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WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? Evaluating the Role of Women in Nationalist Discourses Across the Political Spectrum through a Longitudinal Study of Romania

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LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
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Universiteit Leiden

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

Evaluating the Role of Women in Nationalist Discourses Across the
Political Spectrum through a Longitudinal Study of Romania

MSc Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Development
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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Method: Why Romania and how?</i>	5
<i>The path to understanding: discourse analysis as method</i>	5
<i>Why Romania: Brief Case Selection Analysis</i>	6
<i>Conceptualisation: Evaluating the Presence of Gender in Nationalist Theories</i>	8
<i>Civil or Ethnic nationalism: the inescapability of gender</i>	8
<i>The oxymoronic nature of the conceptual gender-nationalism</i>	9
<i>Men’s dominance over nations and national units</i>	11
<i>Citizenship as an exclusive right: The Napoléonic Code and the existence of women in the imagined communities</i>	13
<i>The Romanian Discourse: Inquiries on the Actors’ Usage of Gender in Nationalist Discourses</i>	15
<i>Timeframe One: Women as Targets of Constitutional Nationalism (1912 – 1938)</i>	15
<i>Timeframe Two. Women and the Romanian Communist Nation (1965 – 1989)</i>	20
<i>Timeframe Three. Perceptions about women within Romania’s Right-Wing Nationalist Resurgence (2018 – 2021)</i>	24
<i>Conclusion: Potential Places for Women</i>	29

Introduction

*“A widowed mother from time of Michael the Brave
Of her sons, she today demands a helping hand. [...]
Of thunder and of brimstone should they perish
Anyone who flees from this glorious calling.
When homeland and our mothers, with a sorrowful heart,
Will ask us to cross through swords and blazing fire!”*
Romanian Anthem, *Wake Up, Romanian!*¹ [tr]

Nationalism is neither a recent nor an isolated phenomenon, but rather deeply ingrained in public attitudes and academic scholarship. Whilst now it is acknowledged that gender is a significant part of nationalist discourses and practices (Walby, 2010), this relation is still fairly absent from mainstream understandings of nationalism (Smith, 1995; Gellner, 1983). Amongst recent developments within the field of nationalism, at least explicitly, a relevant one is the emergence of the concept of “gender-nationalism” (Abdou, 2017:84). The majoritarian focus within nationalism scholarship on the masculine politics of nationalism (Lauenstein et al, 2015:310) has been criticised by a multitude of feminist scholars and has taken a rather multidisciplinary shape; much focus is placed on the general gendered-ness of nations and nationalism (Enloe, 1989; Nagel, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1998) or on the relation between right-wing nationalism and gender (Abdou, 2017; Agius et al., 2020). Little attention is given to the relevance of a nationalist actor’s political ideology and the degree of gendered-ness within their discourse, which is a significant gap within research that I aim to address.

¹ Original: Deșteaptă-te, Române!

This paper attempts to determine to what extent gender *is* an underlying element of nationalism, irrelevant of the political orientation of the actors displaying nationalism, the time period when nationalism occurs, and the form of government which facilitates nationalism. In terms of empirical applicability of theories of gender within nationalism studies, little attention has been given to the relation between nationalism and gender in the context of Eastern Europe, which scholars have dismissed as a clear case of Eastern (otherwise called ethnic) nationalism, and therefore unfruitful.

While attempting to analyse the gendered-ness of nationalism in distinct contexts, I have identified three significant periods in Romania which, on completely different political backgrounds, display nationalism with gendered components. The four periods are the following: 1914–1938 (the start of the First World War until the start of World War Two), 1965–1989 (the period of national communism under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu), and 2018–2021 (the last five year of Romanian politics and developments in this arena). These three periods differ greatly in terms of political ideology and national background, as it will be showcased hereafter. The first period displays a high level of gender-nationalist discourse and policy outputs, especially from the political elites of the period. Constitutionally, women did not possess basic political rights, such as voting, and national strengthening and reproduction was constantly reinforced. The following period, represented by the installation of the communist regime and a complete absence of nationalist discourses, sees the implementation of women's voting rights within its first constitution and, closely after, the implementation of policies against gender-based discrimination.

Nevertheless, the most significant pattern that can be observed is the following: despite differences, those periods that showcase a re-emergence of nationalist actors also display a significant number of nationalist discourses regarding women's bodies, actions, and abilities.

Therefore, I hypothesise that the gendered component is intrinsic to nationalism, at least, if not generalisable, in the Romanian political and civil environments, this being the case irrelevant of the political orientation of the nationalist actors. This raises the following research questions: first, what form does gender take within nationalist discourses on opposite sides of the politico-economic spectrum and to what extent is gender present in these discourses, irrelevant of the form of government or political ideology of the nationalist actors?

The dynamic between Romanians and nationalism is a complex one (Dumbravă, 2017:1492); increasingly intolerant and gendered political discourses in Romania showcase how gendered nationalism can be (Mudde, 2019:85). There have been fluctuating waves of nationalist discourses throughout the last century, and they are as follows: first, the fervently nationalist foreign policy and domestic actions in the first half of the 20th century², exacerbated by movement of national unification (Livezeanu, 2018:8); second, the rather absent nationalism during the first part of the communist regime; third, the emergence of national communism under Ceaușescu; fourth, the collapse of communism and Europeanisation, and lastly, a re-emergence of far-right nationalism, mirroring the general political patterns within both the EU, but also in the US .

The paper hereafter begins by outlining the research design, discussing the method choice in the context of the proposed case of interest, along with potential limitations predicated by the chosen method. I then move to the theoretical section of the paper, which aims to both situate this work within existing literature, but also provide a conceptualisation of the key terms employed throughout this study. Afterwards, I move to the empirical section, which is divided

² That is not to say that nationalism in Romania has only emerged in the 20th Century. The phenomenon of Romanian nationalism can be traced back to the 18th century (Livezeanu, 2018:4), although, for the purpose and limitations of this paper, the analysis begins in the 20th century.

into three, each of the three sub-sections corresponding to the three periods analysed and focusing on relevant discourses of the time.

Method: Why Romania and how?

