractured lineage. Despite this reorganization, the father remains the sole authority figure in the children's lives, and he too is bound by societal patriarchal norms. Modernist literature reveals not only instances of sexism, misogyny, and the subjugation of women, which contemporary politically correct sensibilities often prompt us to seek, but also instances of men and fathers who grapple with a sense of failing to meet the societal expectations placed upon them, leading to feelings of guilt. Social pressure affects both mothers and fathers, illustrating a contradiction that modernism observes without taking a definitive stance against it. Let's consider the monologue of Serafim, the father responsible for raising motherless children in *Părinți și copii* [Parents and Children], by Sofia Nădejde:

> Îmi iubesc copiii. Ce folos însă de dragostea mea, dac-am călcat în viață cu piciorul stâng? Am disprețuit îndeletnicirile bănoase. Credeam că o să fiu cărturar și, uite, nu-s nici una, nici alta! Dacă m-am îndepărtat pe mine și pe urmașii mei de viața tihnită a satului, barem să mă fi îmbogățit, să fi lăsat copiilor arma cea mai puternică, banul. Dar cum să-l fi făcut? Venit de la țară, îmi închipuiam că învățătura e averea cea mai de seamă. Nu-mi trecea prin minte că mă osândesc pe mine și copiii la sărăcie lucie, la grija zilei de mâine, la dorințe ce nu se pot împlini[55].

> [I love my children. But if I entered life on the wrong foot, what good is my love? I despised well-paid jobs. I thought I was going to be a scholar, and look, I'm neither! If I had taken myself and my descendants out of the quiet village life, I could have at least become rich, I could have left my children the strongest weapon, money. But how to earn it? Coming from the countryside, I thought that education was the most important asset. It didn't occur to me that I was condemning myself and the children to abject poverty, to worrying about tomorrow, to wishes that cannot be fulfilled (*m.t.*).]

The exceptionally protective father, aided by aunts (as seen in *Ciuleandra* by Liviu Rebreanu) or chaste sisters (as depicted in *Părinți și copii* by Sofia Nădejde), who wholeheartedly dedicate themselves to their grandchildren and siblings, represents one of the rare characters who maintain a strong emotional connection to the departed mother. When remembered by their children, mothers are typically portrayed as static images, frozen moments captured more for the sake of fulfilling a societal role than out of a genuine desire to commemorate the shared experiences. The justification is rooted in the manner in which family historians have grasped the attitudes of individuals towards death, spanning from the Middle Ages through the 19th century:

> The work of historians of the family also suggests that in a world where death, separation, and loss occurred all too frequently, the small rituals of everyday life were less focused on remembering past generations and deceased family members (as they seem to be today) than on forgetting[56].

Forgetting in literature from a century ago works in a double, contradictory sense. On one hand, it serves as a deliberate act infused with a sense of regret, reflecting the fatalistic spirit of an era that lacked modern medical treatments like antibiotics and penicillin. On the other hand, it functions as a mechanism for temporarily suspending certain relationships in favor of others. Janet Carsten has observed that in today's society, the exclusion of some family members from the family circle, which is perceived as a disruption of familial bonds and becomes more pronounced in light of the options provided by social networks, is often linked to the fact that individuals have more social connections to engage with, enabling them to readily substitute biological ties[57]. This

ethos nonetheless is not new, it dominated modernity from the end of the Industrial Revolution onwards. During this period, urban areas became conducive settings for redefining the distinctions between public and private domains: public spaces no longer exclusively symbolize authority, and private spaces are no longer limited to mundane, everyday life. The greater the practicality of public spaces becomes, the more it permits the emergence of private enclaves.

In the context of a growing socialist discourse during the interwar era and the emerging notion that alienation is a fundamental and irrevocable outcome of uprooting, we witness the emergence of characters such as Nory from *Rădăcini* by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu. Nory stands as one of the most compelling portrayals of the illegitimate daughter in Romanian modernist literature. She comes back to her "roots" in a somewhat dispassionate manner, aiming to establish a certain degree of familial connection, even amidst the traumatic experiences she has endured. For Nory, the environment she inhabits has transformed into a public sphere, and the family has evolved into what can be likened to „prietenia bandiților"[58] ["bandits' friendship" (*m.t.*)]. For Nory, the concept of private space is associated with a family to which she has no genetic similarities, a family of aristocratic and conservative nature. This family, which she approached with trepidation as a child and later as an adult, held no biological connection for her. As such, the real living space for her is "the street" („vizitele personale le primea pe stradă"[59] ["she received her personal visits on the street" (*m.t.*)]) or her friends' houses („nu obicinuia nimeni a veni la ea, îi plăcea să se ducă la alții, și altora le plăcea să o găzduiască"[60] ["nobody used to come to her, she liked to go to others, and others liked to host her" (*m.t.*)]), since „locuința ei n-avea importanță, cum nu avea aceea a unui bărbat singur"[61] ["her home was not important, same as that of a single man" (*m.t.*)]. Nory had spent so much time in the public sphere[62] that she managed to substitute her unhappy and fragmented family connections with her circle of friends.

