

**FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY PATRIOTIC MOTHERS  
TO THE CONTEMPORARY NATIONALIST  
DISCOURSE: THE APPROPRIATION OF THE IMAGE  
OF THE MOTHER IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF  
1848 AND THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALIST  
DISCOURSES TODAY<sup>1</sup>**

The imagery of mother and family has become a focal point in far-right literature, reflecting the way nationalist discourses reclaim traditional and indigenous values. The concept of family, particularly the representation of mothers in Romanian culture, is closely tied to national identity. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, women were primarily seen through their maternal roles, as giving birth to the nation's heroes. Press and writings from the Revolution of 1848 underscore the significance of women in nurturing future patriots and instilling patriotic values through their children's education. However, at the level of public life, women's roles are largely limited to fulfilling maternal functions on behalf of the country, which gives them little autonomy.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a pivotal shift in the position and identity of women in Romanian society. Female identity was predominantly confined to that of mother and educator<sup>2</sup>. The Revolution of 1848 brought changes to the social role of the family, notably redefining mothers' roles by aligning them more closely with political practices. Women were starting to get involved in the public sphere, and from a social viewpoint, they started to mobilize around charitable projects. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the distinctions between the revolutionary women's movement in France, such as the activists of the Saint-Simonian circle and those involved with the *Tribune de femmes* magazine, whose demands were primarily focused on gender equality and women's rights<sup>3</sup>. By contrast, in Wallachia and Moldavia, women's public presence is more closely associated with patriotic discourse than with gender issues and the disparities in women's social status

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<sup>2</sup> Ionela Băluță, *La Bourgeoise respectable: réflexion sur la construction d'une nouvelle identité féminine dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle roumain*, București, Editura Universității din București, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Clark, *Revolutionary Spring: Fighting for a New World 1848–1849*, London, Penguin Books, 2023, p. 138.

during that era. Correspondence among revolutionary women reveals the challenges they faced, including experiences of motherhood amidst lack of medical resources and a precarious social situation, political instability, as well as the traumas of infant mortality and children's illnesses. Correspondence can be considered a key genre of women's writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In British historiography, some historians have noted that, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, letter-writing was viewed as a genre reserved for women, who were expected to write only about trivial aspects of life<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, in Central and Eastern European culture and literature, correspondence was regarded as a space of freedom for women<sup>5</sup>.

The intertwining of motherhood with the rise of patriotic discourse leads to a romanticized and superficial depiction of motherhood, emphasizing the fact that women's reproductive roles are paramount. By drawing on literary writing or magazine articles dedicated to mothers and family during the events of 1848, this study aims to shed light on how the patriotic connections of women in 1848 are recontextualized under the influence of hermeneutic violence in contemporary nationalist texts produced by influential figures of the radical right movements. Thus, the survey proposes a comparative analysis of the image of the mother and family during the 1848 upheavals related to the rise of patriotism, and the way it has been revisited and perverted in the nationalist contemporary discourse. Concerning the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the definition of literature and of what is considered a literary text is much broader and extends beyond fictional works, where "not literary pride drives the pen, but rather genuine civic passion"<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the texts I will focus on are not literary in the sense of fiction. Furthermore, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's limited access to writing led to literary interests being expressed through correspondence, which replaced fictional writing. On the other hand, the contemporary texts chosen for analysis (the writings of Mihail Neamțu and Dan Puric) are mostly essayistic. I did not aim to explore the field of conservative and reactionary women's literature. The limitations of this research lie in the fact that I did not propose to investigate this area extensively, but instead chose to highlight broad strokes of extremism promoted by the most prominent figures of far-right ideologies. Additionally, literature related to the conservative movement of a TradWife-type is not well-defined in Romania. Women who support these movements are active in reactionary magazines such as

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Harvey, "Symphyty in Practice. Eighteenth Century Letters and the Material Body", in Sarah Goldsmith, Sheryllyne Haggerty and Karen Harvey (eds.), *Letters and the Body 1700–1830. Writing and Embodiment*, London, Routledge, 2024, pp. 85–102.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Pekaniec, "19<sup>th</sup>-Century Polish Women's Literature of Personal Document – 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Reception", *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2025, 12, p. 197–217.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Cornea, *Originile romantismului românesc. Spiritul public, mișcarea ideilor și literatura între 1780–1840* [*The Origins of the Romanian Romanticism. Public Spirit, Intellectual Trends and Literature between 1780 and 1840*], București, Cartea Românească, 2008, p. 187. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

*Cultura vieții* or *Armonii culturale*<sup>7</sup>. Publishers representing the official voice of these reactionary movements, such as *Christiana*<sup>8</sup>, tend to be dominated by male writers, mostly priests or monks, and similar clerical figures who are writing on sexuality and women's bodies.