The path to understanding: discourse analysis as method

It is interesting to look at the relation between the evolution of nationalism and nationalist practices, and the role women *were given* in the society in general, and nation-building in particular as the *two variables of interest*. I develop my argument by distinguishing three distinct periods in the Romanian history that display nationalist discourses, attempting to analyse the “discursive performances of gender” (Butler, 1993) through discourse analysis. Discourse is “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena” (Hajer, 1995:301); discourse places identities in a specific set and social context (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). It represents the ideal method of determining the social power of elites, mostly men, in preserving particular types of community and ways of being (van Dijk, 1995:249). Because my focus is broad, with timeframes from vastly different political periods, it is relevant to note the “dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89). I have mainly collected data through archival research, primary and secondary resources. Some discourses have been made available by their propagators (specifically the contemporary actors). First, I have collected all discourses relating to the nation and nationalism available to me within the time of the study; then, after thematically systematising each individual text, I have singled out those that do display gendered components.

In each of the three periods observed, I identify two distinct types of thematic frames, one in common, namely motherhood as a tool of national reproduction, and one that invariably emerges in one or more of the three periods, namely women as housekeepers, women as child-raisers, and women as physically and intellectually inferior to men.

The way nations, and implicitly nationalism, come to be is a deeply interactional process, be they “narrations” (Bhabha, 1990) or “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991:6). In order for national identities to emerge, a shared space of coexistence is required, where social categories acquire a sense of groupness (Brubaker, 2003:168) and a “map of being”. The cultural ‘other’ is also imagined through relations of difference that are not fixed and established through communication (Kawai, 2009:16). The best way to assess the fluid nature of nationalism while attempting to answer the research question is by analysing the speeches put forward by those tasked with ‘intellectually reproducing’ the nation, namely political elites. Since my focus is on Romania, these policies and speeches are accessible to me in their original language.

Why Romania: Brief Case Selection Analysis

The relation between nationalism and gender has been analysed on India, with a focus on Hindutva and (Kinnvall, 2004; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2010), which is the typical case, and on Western states. Yuval-Davis takes a more theoretical stance on the relation between gender and nations and nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989) and outlines the main methods and consequences of the intersection between gender and nations. Her work represents a turning point in the literature of nationalism, from works which generally portrayed gender as irrelevant or completely dismissed the issue, not including it (Smith, 1986;

Gellner, 1983). Nevertheless, while she acknowledges more deeply the intersectionality within the interaction of gender and nations, her work is rather theoretical and does not deal with the impact of women beyond political symbols (Walby, 2010; Kandiyoti, 1989), which I aim to avoid in this paper.

After the start of Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule, a new upsurge of nationalist practices occurred; along with this, a wide array of statements and policies aimed at women emerged, perhaps most notably the Decree 770 restricting abortion and contraception. After the collapse of communism and the start of EU accession processes, political elites have adopted new discourses centred around 'Europeanisation', which dismissed nationalism and emphasised human rights. Nevertheless, following this period, political elites, and social organisations on both sides of the political spectrum restarted promoting traditional values, a re-strengthening of the nation, and discursively relegating women to the private sphere. Therefore, irrelevant of the political background in the state, a correlation can be drawn between the presence/ absence of nationalism and the type of policies and discourses being put forward concerning women.

The dismissal of nationalism in Eastern Europe as unfruitful because of its seemingly ethnic character is also one of the main reasons why the main case study of this paper is Romania, whose nationalism, especially the one from the communist period, is mostly overlooked by scholars. Furthermore, besides being an Eastern European state, which is generally understood as displaying ethnonationalism (Smith, 2016; Gellner, 1983; Ignatieff, 1993), Romania is a representative case in light of the proposed argument; that is the case because of the presence of a multitude of significantly different regimes it has experienced over the span of a century, and the presence of nationalism with a strong gendered component in all of these periods.

Conceptualisation: Evaluating the Presence of Gender in Nationalist Theories

Civil or Ethnic nationalism: the inescapability of gender

Multiple conceptualisations of nationalism exist in scholarly literature, certainly too many for any scholar to synthesise in a single work. Along with the vast conceptualisations, a plethora of classifications and epithets have been attributed to nationalism, including the one that is the focus of this paper, namely gender-nationalism. Dichotomies within nationalism are also present, such as the well-known, but rather normative (Tamir, 2019:425) distinction between civil or ethnic nationalism (Shulman, 2002; Gellner, 1988; Kohn, 1944). This distinction is notable due to the connection that is being drawn by the between ethnic nationalism and Eastern (European) nationalism as coinciding. That would mean that nationalism in the case study at hand – Romania – would implicitly fall under the categorisation of ethnic nationalism.

The association between gender and ethnic nationalism as it was conceptualised by scholars of nationalism such as Ignatieff (1993) or Gellner (1983), comes about with greater ease, due to its inherent oppressive nature, as it is aimed at “the subjugated, uneducated masses” (Tamir, 2019:426). Within this frame of thinking, ethnic nationalists perceive ethnic categories as groups with fictive, mythical ancestral ties, whose blood is passed within generations, and for which the purity of and control over women is essential as a means of preserving and defining “the boundaries of the ethnic community” (Albanese, 2006:17; Charles and Hintjens, 1998). Conversely, they argue that civil nationalism displays little to no gendered components, since its focus rests on equal rights and shared political values (Ignatieff, 1993:6), and is decoupled from religious values. Thus, civil nationalism is diametrically opposed to ethnic nationalism,

which is based on primitive, mystical values (Zmire, 2021:486), oftentimes linked to patriarchal values, as are those promoted by religious leaders.

Whilst following this conceptualisation would perhaps narrow down the area of inquiry and provide the argument conceptual consistency in light of the aforementioned inherent gendered trait of ethnic nationalism, the dichotomy in itself needs to be challenged. It reinforces the idea of Eastern Europe as backwards and irrational, as it envisions that Eastern Europe bases its identity on a “fictive super-family” (Smith, 1991; Horowitz, 1985), and implies that only here could nationalism be gendered. Thus, this perspective is West-centred and would in turn reinforce the self-attributed “moral superiority of the West” (Tamir, 2019:425), which is empirically erroneous³. Not only this, but since I rely not only on the assumption that nationalism is inherently gendered, but so are nations, any ideas that aim to reinforce any concept of the nation (be it based on citizenship, as is the case of civil nationalism, or historical blood ties, as it the case of ethnic nationalism) would eventually display some sort of need for national reproduction, directly linked to women. Granted, it is questionable to what extent the reproduction envisioned by these types of nationalism would cause gender inequality, yet this question does not fall within the scope of this paper.

