Paper prepared for the Euroacademia International Conference Re-Inventing Eastern Europe

Vienna, 17 – 19 May 2012

This paper is a draft

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The Political Language of Moral Panics: Teutophobia and the Image of a Besieged Romania in 1871

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Keywords: nation-building, moral panic, Romania, discourse, concepts

Abstract: The present paper seeks to examine the political vocabulary employed by Liberal journalists who, in the wake of the Prussian victory of 1871, attempted to forge a greater sense of solidarity amongst Romanian readers through fear and suspicion, employing a Teutophobic rhetoric that had roots in the recent past. It is our hypothesis that an unbroken sequence of moral panics created a focus on anxieties regarding the "effectiveness" of both physical borders and ideological limits of "the nation". Methodologically, our work strives to catalog political keywords in a Romanian context, mindful of their Western origins, by determining the possible range of their usage, as well as their role in outlining what would from our perspective appear to be a moral perspective on the nation as a moral entity to be defended. As the research focuses on only one year, however, we are provided with a single snapshot, rather than an entire reel that would capture their evolution in a social context, as the methods of Reinhart Koselleck, for instance, would require; as such, a greater emphasis shall be placed on their interaction within a discursive framework, rather than attempting to follow the rules of *Bergriffsgeschicthe* in earnest.

Introduction

While the first five years of Prince (later King) Carol I's long reign (1866-1914) have received a significant amount of scholarly attention, equally owing to their significant political instability and the institutional impact of Romania's first modern constitution, the period immediately following them has attracted scant attention, the issue of defining "stability" as such notwithstanding. Constitutional debates in 1866 had brought up the intellectual issue of defining the nation by denying a growing Jewish minority political rights and that of defining the citizen via creating a restricted franchise. But, as five years of government crisis and frequent, violent elections widened the gap between the highly fragmented Liberal and Conservative proto-parties, the shared victory of having managed to secure the continued unity of what had until recently been the separate Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, respectively, was dwarfed by diverging, though hardly explicit, interpretations and appropriations of "constitutional" as a preeminently moral attribute of political conduct and vision. In theory, the necessity of having a foreign ruler remained largely unchallenged: not yet wholly independent, Romania was still a vassal of the Ottoman Porte and under the joint protection of all major European states, henceforth dubbed the Guarantor Powers¹. Regardless of how unpopular a prince of Prussian descent was among Liberal circles at the time, what united both "Reds" (Liberals) and "Whites" (Conservatives) was their common acknowledgement of the "tyranny" of native, jointly deposed Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza's 1859-1866 reign, doubled by a pragmatic desire to ensure the existence of an internationally-acknowledged state that would give the nation a framework for development.

Thus, defining an enemy within the in-group broadly construed as "the nation" is, as shall be argued, not synonymous with singling out for discrimination the local German community; rather, the gangrened part of the body politic that threatens to infect the whole is, for the journalists of the opposition, the Conservative government, nothing more than a cabal of purported agents of Pan-Germanism. Chauvinism was *not*, we posit, the key factor behind the phenomenon: Teutophobia, rather than Germanophobia is a more fitting label for an aversion towards Prussian militarism, rooted in a fear of sharing the fate of France, in the aftermath of the first total war. The singular cultural relevance of France for early modern Romania can hardly be overstated – Romanian political elites were educated in Paris, the civil code was modeled upon the French, and both "Românul" (the journal of the various Liberal factions) and "Pressa" (that of the Conservatives) equally lamented the war and the Commune. It is with "Românul" as an opposition newspaper during modern Romania's first stable government (1871-1875) that we set out, thus, to analyze the tone and, inasmuch as space allows it, concepts employed by nation-building via moral panic.

What we now need to clarify, however, is the meaning of the term: drawing upon the original and authoritative description of the phenomenon by Stanley Cohen in his 1972 "Folk Devils and Moral Panics", a moral panic is a fundamentally a media-driven phenomenon (and thus inherently modern), constructed from above by news-makers, capitalizing on preexisting anxieties and ultimately seeking to rhetorically mobilize the target-group against the insidious source of a decay that may devour it from withinⁱⁱⁱ. What we can say for the moment is that if we are ready to face the rather exceptional facts, the discourse of moral panic was predominant to such a degree in the press of the day

that it lost its inherent exceptionalness: the readers would have grown accustomed to it one way or another; nevertheless, from a discursive point of view, they present us with a consistent body of work that suggests the potential importance of moral panic in forging the nation, by imagining it as an entity which requires protection, with an implicit set of moral values that may be infringed upon.