*From the Patriotic Mother to the Mother of Reactionary Coalitions: Motherhood in the Cultural Far-right Discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries*

The phenomenon of the 1848 Revolution was revisited after the establishment of the communist regime after 1948. The figures of Nicolae Bălcescu and Ana Ipătescu (although the latter to a lesser extent, as gender prejudices remained strongly present in the post-war years) became heroic representations, as they were seen as true fighters for freedom and the rights of the oppressed classes<sup>9</sup>. Of course, their recovery is biased and ideologically distorted. On the other hand, the re-examination of the female revolutionaries of 1848 has not gone beyond recognizing their significant roles in the private and family sphere, their contributions valued primarily for their roles as wives and mothers, whereby their appreciation is measured in terms of gentleness and patriotic qualities. Mothers of the 1848 Revolution were expected to instil patriotic values in their children<sup>10</sup>. Mothers' love for their children equally reflects their devotion to the nation<sup>11</sup>.

What undermines the historical narrative (both the ideological one from the era of Socialist Realism and many contemporary narratives) is women's claim to a public role, which they originally held during the Revolution. Furthermore, it distorts the emotional connection between women as mothers and the institution of the family, by patriotism, establishing itself at the time as a form of secular religion<sup>12</sup>. The appropriation of the image of motherhood by patriotism occurs

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.culturavietii.ro> and <https://armoniicultural.ro/page/84/?ai3a%2Fbb225320> [htm](#). Accessed June 20, 2025. These magazines promote culturally conservative and reactionary attitudes. They mostly discuss the importance of family, religion and traditions. There are a lot of platforms aiming to promote ideological extremism. For instance, see Cristian Norocel, Gabriella Szabó, Márton Bene, "Integration or Isolation? Mapping Out the Position of Radical Right Media in the Public Sphere", *International Journal of Communication*, 2017, 11, pp. 3764-3788.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.librariasophia.ro/editura/christiana?page=2>. Accessed June 20, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> An ideological reading of the Revolution of 1848 can be noted in Mihail Roller's studies. See Mihail Roller, *Anul revoluționar 1848 [The Revolutionary Year 1848]*, București, Eminescu, 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sophie Wahnich, "L'amour de la patrie a-t-il un genre? Les émotions révolutionnaires mal partagées de 1790 à 1795", *Clio*, 2018, 47, pp. 93-116.

<sup>11</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Viața femeilor în trecutul românesc [The Life of Women in Romania's Past]*, Vălenii de Munte, Tipografia Neamul Românesc, 1910, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> Alin Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea: între public și privat [The Woman in the Romanian Society of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Between Public and Private Life]*, București, Meridiane, 2003, p. 69.

particularly in texts with nationalist overtones. These have become frequent amid the growing affinities for far-right ideologies in Romania in recent years.

Conducted by Ionela Băluță, studies on women and motherhood at the intersection of contemporary nationalism and 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal desires demonstrate how the development of a predominantly patriarchal national culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century simultaneously marked the appropriation of women's autonomy both within marriage and in public life, where women contend with various forms of symbolic violence<sup>13</sup>. This symbolic violence manifests not only through limited access to public life, but also through discourse that primarily defines women in terms of their reproductive roles. The nationalist discourse surrounding movements such as the "Coalition for the Family" and the actions of this reactionary organization have significantly influenced the way civil society in Romania engages with feminism and the LGBTQ+ community. The anti-gender campaigns mounted by Romanian far-right movements have been critically examined in numerous studies by Ionela Băluță and Cristian Norocel<sup>14</sup>. Diana Mărgărit highlighted the vulnerabilities in Romanian society that have created a favourable environment for right-wing extremist movements. She notes that the increasing legitimacy of the Romanian Orthodox Church, along with the rise of nationalist rhetoric from certain far-right intellectuals such as Dan Puric, Mihail Neamțu or Sorin Lavric, has shaped the rise of reactionary conservatism.

The contemporary nationalist discourse in Romania responds to two crises with racist, homophobic, xenophobic, and misogynistic measures: one concerns the institution of the family, and the other relates to sovereignty and the defence of the nation against outsiders. Thus, both AUR<sup>15</sup> and presidential aspirant Călin Georgescu prioritize the notion of the "traditional family" and the principle of "not selling the country" in their agenda<sup>16</sup>. The harsh and hateful rhetoric employed by extremist movements to promote their homophobic and xenophobic agendas is documented in Radu Cinpoș's studies, which reveal the way anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda is executed in the name of traditional family values. Eurosceptic sentiment in Romania has been amplified publicly by the propaganda of anti-EU movements that associate Western Europe with moral decay and social

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Cristian Norocel, Ionela Băluță, "Retrogressive Mobilization in the 2018 'Referendum for Family' in Romania", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 70, 2023, 2, pp. 153-162.