The oxymoronic nature of the gender-nationalism concept

Moving to the epithet that is of interest in this paper, gender-nationalism entails a specific type of reimagining the nation whereof women are “symbolic border guards of the nation” (Yuval-Davis, 1993), whose purity as a representation of the nation has to be protected (Abdou,

³ For cases of nationalist discourses with heavy gendered components, one can look at France’s Marie le Pen, in relation to whom Abdou (2017) has first proposed the concept ‘gender-nationalism’ or US’ Donald Trump (Silva, 2019; Kivisto, 2017)

2017:84). Through these, actors aim to strengthen heteronormative understandings of society, gender, and the nation, alluding to an imaginary of a secure past and “confining women to specific traditional roles” (Agius et al., 2020:436). As it is going to be seen hereafter, this can be done, amongst others, through links to religious values or family ties, or by emphasising women’s intellectual or physical incapacity to move beyond the private sphere of life.

There are scholars who argue that the gendered nature of nationalism is widely acknowledged and well-established, yet it remains at the margins of nationalism studies (Thomson, 2020:4). Notwithstanding, a pattern can be noticed within this literature to hyper-fixate on the relation between right-wing political movements and attitudes and gender. Less attention is given to the relation between distinct empirical manifestations of nationalism and gendered discourses, and, more importantly, to the consistency, or lack thereof, of gendered discourses within these manifestations. Starting from Brubaker’s (2019) connection between populism and the exclusive nature of national belonging within populism, Thomson proposes as unexplored the connection between gender and nationalist-populism (2020:8).

Nevertheless, the very concept of gender-nationalism, as Abdou calls it, which she argues has reached a new peak amongst with populist reactions to the refugee crisis (2017:86), has emerged specifically in relation to populism. Agius et al. (2020) explicitly tackle the relationship between right-wing populism and gender-nationalism through the lens of ontological security. They discuss the ways in which nationalism relies on specific narratives of modernity, which, in the case of right-wing nationalist parties and movements, “reflect the power of a dominant patriarchy” (2020:436). Whilst this approach has great potential to shed a light on state behaviour and ideas of decision-making detrimental to women at the macro level, a psychological approach to the concept should be employed if a scholar wishes to understand

individual groups and the reasoning behind specific discourses, such as the gendered nationalist ones.

Men's dominance over nations and national units

When discussing nationalism, Mosse argues that nationalist movements have co-opted modern masculinity from the very beginning (1996:7). Therefore, ideas of nationalism and understandings of masculinity have evolved in parallel, strongly relying on each other (Nagel, 1998:249). Nevertheless, a common aspect of most functionalist conceptualisations of nationalism is the emphasis on the “the national unit” (Gellner, 1983:1) or “self-defined members of a nation” (Barrington, 1997:712) who represent the political unit. These may as well appear as gender neutral, and they are semantically so. Nevertheless, it is important to note the role of women (or lack thereof) in the institutionalised ‘definition’ process, and to what extent they belong to this unit. Besides ideas of citizenship, which will be discussed in a later section, Gellner, in his functionalist approach to nations, emphasises the notion of a standardised culture that was shared through state education in the process of nation-formation; he argues that homogenous cultures are “very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly ... identify” (1983:64). Going beyond the surface and the semantic use of the word ‘men’ for ‘people’, he also omits, more significantly, the inaccessibility of education for women at the moment of national formation he focuses on. Therefore, while the result of a culture spread through education could represent a ‘standardised and homogenous culture’, it is only so for a limited number of social groups, most of them men.

In order to determine the relation between national formation and ideas of masculinity, we can also look at constructionist approaches to nations, as is Benjamin Anderson’s understanding of nation-states as “imagined communities” (1991:6). It is important as it raises the question who were the decision-making entities that had a monopoly over the imaginative process at the

moment when nations started emerging, who was the ‘self’ who had definition powers and finalised the ‘unit’. The monopoly of men can be assumed by looking both at the statistical difference between the number of men and women in decision-making positions over the last century, with virtually no women being in significant state positions until 1947 and the emergence of Ana Pauker as PCR’s Foreign Ministry. Notably though, in the *Unknown Soldier*, Anderson, not dissimilar to earlier scholars of nationalism, completely omits the masculinised portrayal of the nation and national conflict (Enloe, 1989; Lauenstein et al., 2015:310).

Thinking about the way in which the nation and its characteristics have been shaped, one constant element during the last century in Romania is the predominance of male ‘heroes’ that have constructed the Romanian nation and brought about the unification and stability of the Romanian state. From the very start of history as an institutionalised discipline in Romania, the historical ethnic ties and ideas of unity, and continuity were greatly emphasised, with historical national heroes, always men, tasked to protect these values (Petrescu & Petrescu, 2018:173). These men were either collectives of soldiers or well-known voivods, defending the pre-Romanian statal formations from the ever-expanding surrounding empires. Women, with a few notable exceptions, are nearly absent from history books and have no recognisable characteristics with two exceptions. They are either “weeping mothers and worful wives” (Lauenstein et al., 2015:310; McClintock, 1993:73), or possess masculine characteristics, which is what makes them formidable (see historical figures such as Ecaterina Teodoroiu). Motherhood in itself is a significant symbol that can be traced back to Virgin Mary as a cultic image (Peto, 2010), representing values from within the ‘feminine repertoire’ (Gibson & Heyse, 2010:253), such as “nurture or empathy” (Norocel, 2018:44), which are a common denominator for all of the discourses analysed in a proceeding section of this paper.

Citizenship as an exclusive right: The Napoléonic Code and the existence of women in the imagined communities

When the nation and the state become congruent, irrelevant of which of the two precedes the other, it is relevant to look at ways in which specific persons are favoured to enter the collectivity, or, as Gellner calls it, the ‘national unit’. One of the most wide-spread means of showcasing belonging to a national unit is citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 1997:24). This is significant as, when it comes to obtaining citizenship and entering the national unit, women are disproportionately affected, oftentimes being legally dependent on men. This is evident in nation-states that have implemented citizenship laws inspired by the Napoléonic Code, such as Romania, where women, irrelevant of their marital status, are provisionally and invariably inferior to men in terms of citizenship (figure 1). Following the constitutional changes in 1923 – 1924 proceeding the moment of national unification in 1918 in Romania, we can observe a “redefinition of the citizenship body as an ethnic community under the new legal-political regime of the nation-state” (Iordachi, 2019:4), along with the reinforcement of the said Napoléonic Code.