The Slătineanu Ballroom Debacle

It would, perhaps, be wise to start our journey by noting that the event that provides a model, a mold for all the subsequent moral panies to be cast in had as a direct effect the toppling of the Liberal cabinet of Ion Ghica on the 10th of March 1871 (*n.b.* all dates follow the Julian calendar, and are therefore 12 days behind the Gregorian one). In the voice of a storyteller, the unnamed (the norm!) author derides the fears of "rebellion" that allegedly moved the army and the prosecutors to disperse the small but feisty crowd of students. Having even climbed atop the roof of an adjacent church so as to get a better aim at the windows of the ballroom where the "German colony" of Bucharest had gathered to celebrate the birth of an empire, the students were, under the new Conservative government of Lascăr Catargiu, prosecuted. The court proceedings, however, dragged on through the year, conveniently providing the Liberals with an occasion to refresh the memory of their reading public on the matter every so often: on the 22nd of September, for instance, we see a public demand that the trial be classified as a political one, given that at the heart of the matter lay the earnest desire of honest Romanian youths who "did not want to allow the Teutons to outrage Latin sensibilities further still" — technically, this would have implied a trial by jury, a jury hopefully influenced by Teutophobia.

The students themselves are given the opportunity to articulate their point of view, obviously in a language similar to that of the other articles on the topic, if not even more fiery than the average. In a reply to the article published by the Conservative "Pressa" in the wake of the event, a student (a certain I. G. B.) speaks on behalf of those who had stormed the ballroom:

"the spontaneity with which the deeds were done should make plain for everyone – save for those blinded by passions and interests – that their counsel was the heart, and their legitimation were the feelings that made it throb so vigorously. To throw a banquet in the house of of a dying man's family while his grieving brother is weeping at his side is the very height of immorality. To wish him a terrible death and to gloat over it – *that* is the height of barbarism! The Teutons throw their banquets in our house, over our brothers' graves, and 'Pressa' thinks that it's all moral if they're the ones paying for them!"

Thus, from the very beginning, the rise to power of the Conservatives was inextricably linked to the event, thereby providing a sort of distorted foundation myth for the new government^{vi}: a cabinet adept at turning violence into an art.

"born of the tantrum thrown by a certain Prussian in the Sl \bar{a} tineanu Ballroom, who demanded that the people [poporul-aterm used ambiguously here, in that it may refer to the mass of people outside the hall, but also to 'the people', embodied by the youths in question] be shot because they did not love the Germans, and shouted that he would make sure to topple the government that had failed to give him the pleasure of witnessing a bloodbath on the streets of Bucharest."

By March 17^{th} , references to the events of the 10^{th} already had behind them a corpus of reports vii that sought to establish an orthodoxy of sorts – the point of departure for further Teutophobic scares that stem from it. Thus, on the 23^{rd} , "Românul" finds it easy to reply to an article published in the official gazette that, for its own part, attempted to accredit a rival moral panic supported by "Pressa" – that the Ballroom events were a tell-tale sign of a revolt/revolution in the making and that the royal palace had been, in fact, targeted by a mob five to six hundred strong viii.

The Consul: A Case Study in Imagining the Enemy

It ought, given the above, be mentioned that the journalists of "Românul" use the name of the Prussian consul, as shorthand for the Conservative government: "the Radowitz Cabinet" – as Bismarck was to be hated primarily for humiliating France, Radowitz neatly fulfilled the need for a more specifically anti-Romanian object of contempt. On March 16th, "Românul" notes that even in Austria and Bavaria – to say nothing of Switzerland or Russia – similar events did not escalate into international incidents; "the nation's disgust" shall forever trail behind the weak government brought into being "by the stomping of a Prussian foot in a ballroom". In fact, this image in particular tries to capture the arbitrariness of a *diktat*, and is found to be almost as recurrent a trope as the "Radowitz Cabinet". But, "stomping feet" aside, journalists asserted that the consul's outburst, though proof of a reprehensible character, had less to do with the events of March 10th than with the Teutonic/Conservative master plan:

"it wasn't the mere accident at the Slätineanu Ballroom that spelled the end of a national cabinet [ministerului naţional] and the dissolution of the people's representation [reprezentațiunii poporului] – merely a few students [...] who broke a few

windows and threw a few bricks and potatoes into the soups of the Teutons who had gathered to celebrate the murder of our French brothers. It was the legal action taken against the German princes who had made away with 56 million that rightfully belong to the Romanian state that angers his Swabian excellency and the reactionary forces in our country^{xiii}.

Thus, we may note the connection between the much-debated "Stroussberg affair", in which a Prussian consortium that had failed to honor terms of a railroad-building contract with the Romanian state, and the new wave of Teutonic affronts to the nation. But what truly cemented the consul's status as a symbol of Prussian contempt for Romanian sovereignty was the way in which he delayed official accreditation for months on end: thus, on the 10th of October, "Pressa" outrages "Românul", which argues that accreditation is *not* an "exaggerated formalism" in choosing to bypass Romanian sovereignty in favor of dealing directly with the Porte, Bismark and Radowitz bring back eerie memories of the *Ancien Régime*; furthermore, on November 24th we learn from "Românul" that in Serbia, only more recently and to a lesser degree autonomous, the German consul had immediately become accredited in Romania, Radowitz had only been so since October 14^{thxv}. In short, one may argue that the figure of the young Karl Maria von Radowitz had become, for Romanian Liberals, synonymous with the supposed insolence and barbarism of the newly-established German Reich.

Competing Panics: Foreign Invasion, Weak Borders

On the 17th of March, "Pressa" publishes an article deploring the state in which the Liberals had left the country, after the Slătineanu street brawl: "inside our borders – bankruptcy!, right outside them – invasion!" likewise, and more irritatingly still for the Liberal opposition, foreign journals also alluded to the necessity of military occupation, as it was the duty of the Guarantor Powers to ensure that an obviously immature Romania be run properly. "Românul" deals with "Pressa" on the 19th: the Conservatives tried to persuade the public of the imminence of Turkish invasion, a prospect which was both terrifying and, from the point of view of nascent historical narratives of national pride, an unparalleled form of indignity, while the Liberals, on the other hand, argued that the communique in question originated with the Austrians and Prussians, and that the Ottomans had declined to even consider the prospect of invading Romania^{xvii} – for "Românul", the threat of an *impending* invasion was, thus, debatable, while the reality of Pan-Germanic grand designs behind was *not*. Similar events^{xviii} are dealt with in much the same manner.

What is at stake, in fact, is the way in which a fear of invasion is transformed into a more diffuse (but perhaps even more pervasive) sense of futility with regard to Romania's borders; on the 28th of July, for instance, "Românul" cries "betrayal!" when the Prince keeps silent over the fact that Bismarck had addressed the Porte and not the Romanian government – reminding Romania of its incomplete independence is the greatest affront^{xix}. Nevertheless, in an article published on the 7th of April, "Românul" urges the nation to be brave and disregard the noises that the government propaganda machine tries to deafen it with:

"we, the press of the political opposition, demand the attention of the *real* public opinion, not that of truncheon-wielders [...], but that of those endowed with a *sense* for the national and the liberal [ce are simtul national şi liberal]"^{xx}.

But just how "deep" does the dichotomy between "real" and "fake" run, from a social point of view? Does the fault line neatly separate the Nation from its corrupt leaders and the agents of their violence, or has the crack already begun to divide the mass of the people? The journalist is conveniently ambiguous: from the point of view of nation-building, the community is innocent until proven guilty – from that of moral panic, quite the opposite.