The family is not "dissolved"[63] by modernity, a perception that still prevails today, especially when rural novels like *Mara*, *Ion*, or *Moromeții* are studied as representing the core of a declining rural community. The notion that the family dissolves is a retrospective fallacy, as the concept of a steadfast family structure in the past is a "myth"[64]. The family in the Romanian modernist novel reconfigures itself in response

to evolving circumstances, which initially transform gradually and then more abruptly, especially when considering the impact of the two world wars. Even within the profoundly urban setting of the first half of *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War], a novel frequently regarded as the epitome of Romanian modernism, the role of parenthood remains significant in shaping the narrative's dynamics. One finds here the profile of an uncle „care influențase, prin incomparabila lui danie, întreg destinul vieții mele"[65] ["who had influenced, through his incomparable wisdom, the entire destiny of my life" (*m.t.*)]. The portrayal of the uncle, which seems to assume the role of a father with equal fervor as the aunts and sisters undertake the responsibilities of the mother, serves as a symptom of the significance of the reconstituted family within the urban community. First of all, „ființa sufletească" ["the spiritual being" (*m.t.*)] of Gheorghidiu's uncle is reconstructed „din scrisori și din amintirile altora"[66] ["from the letters and memories of others" (*m.t.*)]. The reason behind this lies in the interruption of the genealogy, initially caused by the mass migration from rural areas to urban centers and later exacerbated by the upheaval caused by the First World War. Under these circumstances, the continuity of succession cannot be ensured passively, but it necessitates an active mnemonic effort aimed at rebuilding it. The extended family is practically nonexistent within the urban community, except in cases where an absent or deceased parent needs to be replaced. In these instances, it is typically the house of a male relative, most commonly an uncle rather than an aunt, that is discovered, often in adulthood. This house serves as the sole gathering point for relatives, and such gatherings occur within an uninterrupted present moment. In modernist literature, there is a noticeable absence of memories from those who lived together, primarily because the shared domestic spaces that would have encapsulated these memories no longer exist. This might offer one possible explanation for why the Romanian prose of the first half of the last century constructs fragments of individual memory that are interconnected with the social dimension: the memories of familial places have become inoperative.

The distinction here lies in the fact that this location, in contrast to the households portrayed in rural novels such as *Ion* or *Morometii*, does not serve as an area exclusively designated for immediate or extended family

members. Instead, it functions as a setting that holds equal significance for friends, acquaintances, and family alike. Within the detached ambiance of the uncle's home, the nephew or niece occupies the same status as the guests. In contrast to the predominantly nuclear families depicted in rural novels, the reconstituted urban family resides in a community where coexistence entails encounters not only in the public sphere but also within the intimate confines of the home. In this setting, individual spheres do not converge into a collective, demonstrating not only the influence of bourgeois spatial territorialization through private spaces but also the relaxation of boundaries between the public and private domains. Urban narratives diverge from rural ones in that they no longer revolve around a "we" as a "space" that delineates an "outside"[67], or family unit to create a community. Instead, urban narratives encompass a more inclusive "we" and "you", where individuals mix and blend within a communal space, a space that is collectively constructed and accessible to all without depersonalizing the individuals who contribute to it.

The recollections of the houses where we resided at a particular point in time, particularly those associated with our childhood, as Janet Carsten suggests, serve not only as evocative elements but also fundamentally (re) establish kinship bonds[68]. Just as Lovinescu's house serves as the cornerstone for the literary community within *Sburătorul*[69], the uncle's house constructs the modernist community, effectively mimicking the idyllic image of a childhood home that is frequently absent from the memories of modernist characters. Two notable implications warrant attention here: firstly, kinship ties are seldom established through the material and emotional space cultivated within the confines of a residence, and secondly, in contrast to the prevailing valorization of childhood during the 19th century in Western Europe, a trend that Maurice Godelier notes, idealized childhood is downgraded within the urban novel. Childhood reminiscences have evolved beyond nostalgic recollections of a supposed golden era. In the backdrop of late 19th-century modernity, they portray the traumas faced by abandoned, illegitimate children who are marginalized and excluded from the familial house. For those still retained within the household nonetheless, the house no longer embodies a political role of stability as a counterbalance to historical upheaval[70]. Instead, the Romanian modernist residence transforms into a shared living space like any other, facilitating an ongoing transition between the public and private domains.

Revisiting modernity and the events of the past century through the lens of a contemporary perspective that transcends specific time periods has become even more imperative today. This urgency is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic era where domestic ecosystems are increasingly being delineated as a separation between public space (related to work) and private space (reserved for leisure and personal time) – a division that has been accentuated by the growth of industries like remote work and parenting. Despite its vulnerability to changing circumstances and, therefore, its dynamic and ever-evolving nature, it's crucial to acknowledge that the concept of community does not simply dissolve into thin air. Placed within the dynamic context of a contemporary perspective that consistently restructures temporal frameworks, even though *Rădăcini* by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and *Dezrădăcinare* by Sașa Zare were written almost a century apart, they converge in their portrayal of how the allocation of space contributes to the reconstruction of a community, one built on affinity rather than on mere physical proximity.

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[5] Jean-Michel Rabaté, Angeliki Spiropoulou, *Introduction, Historical ModernismsTime...*, p. 6.

[6] Morag Shiach, *Periodizing Modernism*, p. 30.

[7] Ivi, p. 27.

[8] Ibidem.

[9] S. *Building liveability: Copenhagen's sustainable urban development*, e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCYgajPrT64&ab_channel=Denmarkdotdk [November 30th 2022].

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[25] Sașa Zare, *Dezrădăcinare…*, p. 191.
[26] Ivi, p. 175.
[27] Ivi, p. 136.
[28] Ivi, p. 417.
[29] Ibidem.
[30] Jürgen Straub, *Psychology, Narrative...*, p. 218.
[31] „[...] și-a dorit mereu orașul, să scape de satul nenorocit în care n-avea rădăcini, nici neamuri, satul care o păcălise, o prinsese captivă pentru treizeci-de-ani", Sașa Zare, *Dezrădăcinare…*, p. 87.
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[56] Janet Carsten, *After Kinship…*, p. 17.
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