Amongst others, the Napoléonic code discusses the role and organisation of the family and establishes men as the (figure)heads of the family. Citizenship dynamics play an important role in delimitating the periods of interest. Starting 1954, under the rule of Gheorghiu-Dej, the civil code was revised; detaching itself from the Napoléonic code, it bases its approach to issues of citizenship and paternity on the Soviet model, making it more inclusive to women and placing them on a similar footstep to men and eliminating the dowry (Bucur & Miroiu, 2018:30). After 1966, and lasting until 2012, the Romanian civil code regains its closeness with the Napoléonic Code, an element of continuity for almost 50 years. The code is also important to mention as it

provided the state a “supervisory role over the institution of the family and the upbringing of children” (Iordachi, 2019:422).

Thus, if nationalist discourses aim to reinforce and legitimise institutionalised patriarchal, familial principles, women might implicitly be disadvantaged due to the underlying gendered nature of these practices. Such institutionalised practices lead to the securing of power by men through the preservation of their monopoly over both state institutions, the organisation of the family and of the private life. This generates the stability of nation-states as imagined communities devised by men, where women situate themselves on a lower step, both publicly and privately, and the heavily institutionally dominance of men in both of these two spheres “keeps a particular narrative going” (Giddens, 1991:54).

Along with constitutionally skewed understandings of citizenship and gender, these “imagined communities” are reiterated and legitimised through discursive means, evoking mythical or historical portrayals of the nation, re-establishing, and redefining what the ‘national unit’ is. In most situations, these variations of the past can be brought about through the “reinstalment of strong male leaders who can guard the nation against progressive ideas” (Agius et al, 2020:449). In Romania, as it will become evident within the empirical section of the paper, national heroes are ever present in national discourses, embodying either medieval voivods or rulers of the ancient tribal union Dacia, who are always men who display integral masculine possessions such as bravery or self-discipline. These men are portrayed as the founding fathers of the Romanian nation, essential to its very being.

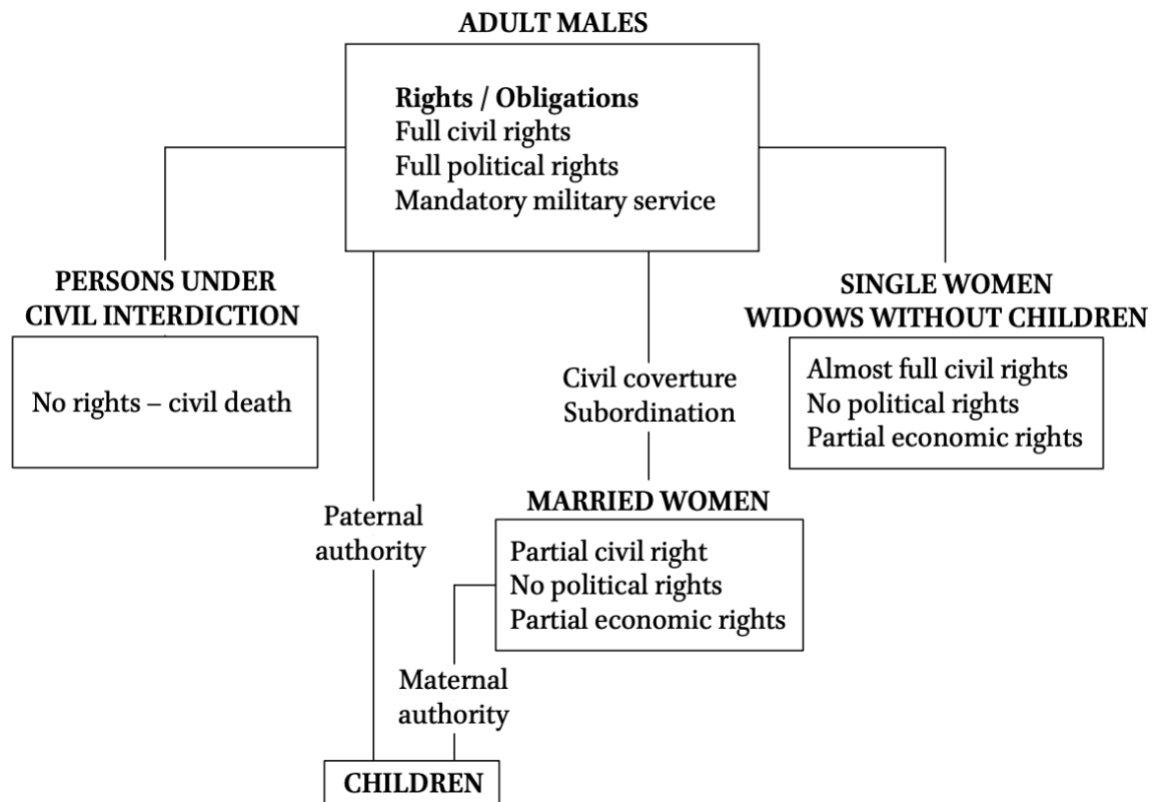


Fig1: Civil statuses under the Code Napoléon

Source: Iordachi, 2019: 414

The Romanian Discourse: Inquiries on the Actors’ Usage of Gender in Nationalist Discourses

Timeframe One. Women as Targets of Constitutional Nationalism (1912 – 1938)

When discussing Romanian nationalism, the historical literature on nationalism usually focuses on early attempts at national unification of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and on the prominent unification movements at the beginning of the 20th century (Petrescu & Petrescu,

2018:166), mainly tackling issues of ethnicity. The national identity in this period is constructed around and closely linked with the Orthodox church, which was axiomatic to the nationalism of this period (Niessen, 1995:287). In this way, this empirical manifestation of nationalism in the first half of the 20th century Romania befits the conceptualisation of ethnic nationalism. There are limited attempts made by scholars in the historical or political science fields to trace and understand the role of women in the public and private spheres at the beginning of the 20th Century, and little to no attention is paid to the evolution of women's impact of national formation in Romania. Iordachi (2019) briefly touches on the interplay between women and citizenship, tracing it for the entirety of the 17th century to 1914. He acknowledges that there has been little progress in this area from 1817, when Romanian national identity began to be better shaped. One progressive step was the introduction of the dowry institution, which generated a minimal sense of financial security for women, independent of men – be they husbands or fathers.