The German Community: Escaping the Crossfire

In the original article describing the ballroom brawl, the unnamed author mentions that one of the events which triggered the students' assault was the explosion of a beer barrel, flung into the street by the hapless banqueters, "exuding a characteristic smell that gave right away the nationality of the guests" Other than that, however, the article lets Radowitz take center-stage – the writer does not refer to the guests at the banquet with undue maliciousness; and yet, there is an obvious ambiguity: what did the band of students *really* mean when it chanted "Prussians, be gone!" - gone from Paris or from Romania? On its part, "Românul" makes a point of attacking Bucharest Germans only from the position of moral superiority that is inherent to reprimanding someone for their tactlessness: it republishes in its entirety a letter in which the "German colony" declares that its only desire is peaceful and industrious coexistence with the Romanians – the students had surely been "seduced" and used by some "base" group or other, for they, the Germans, were celebrating the Fatherland's unification, not victory over France. The Germans play the card of conforming to a safe stereotype, "Românul" stresses the tolerance of the Romanian people and shows overall satisfaction with the disclaimer^{xxii}.

Here, then, lies the distinction between "Germanophobia" and "Teutophobia". An intriguing case in point: on

July 19th, the well-know Dr. Obedenaru publishes a long letter. In it, he replies to criticism levied against an article published in "Românul" five days earlier, in which, in a peculiar hybrid of modern and pre-modern scientific lingo, he had theorized an updated miasma theory explanation for Romanians' national character^{xxiii}. Or rather, the character of any and all inhabitants of Romania, regardless of their ethnic origin; in his original article, Dr. Obedenaru mentions in passing that second-generation Germans in Romania are wont to become lazier than their ancestors – and he blames malaria [*friguri*], though not as we understand it today, for making men moody and distraught. In justifying why he has chosen the Germans as an example, he is blunt: because they are the only sizable group of foreigners who continue to work after settling in the country, unlike "idiotic" Turks, domineering Hungarians ["Wielding a whip! That is a Hungarian's only pleasure!"] and "crafty" Jews^{xxiv}.

'German Rivers'

On April 3rd, 1871, an article reprinting a story from a certain "Correspondence Slave" sounds yet another alarm: Pan-German agitators in Pressburg (now Bratislava) paraphrase the classic "Die Wacht am Rhein" and name a magazine "Die Deustche Wacht am Der Donau", proclaiming, thus, that "the great oriental river" must, like the Rhine, become German^{xxv}. The fact that such news come from the very edge of the German world make matters incontrovertible – the *Drang nach Osten* will spell the end of a weakened Austria, and poses, thus, to the inflexible Hungarians, a threat comparable to that of Pan-Slavism; but Serbians and, finally, Romanians, must take note and prepare themselves accordingly. The author, thus exhorts allies and enemies alike to be vigilant against the fundamentally Prussian onslaught of "Hegelian philosophy, needle gun, Krupp cannon and resurrected Holy Empire". Later in the year, however, we see "Românul" ultimately conflate Prussian and Austrian Pan-German designs^{xxvi}. Less^{xxvii} than a week later, an correspondent from Graz signing under the name of "Publius" refers in a very matter-offact way to the competition between German and Hungarian expansionism, both aiming to annex everything from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. The acts of a fringe movement in Bratislava become unequivocally associated with state policy: "the impish Bismarck" was scheming away in the darkest recesses of the Liberal imaginary.

Still, the aforementioned rivalry between two of more of the Guarantor Powers occasionally gave the journalists of "Românul" hope – after all, the status of the country's frontiers was properly regulated, "right and honor" on their side^{xxviii}. The only effective long-term solution? Pan-Latinism^{xxix}, as a direct attempt to counter and undermine Pan-Germanism, not only historically/ethnically, but also strategically. Finally, on a side-note, an article from April 10th, laments the fate of 'the most exclusively Romanian river [...] a river that flows only through Romanian lands and, for its better part, through a free Romania', the Prut; the headline reads: "The Prut, A Gift For Austria and Russia"^{xxxx}. A convention ratified in 1869, admittedly almost forgotten by the Liberals (who had hoped that its coming into effect would somehow be indefinitely postponed), begins to regulate the commercial and military aspects of the river as a border between the three nations. Why is it felt to be an indignity? Because it is in some ways similar to the multinational administration of the Danube, but, we may add, first and foremost because the news come in the wake of the moral panic that sought to defend a "Romanian" Danube.

