

Name: Flavia Ghețu

Affiliation: Justus Liebig University Giessen, GCSC, IPP

Working Title of Dissertation: Modes and tropes of pessimism: disrupting neoliberal representations of the village in Eastern European novels and films

Abstract:

From the Balkan Wars through the post-socialist present, rural Eastern Europe has emerged as a contested cultural site in which economic precarity, political disillusionment, and fractured forms of belonging are articulated and negotiated. Against the backdrop of ongoing cultural colonisation (shaped by neoliberal economic restructuring and Western representational frameworks), this dissertation examines literary and cinematic depictions of the village in post-socialist Eastern Europe. The project investigates whether contemporary narrative art forms disrupt or perpetuate neoliberal associations of the Eastern European village as ‘backward’ or ‘stagnant’. Drawing on the work of Emil Cioran and Joshua Foa Dienstag, pessimism is framed as a mode of artistic and scholarly production that resists neoliberal narratives of progress and recovery. Focusing on novels such as Peter Pišťanek’s *Rivers of Babylon* and Ioana Nicolaie’s *The Black Wormwood*, alongside films including *Pamfir* (Ukraine, 2022) and *R.M.N.* (Romania, 2022), the project argues that pessimism functions as a productive methodological lens for uncovering nuanced perspectives on rural life in Eastern Europe. It further examines how formal narrative elements (such as chronotopes, focalisation, and tone) either align with pessimistic modes of representation or reproduce distanced neoliberal perspectives of the Eastern European village.