Whilst the role of women in the years of proto-national identity pre-1900s is interesting to look at in its own right, the time frame of focus in this section rests on the years between 1912, in the midst of the Balkan crisis and territorial struggle, and 1938, and the commencing of the Second World War. These years are significant as they display Romania within distinct stages of existence, pre- and post-national unification, and the emergence of both far-right and far-left political parties, on the background of monarchical forms of government. Even the monarchy in itself took two different forms – alternating between constitutional and absolutist – with the presence of nationalist discourse as one of continuity markers.

A notable aspect of the chosen time period is that both before, and after the big union (*Marea Unire*), nationalism was widespread both within the political elites, but also generally within

the civil society. Exacerbated by the national unification efforts and their fruition in 1918, most discourses of this time displayed nationalist elements. Whilst feminist movements did exist (such as *The Association for Civil and Political Emancipation of Women*⁴) and they did produce significant discursive output advocating for women's rights, the paramount goal of women was still that of child-raising; in 1913, Eleonora Stratilescu claimed that ultimately, the goal of women to ensure the "education of Romanian children from a national and religious point of view, in line with the national and patriotic interest" (cited in Iordachi, 2019:452). Notably, the emancipation goals found themselves at odds with the preferences of the nationalist ruling male elites (Iordachi, 2019:450).

Even feminist activists and influential women of the time, such as Alexandrina Cantacuzino, the wife of PM Grigore Cantacuzino, placed motherhood and national reproduction above complete emancipation and the inclusion of women in more domains of the public sphere: "do you think that the homogeneity of the family would be better ensured if the wife enters a party, whilst the husband enters another? First and foremost, women have to be *mothers!*" [emphasis added] [tr]⁵ (Adevărul, 1930). Similarly, in polls about the role of women and their desired behaviour within contemporary society, academics of the time advised women to not join politics "the woman has to avoid compromising her prestige using the archaic methods of local political parties", as they have to be "a force that generates closeness, not strife and destruction" [tr]⁶ (ibid.). This reinforces stereotypical gender norms and roles, playing into traditional stereotypes of the impulsive, but powerful man (which causes destruction, oftentimes associated with war), who belongs in the political sphere, and the motherly, nurturing trait of

⁴ "Asociația pentru emanciparea civilă și politică a femeii" [tr]

⁵ Original: „Credeți că omogenitatea familiei va fi mai bine asigurată când soția va intra într-un partid, iar soțul într-altul? Femeile să fie întâi de toate mame!”

⁶ Original: "Femeia trebuie să se ferească să-și compromită prestigiul întrebuițând metodele învechite ale partidelor de la noi. Trebuie să fie o forță de apropiere, nu de vrajbă și distrugere."

creating interhuman relation and caring, important for raising children and preserving the household.

Nevertheless, even these minimal attempts made by women to better their condition within the political sphere in a deeply nationalist environment was met with opposition from other women. In the 1910s emerged the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, a deeply nationalist and conservative association, whose aims were “to develop the culture and education of Romanian children from a national and religious point of view, in line with the national and patriotic interest” (Stratilesco, 1910:149). Because of the prevailing nationalism of the time, closely associated with war as a masculine activity, the feminist movements became more obscure. Concomitantly, anti-feminist, nationalist, and conservative activities and discourses increased, reaching an all-time high helped by the perpetual (Iordachi, 2019:452).

Men in the political sphere provided the same argument as Alexandrina Cantacuzino to women in their direct discourses; beyond ‘advising’ them to not enrol in politics, a feat which was not possible for them at that point anyway, political actors who brand themselves as nationalist draw a direct relation between the ‘woman way of being’ and household matters. Constantin Argețoianu, a conservative PM and advocate for ‘national renaissance’, when discussing the strengthening of the nation argued that “the role of a woman would be a better fit with her way of being if she restricted her activity to household matters” [tr] (Adevărul, 1930). One of the most significant political actors and academics of the first half of the 20th Century, Nicolae Iorga, was an ardent advocate against women’s emancipation, especially against their entrance in the political sphere. He published numerous speeches in his nationalist newspaper, *Neamul Românesc* (*The Romanian Nation*) about the impact of modernisation on the degradation of the Romanian housewives (1940), who fail to raise children in the service of the nation by doing

so against God's will. Similarly, Titu Maiorescu, another significant political actor and at one point the PM of Romania, directly resisted the provision of political rights to women, stating that "it is impossible to base the fate of a nation on the hand of some beings [women] whose cranial capacity is 10% lower [than men]" [tr]⁷.

Whilst these narratives proved erroneous three decades later, now the public and political discourse was polarised around the inherent fate of women and the "assertion that a high level of education for women affects her as a woman and as a mother", thus endangering the Romanian nation. Not only were the movements of feminist actors inefficient, but they were also discredited by nationalist actors. Nicolae Iorga, within his nationalist speeches, discredited feminist actors, blaming them for the disruption of the 'traditional family', arguing that "feminism shows us what the woman can do without the household, but it obscures what the household will be without women" (Iorga, 1909:286).

Analysing the discourses of the significant political actors of the first decades of the 20th century, two frames can be identified within their statements; first is that of motherhood. Motherhood in itself, as previously mentioned, implies the caregiving needed for raising a child. Children are at the forefront of the nation, as the ones who have the ability to take it further into the future. Without children who are given the proper care in the midst of a traditional, value-oriented family, the nation as envisioned by nationalist elites, would have disappeared. A second frame identified is that of a household keeper (*gospodărie*). This frame implies, first and foremost, the permanent relegation of women to the private sphere, which should occupy the rest of their time outside of motherhood. Instead of masculine, "brutal" responsibilities such as politics and war, women should care for the private space to which men return. This implies another sub-frame, the one of women's mental abilities from the

⁷ Original: "imposibil să se bazeze soarta popoarelor pe mâna unor ființe a căror capacitate craniană e cu 10% mai mica", statement given in 1882 at the Conferețe on Darwinism and Intellectual Progress, Bucharest

perspective of nationalist actors, who perceive women as *lesser than*, either biologically un-gifted or negatively affected by education. The relegation to the private sphere (to the *gospodărie*) is done for these two specific reasons: first because the woman has the biological ability to bear children, and second because she has the biological *inability* to act on the same level as men in the public sphere.