German as a Foreign Language in Schools

Prior to the panic, a May 10th article titled 'The National Tongue and Foreign Languages in Romanian Schools', heartily congratulates the author of a brochure bearing the same title^{xxxi}, the Romanian-Italian G. L. Frollo, who decries the excessive presence of French words and the blindness of contemporary linguists, who, in their quest to standardize the Romanian language, ignore the "inspired" poets who had gracefully melded together popular and high culture only years before. Such opinions would soon become unfashionable, however – Gen. Christian Tell, the newly-appointed Conservative Minister of Education and Religious Cults is deeply unpopular with the Liberals, not least owing to his ministry's decision to support the introduction of the German language in Romanian high schools:

"The banishment of the French language from high schools and the imposition of mandatory German teaching. [bold lettering in the original, recurring phrase in the same text and others xxxiii] Behold, in frank and shameless disregard for public indignation, the program of the current regime. Behold an outrage to the *sense* of every Romanian that this foreign regime thinks nothing of causing, in defiance of our blood and desires." xxxiii

It seems that in 1871 one of things a Romanian liberal held most sacred was that of defending the cultural bonds that the French language forged in school – what was at stake was cultivating one's affinities for empathizing with and emulating a cultural model, for the sake of Pan-Latinism, but also the continued existence of a linguistic benchmark for the Romanian language within an educational milieu, that would help temper the excesses of experimentation by creating a critical mass: the informed, educated public. The purportedly arbitrary new spelling supported by the government is also singled out as the trigger for the moral collapse of Romanian society, through

illegible prayer-books and inter-generational incomprehension while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of "lesenationality" while budgetary cuts that bring an end to financial support for a church and school in the Transylvanian town of Braşov are synonymous with a crime of the school in the transition of the school in the

Thus, on the 29th of September, "Românul" points out that Article 118 of the unmodified law was unambiguous: French, Latin and Greek were mandatory, full stop; however, being the creatures of darkness they were, they "tore down the lighthouse that led students to great and generous ideas, slowly but surely making them forget their origin, their nationality, their race." On October 1st, with the same bold-letter refrain, "Românul" accuses Tell of being Pan-Germanism's greatest agent^{xxxvii}; the panic spreads across the Carpathians, it seems, as the journalists of "Gazeta Transilvaniei" hasten to warn their brethren^{xxxviii} of the danger they are in and of their moral responsibility as privileged, free guardians of Romanian culture. Finally, on October 24th, the projected curriculum is published – and is taken at face value, without further comment: French had not been banished outright, and Italian had been given a fighting chance; above all, there is little that could be done to challenge the decision.

An 'Anti-Constitutional' Petition and a Pamphlet

On April 18th, "Românul" gets wind of a petition in the making – a petition that would challenge the constitutional status quo and the electoral system, on account of "the need to better adjust them to our level of civilization and traditions [datine]^{xxxix}; this is, indeed, enough to arouse the suspicion of Romanian Liberals, especially given the key status of "constitutional" as an attribute designating moral righteousness in a variety of political debates and contexts. What takes the Liberals by surprise when the petition becomes public in earnest^{xl}, however, is not the reactionary tone of Conservatives per se, but the idea of colonizing Germans in rural areas, with the alleged purpose of providing a model for Romanian peasants. The argument here is that the work ethic of the said Germans would inspire Romanian villagers – though, rather self-defeatingly, the relatively isolated German colonies of Russian Bessarabia are quoted as the main inspiration for the project. Article 3^{xli} of the Constitution would thus have to be repealed – in any case, the Romanian state already had to deal with "Bulgarian colonies" it had inherited from Russia in southern Bessarabia ", making the said article a highly debatable one indeed. "Românul" quickly draws the link between Pan-Germanism, Conservative sympathies and the death of equality, first and foremost owing to the language of the petition itself:

"Equality stems from justice, so it is useful only inasmuch it is just [...] It is, thus, unjust to assume that those who own nothing should be able to vote and levy taxes for and from those who do. We have no need for the famous revolutionary triad of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', above all because once fraternity was proclaimed, the most shameless thievery and brutal murders became commonplace."