Timeframe Two. Women and the Romanian Communist Nation (1965 – 1989)

Following the communist overtake in 1945, and generally during Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's rule as the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, the majority of nationalist actors was either imprisoned or exiled. Similarly, along with attempts to create the 'new man' and 'new woman' postulated by Marxism, traces of nationalism and overt nationalist thought were erased from the society. Simultaneously, the Socialist Republic of Romania theoretically became one of the states with most rights and liberties for women (such as one of the most liberal abortion policies in Europe) (Anton, 2018:58), under the unofficial leadership of Ana Pauker immediately post-World War Two. This was very much in line with Lenin's aim for "the unconditional annulment of all laws against abortions. Such Laws are nothing but the hypocrisy of the ruling classes" (cited in Adam & Mitroiu, 2016). Nevertheless, the situation took a drastic turn along with the need for a legitimising tool for the seemingly illegitimate communist regime, the drastic demographic downturn, and the coming to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu. This is a relevant period from two perspectives: first, because it shows the significant impact of nationalism in a socialist state, especially when drawing a comparison between Gheorghiu-Dej's and Ceaușescu's understandings of a socialist state. Second, because

it displays the presence of a gendered form of nationalism from a political actor that strays away from the norm of right-wing nationalists, but rather abiding by a left-wing ideology.

Combined with a strong, Sultanistic personality cult, Ceaușescu managed to re-ingrain nationalism within the Romanian political and civil arenas (Ghimisi, 2020:86). Whilst initially mild, becoming a national hero after his refusal to join the Soviet forces in invading Czechoslovakia in 1968 led to a higher degree of nationalism. The progression to intense xenophobia and drastic rewritings and reimaginations of the national history, along with policies implemented to perpetuate the nation and halt the demographic decline, propelled Ceaușescu and his regime to be seen as a “flamboyant display of chauvinistic nationalism” (Petrescu, 2009:523). Whilst the turn to nationalism started taking place in the final year of Dej’s ruling (ibid.), it took years for it to mature and be adopted by both the political elites and the civil society and satisfy the condition of being a tool to mobilise political support (Breuille, 1994).

Notwithstanding, what is important is that, when nationalism did re-emerge, it immediately displayed the gendered component that this paper is concerned with. The Ninth Congress of the Communist Party stands at the auspice of the intersection between nationalism and gender within the same discourse. Held after the death of Gheorghiu-Dej and the emergence of Ceaușescu as the new General Secretary, one of the most significant developments was PCR’s (Romanian Communist Party) “elaboration of a thesis of the *ethnic* and social *homogenisation* of the nation of Romania” [emphasis added] (Ghimisi, 2020:86). This showcases Ceaușescu ideological options as deeply nationalist, setting them on a high scale of significance, and the certain establishment of his rule as nationalist.

Ceaușescu later called this congress, and the policies that followed, such as Decree 770 from 1967, “efforts for the exaltation of the Romanian nation” (Buletinul Oficial, 1985). Decree 77

was a pro-natalist policy implemented by Ceaușescu and PCR that outlawed abortion in Romania, with limited exceptions. Alongst with the institutional and legal provisions, it came with a plethora of pro-natalist propagandistic discourses and narratives. The justification Ceaușescu provided for this policy, which was reiterated in most of his public appearances was that “the greatest honour and most important social role for women is to give birth, to give life, and to raise children”. In this manner, the women were again relegated from all areas of the public sphere to a very limited area, mostly being situated, yet again, in the private sphere. This way of doing things, Ceaușescu argued, “will constitute, even in the future, the only way for the victory of the communist society, for a **dignified**, free, and independent **nation**” [emphasis added] [tr]⁸ (Buletinul Oficial, 1985).

In all of his discourses, terms such as “our nation” are recurrent, and the preservation of the nation rests at the forefront of “national interests”, which are equated with socialist interests. Whilst he claims that the most important task of the people in the nation is to further the socialist goal and preserve the state sovereignty (which is a motif overtaken from the mythology of the past), women have an adjacent, more important task. Ceaușescu claimed that “there cannot be anything more precious for a woman than to be a mother, except to ensure the realization of nature's laws in her own life, to procreate, to ensure the continuous development of the people, of our nation. There cannot exist for a family and for a woman a greater pride and joy than that of having and raising children” (cited in Kligman, 1998:71). Similarly, in PCR’s propaganda newspaper, *Scântea* (The Spark), he called having multiple children “a noble patriotic duty” (1984).

⁸ Original: „Aceasta va constitui si in viitor singura cale pentru victoria societății comuniste, pentru o viață demna, libera si independentă a națiunii noastre!”

In a sense, this way of expressing the discursive interconnectedness between nationalism and gender is even more obvious and straightforward than his pre-communist, right-leaning predecessors. It exemplifies that, whilst right-wing populists are the most visible propagators of gendered nationalist discourses, it does not have to be an exclusive characteristic of the right-wing; left-wing actors also use the same discourses to legitimise their policies, discursively legitimising role which nationalism does play in specific circumstances (King, 2002:369), such as in the case the Ceaușescu's pro-natalist policies. Through his nationalist discourse, Ceaușescu has carefully crafted a previously inexistent link between the Marxist-Leninist ideals that have been resting at the basis of the Romanian communist state since 1946, and ideas of *national* reproduction. He highlighted how “one of the most important duties of women, mothers and educators is to devote themselves to the raising of new generations in the spirit of ardent patriotism, of respect and esteem for the glorious past of the people, of the desire to sacrifice its entire life to the nourishing of the socialist Homeland and the ideals of the communism . . .” (cited in King, 2002:372).

Notwithstanding, nationalist discourses, portraying anti-abortion policies as a “patriotic duty” to revive “the nation’s vigour” (Berelson, 1979:209) in this situation can be perceived as a *means* of legitimising pro-natalist attitudes rather than being a cause of the latter. However, even if that is indeed the case, the fact that nationalist discourses are an efficient tool of anti-abortion legitimation showcases its underlying gendered nature in this respect, irrespective of the general political ideology of the actor generating the discourse. There is one common frame of analysis that is present both here and in the previous period of concern, namely that of national reproduction. In both periods, women eventually become tools for the ruling elites to ensure the perpetuation of the nation and preserve the demographic increase. Whilst the underlying reasons might vary from moral considerations of abortion to long-term economic

reasonings, the empirical elements of these discourses are indiscriminate and make the line between imagined and real reasons blurry.

Notwithstanding, while women are once again relegated to the household and generally to the private sphere and childbearing, more agency is given to women than in previous periods, as they are seemingly encouraged *choose* to have children, thus fulfilling both their national and socialist fate. Nevertheless, considering the elements associated with these discourses, specifically in the form of violent disincentives to have abortions and significant payments to have children, the elements of agency and free choice becomes questionable. This, associated with Ceaușescu's authority, leave no space for women to move beyond their procreation responsibilities.

Another frame that can be identified is that of childcaring and the need to raise children in the spirit of the nation and of socialism. Whilst the further education of the children is the responsibility of the state, mothers have the role to set a basis of 'dignity' that the nation needs to have. Since it is a mother's responsibility to ensure the continuous development of the people, it is preferred that when one child goes beyond the needs for nurture, another child must be given birth to and raised: in this way, women "sacrifice" their lives for the nurturing of the nation in the form of the "socialist Homeland", as Ceaușescu has claimed they should.

Timeframe Three. Perceptions about women within Romania's Right-Wing Nationalist Resurgence (2018 – 2021)

The period following the collapse of Ceaușescu's regime and communism in Romania did not see immediate reformation. While policies were briefly changed, the persistence of the same

elites within state institutions saw a continuation of nationalist language within the political sphere, almost giving rise to ethnic conflict and preserving illiberal attitudes towards abortion and minority rights. Nevertheless, along with the beginning of EU (European Union) accession procedures, and the liberalisation of all spheres within the Romanian state, along with an obvious enthusiasm for supranational identities and Europeanisation, the nationalist discourse began to lose traction. That is not to say that nationalist elements completely disappeared from the political arena; some right-wing nationalist actors emerged and proved to be relevant players in both national and local elections⁹. However, these actors did not have such a wide-reaching, committed audience as the newly emerged AUR (Alliance for the Union of Romanians), currently the third biggest political party in Romania (Politico, 2022) and the long-lasting PSD (the Social Democratic Party of Romania), the biggest party and Romania in the period analysed, namely 2018 – 2021, but also currently.

Interestingly, whilst AUR is a far-right populist party, PSD is a left-wing nationalist party; nevertheless, both of them are socially conservative, Eurosceptic, and, most importantly, display a wide array of nationalist discourses that oftentimes overlap. These discourses are noticeable in both campaign speeches, but also as reactions to current socio-political developments. The display of gendered nationalism in this period differs from the others insofar as it develops on the background of a liberal democratic state, albeit incomplete, with a constitution and external incentives to develop towards an egalitarian society. This further aims to showcase the strong bond between nationalism and the emphasis on gender, which transcends boundaries of government forms or political ideology.

⁹ see political actors such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who was a powerful candidate in the national elections of 2000 or Gheorghe Funar, another right-wing nationalist who was the mayor of Cluj-Napoca, one of the biggest cities in Romania, from 1992 to 1994.

Both the time period and the two parties are relevant to the study as they somewhat mirror the political configuration of the parties in the first time period selected, but in this case both sides of the politico-economic spectrum display nationalist tendencies with strong gendered components. On one hand, there is PSD, whose most notable gendered nationalist practice was its organisation and support for the 2018 Referendum for Family (*Referendumul pentru familie*). The referendum aimed to change the civil code so that it would explicitly state that marriage can *only* take place between a man and a woman, instead of between “spouses”. The justification for supporting and financing this referendum with public money, as the Adjunct General Secretary of PSD, Codrin Ștefănescu declared, is that it would ensure the preservation of “our ancestral traditions, the culture of the Romanian *nation*, and the future of our children”¹⁰ [tr]; similarly, Liviu Dragnea, PSD’s former president, has claimed that “traditional values represent the roots of a nation”¹¹ [tr] (cited in Dancu, 2018). Whilst these claims do not directly target women, they are relevant in two ways: first because of the generally gender restrictive view of the world, and second, and perhaps more relevant to this study, because the idea of ‘conservative family values’ that need to be defended is widely accepted as closely linked with ideas of motherhood and religion (Norocel, 2018:45; Meret, 2015).

Another significant moment in PSD’s display of gendered nationalist discourse is represented by the attitudes of its party members to Viorica Dăncilă’s (also a member of PSD) candidature in the presidential election throughout her whole campaign. Dăncilă, who during the campaign was the Prime Minister of Romania, was regarded by her party colleagues as “a mother”, whose children are the country (*patria*) and the Romanian nation. When urging people to vote for her, one of PSD’s County presidents, Luminița Jivan, claimed that “us women... take care of the

¹⁰ Original: „pentru tradițiile noastre strămoșești, pentru cultura neamului românesc, pentru viitorul copiilor noștri”

¹¹ Original: Valorile tradiționale reprezintă rădăcinile unei națiuni”

house, of the children, of the loved ones. [...] For Viorica Dăncilă, her house and her family are Romania. [...] For the good of our nation, let's vote Viorica Dăncilă president" (Jivan, 2019). Similarly, another county's PSD president, Șerban Valeca, claimed that "us in Argeș see Viorica Dăncilă like a housewife. [...] A human with a Romanian heart" (Valeca, 2019). The latter claim attributes two significant characteristics to Dăncilă: first, her nurturing abilities as a housewife, second, in close link, her belonging to the Romanian nation, which should be the first to be represented. This plays hand in hand with previous attempts to defend the conservative family values, where motherhood also played an essential role, in this case motherhood referring more broadly to a "nurturing and protection" of the people (Norocel, 2018:45)

What differs is that whilst PSD mostly attempts to stay within mild displays of nationalist attitudes, AUR bases its entire scope and output on nationalist elements, putting forward as their main slogan "We value **the family, the country, the faith and freedom**" [AUR's own emphasis]. The slogan in itself is interesting, as it intentionally or unintentionally alludes to one of Ceaușescu's 1985 discourses previously analysed, where he mentions the need for a free and **independent** nation, which is a leitmotif for AUR. For instance, in 1985, Ceaușescu directly referred to the need to preserve a "dignified, free, and independent nation" (Buletinul Oficial, 1985). Besides faith, all other elements overlap with AUR's own vision for Romania. Interestingly enough, out of all actors analysed in this paper, AUR and PCR find themselves at the utmost opposite sides of the politico-economic, ideological spectrum. While AUR is a far-right political party (Doiciar & Crețar, 2021:244), PCR is, at least theoretically, on the far-left side of the economic spectrum. Considering their underlying reliance on the Napoléonic code inspired civil code, it is interesting to note how, in both of these cases, women are not entirely regarded as being situated of the same footstep as men.