To this, "Românul" replies that

"there are, indeed, ages in which reactionary [reacţiune] forces, like cholera or the plague, spread across the face of the Earth, but one must not blame it on Providence – rather, on the ignorance of peoples [neştiinţa popoarelor] and still-festering filth that has yet to be cleaned"xliv

It is, sadly, impossible to determine the identity of the editor who, in the wake of the petition, compiled a few pamphlets written on the same topic of German colonization in 1860, adding to them a lengthy excursus under the guise of an introduction. The opinions voiced by the various authors are fairly heterogeneous, as far as finer points are concerned, but this does not seem to deter the unnamed editor; his introduction, for one thing, decries the evils of cosmopolitanism and argues that "a war of economic attrition" is being waged against Romania^{xlv} by a political class "no longer in moral union with the nation" The cleavage between "the national and the colonial political systems" makes it obvious that colonies will only bring prosperity to their metropolis, and that in the great multinational empires, nations thrive off nationalities – to use Eric Hobsbawm's classical dichotomy^{xlvii} – precisely because they are more civilized and, thus, more "egotistic" Thus, the economical is emphatically political, and the author excoriates politicians tolerant of the Jews, arguing that the former have made "the very system of the state" inimical to society^{xlix} – Romania is already a colony, in fact, inasmuch as "the state is no longer the nation" and actively prevents the formation of a middle class, by encouraging "depravedness, political and moral" Finally, Romania and Germany cannot have mutually advantageous economic intercourse – "The Orient is in an age of racial struggle and nation-state formation. [word-for-word translation, italics in the original]"; the absence of protectionism meant, inkeeping with the doctrines of Romanian Liberals at the time, national annihilation.

Conclusion: A Country Under Siege

As we have sought to illustrate, the attempt to create a climate of unease and the strategy of resorting to the creation of moral panics as a tool for nation-building are among the most important goals for the Liberal journalists of "Românul" in 1871. Did "Românul" hope to see a "Slătineanu Redux" of sorts that would drive the Conservatives out of government? The answer is that we must bear in mind the fact that "Românul" functioned in an age of limited suffrage and limited literacy - reading "Românul" meant not merely being "in on the gag", but in tune with the political: at the most pragmatic, what its journalists sought to achieve was the consolidation of an "imagined community", to use Benedict Anderson's well-known terminology. In this sense, recourse to moral panics would therefore seem a logical strategy, given that, as defined in this chapter's introduction, they have the strengthening of community/in-group bonds as a notable side-effect (if not as their stated purpose). To wit, every time "Românul" added another layer to its Teutophobic discourse, all that came before the shift had to be re-evaluated in light of more recent developments, all of which, obviously, hinted to a conspiracy in the making; thus, throughout 1871, the corpus of Teutophobic references became, through a snowball effect of sorts, ever larger – indeed, potentially too cohesive, intertwined and self-referential to provide an incentive for collective action. Just as the "sense of every Romanian" straddled the line between instinct and intellect, closer in meaning to the archaic "wit" and establishing a rhetoric of authenticity for moral participation, so we may conclude that, in what concerns the enmeshed concepts employed, "colony", above all, is, without its meaning being contested as such, the one to best embody anxieties with regard to the economic and cultural weaknesses of the nation, the emphasis falling on the gap between state and nation that an alien metropolis might fill; derailed nation-building, it seems, was the most morally charged fear of all.

Andrei-Dan Sorescu is an undergraduate student of Political Science at the University of Bucharest. His current research interests focus on rhetorics of political exclusion, discourses of nation-building and debates on the limits and nature of citizenship in a nineteenth-century context. The present contribution is part of his BA thesis, titled "Who Gets to Be a Citizen and Why? Nation-Building and Political Participation in Romania, 1871 and 1875", which analyzes journals and periodicals in search of concepts used in shaping the vocabulary of citizenship and restricted suffrage that became cemented during Romania's first stable government. Future projects aim to deal with tensions between restricted suffrage and nationalism reflected in the moral vocabulary dealing with both franchise and nation, a still under-researched topic of 19th-century political and intellectual history.

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