For instance, Claudiu Târziu, the former co-president of AUR and a member of the Romanian Senate utilised the association he was a member of to stop the campaign for HPV-vaccination. He claimed that ‘the campaign has to be stopped’ (Târziu, 2008), invoking the argument of national and bodily sovereignty, along with the connection between the ill-intentioned national elites, and big international pharmaceutical companies, who use Romanian girls as ‘lab rats’. More extreme statements have been put forward AUR member and president of the Senate of Aur, Sorin Lavric. In his literary works, he appropriates Maiorescu’s ideas and describes women as lacking intellectual and philosophical depth (Dumitru, 2020), therefore they should not be included in the higher occupations, such as those in the political sphere, but rather be preoccupied with forming a family. Significantly, these claims were made during his electoral campaign, in the same speech in which he has also included racial slurs directed at the Roma minority in Romania. Generally, AUR has taken stances against the implementation of sex education in Romanian schools; George Simion, the president of AUR, has argued, while reinforcing his conservatism and nationalism that “the young generation should read the Holy Scripture at least one per week” instead of learning “such aberrations”. All of these people, along with the party, are supporters of the *Coalition for Family*, which is constantly organising campaigns against abortion and anti-LGBTQ rights. In their manifest, they claim that “the nation belongs to the father” (Burlă, 2020), this implies a relation of subordination.

In Romanian, nation is a feminine-gendered word, therefore the subordination relation implies the dominance of the father-male figure over the defenceless nation. This relation of subordination of men and women is an implicit element promoted by the Orthodox Church of Romania (hereafter BOR). AUR, as one of the main political allies of BOR, perpetually promotes its values, which it perceives to be standing at the forefront of both national survival,

and national salvation. This understanding of the interplay between religion, nationalism, and gender is perhaps most obvious and recurrent in their tackling of the sex education issue. Despite Romania having one of the highest rates of domestic violence and sexual assault in the EU, disproportionately affecting women, AUR discursively constructs sex education as “a product of secular, radical thinking, incompatible with the values of the majority of Romanians. Simply, it is attempted to re-educate parents and relativise Christian and traditional family values” [tr]¹² (AUR, 2021).

Interestingly, the frames that can be identified in contemporary gendered discourses are somewhat similar to those in the first period analysed. This has the potential to create a nuance within the understanding of nationalism as gendered, providing a picture of what frame each political ideology uses. It appears that specific to right-wing nationalism is the frame that places women as biologically inferior to men, most importantly from an intellectual point of view, as both AUR’s Sorin Lavric and Titu Maiorescu have argued in their specific time periods. A distinct frame that is specific to contemporary nationalism is that of outside influence, whose malintent falls directly on women, who are constantly threatened. This is showcased by the portrayal of both vaccination and sexual education as mainly targeted at women – vaccination as a means of using women as “lab rats” and sexual education as intruding within women’s main roles as housewives and child carers and causing them to stray away from the subordinate relation promoted by religious and traditional values.

Conclusion: Looking beyond victimhood

¹² Original: „produs al gândirii radical seculariste, nefiind compatibile cu valorile majorității românilor. Pur și simplu, se încearcă reeducarea părinților și relativizarea valorilor creștine și tradiționale ale familiei”

Historically, women's relation with nationalism was marked by tension and uneasiness (Enloe, 2015:87). Both within academia, but also within everyday manifestations, national struggles are portrayed as gender-neutral, as indiscriminately involving men and women in the same way. As it has been showcased in previous sections, women were far from having an identical role to men in either shaping or critiquing nationalist goals. Even when attempts at this were made, as it was for instance the case of Adela Xenopol in the first timeframe analysed, women had to operate within already set norms of nationalism, having to renounce part of their agency. Through the institutionalisation of gender inequality, such as the adoption of a Napoleonic-inspired civil code, political elites gained the ability to perform a rhetoric of inequality, legitimised by discourses that portrayed women as inferior, physically and mentally, and reduce them to symbols situated within a feminine repertoire. Thus, rather than being 'genuine participants' women are relegated to the private sphere.

Within current public debates, the political actors seen as the promoters of such discourses are right-wing nationalists. Notwithstanding, as I have attempted to prove throughout this work, gendered nationalism is not a by-product of the right-wing, but rather something deeply ingrained within nationalist movements, or even national formation in itself. Furthermore, in my discussion of the Napoleonic code, I have attempted to shed a light on inherent inability of civil nationalism to be less gendered than ethnic nationalism. Even when the nation is defined through citizenship rather than ancestry, women are targeted and set lower in the hierarchy in a well-established patriarchal society. Nationalist discourses do nothing else but legitimise such deeply ingrained institutional inequality, and the attempts at women's true emancipation are forced to make significant concessions for a rather small progress. A very interesting future part in this direction is looking at states known for their civic nation composition – with

Switzerland coming to mind – and the progression of discourses and policies surrounding women in these states.

In this work, I have identified three vastly different time periods, both in terms politico-economic ideology, forms, and systems of government, all of which harboured nationalist political actors, both men (for the most part) and women. Within these periods, however, and despite all significant differences, one element was constant – the deeply gendered nature of these nationalist discourses, or strong attitudes of nationalist actors against women’s emancipation.

Another adjacent find of this study is the widely unexplored role of women in national movements, both within the academic field, but also within the media. As previously mentioned in the beginning of this paper, there is little to no scholarship on the role of women in the Romanian unification movements at the beginning of the 20th Century; gender is completely overlooked, and scholars generally look at the experience of ‘the people’ – the Romanian, the Columbian, the Korean – thus generalising the distinct lived experiences of women, and men, in such movements. Looking beyond Romania as the case study, it becomes evident that the experiences of women in struggles related to the national issue are not tackled with; even when women are touched upon, the treatment of the issue usually boils down to the same discourse of “the nation violated, the nation suffering”, painting women as powerless, with their purity in dangers, in need of constant help from the strong men. Thus, a potential path within nationalism studies is to pay greater attention to women’s role in national struggles beyond their role as victims that need to be protected by the young men of the nation; this is extremely relevant, especially considering current discourses around current world events, such as the war in Ukraine.

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