<sup>15</sup> The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (*Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor*, AUR), is the Romanian far-right party that was founded in 2019 by a lot of radical right intellectuals and extremist activists belonging to reactionary movements such as The Coalition for the Family. Currently, AUR represents an important political force in Romania, particularly since the 2020 elections and after its alliance with the far-right candidate for the Romanian presidency in 2024, Călin Georgescu.

<sup>16</sup> Diana Mărgărit, *Democracy and Human Rights: Insurgent Conservatism in Romania*, Bucharest, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, 2020.

destruction<sup>17</sup>. It is not only extremists that have adopted these ideas. Established political parties have also publicized the notion that Romania remains a nation that upholds traditional family values<sup>18</sup>. Motherhood is a built-in component of traditional femininity, intrinsic to the fulfilment of gender roles. Through motherhood, a woman's body becomes a tool in the struggle for national sovereignty. It is leveraged to promote nationalist ideas, as it is seen as a woman's duty to give birth to and raise children in a nationalist spirit, children who then become adherents of conservative values. The exercise of maternal function represents a woman's obligation to the nation and signifies her loyalty to the country. In other words, reproduction serves as a mechanism for national consolidation and preserving the social order<sup>19</sup>.

The nation, and women who are giving birth to children of the nation, became a central element of the patriotic discourse of 1848, when patriotism meant not isolationism, but rather cultural development. Nevertheless, women are subjected to patriarchal social paradigms and are meant to educate the future heroes of the nation in the spirit of devotion to the fatherland during that time. In the following sections, we trace the mechanisms by which the perversion of the patriotic spirit (in turn entailing the same traditional gender-role dimension) and the image of the patriotic mother from the 19<sup>th</sup> century occur in the discourse of far-right currents that reintegrate the image of the mother into a reactionary framework aiming at misogyny, homophobia, and racism. The study proposes a comparativist approach to texts dedicated to motherhood and published in the context of the 1848 phenomenon, and texts signed by far-right intellectuals who integrate motherhood into a reactionary matrix in which women perform traditional gender roles and accept their secondary social and human status.

For this analysis, I consider fictional writing, such as Mircea Rosetti's short prose dedicated to Maria Rosetti, as well as Maria Rosetti's correspondence, and articles from the newspapers *Mama și copilul* [*Mother and Child*] and *Femeia* [*The Woman*]. On the other hand, I trace the way the image of the revolutionary and activist mother of 1848 is nefariously reinterpreted and entirely seized by the reactionary discourses of the far right through the lens of nationalism. In this order, I consider writings published by radical right intellectuals.

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<sup>17</sup> Radu Cinpoș, "Beyond Radical Right Politics: LGBTQ+ Rights in Hungary and Romania", in James Koranyi and Emily Hanscam (eds.), *Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*, Berlin & Boston, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023, pp. 217-240.

<sup>18</sup> Sorina Soare and Claudiu D. Tufis, "No Populism's Land? Religion and Gender in Romanian Politics", *Identities*, 30, 2023, 1, pp. 112-130.

<sup>19</sup> Ov Cristian Norocel, "Heteronormative Constructions of Romanianess: A Genealogy of Gendered Metaphors in Romanian Radical-Right Populism 2000–2009", *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 19, 2011, 1-2, pp. 453-470.

*Patriotism and Propaganda – the Mother as an Educator of the Fatherland and Child-bearer of a Sovereign Nation*

The first treatise on patriotism reached Romanian culture through the translation of Iancu Nicola's *Manual de patriotism* [*Handbook of Patriotism*] in 1829<sup>20</sup>. In the Romanian context, patriotism is understood as "solidarity within the Ancient Greek 'polis'" and is distinct from the meanings of "nationality or popular sovereignty"<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, patriotism was cultivated as respect for the Romanian language and literature, and the heritage of the Romanian people. It manifested by submission to the social order, the philanthropic spirit of the aristocracy, and both the labour and submission of the peasants. Since Tudor Vladimirescu's upheavals, the term "patriot" has been applied to those willing to sacrifice themselves, thus rendering patriotism a virtue. As Knight Jaucourt defined it, patriotism is "the political virtue of self-denial, the ability to put the public interest above the personal interest"<sup>22</sup>. In the context of the Revolution of 1848, patriotism became the central concept on the revolutionaries' agenda, marking the rise of the patriotic literary movement represented by Nicolae Bălcescu, Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Barbu Paris Mumuleanu, Gheorghe Magheru, Vasile Alecsandri, and others. Their patriotism aimed to unify national power for independence and social freedom. The social and political dimensions of patriotism were accompanied by the necessity of solidifying the national language and culture. The patriotic spirit of intellectuals is evidenced through their literary and cultural contributions, supported and funded by the philanthropic spirit of the nobles and boyars.

Women also played a crucial role in instilling patriotism in society at that time. Maria Rosetti (1819–1893), the wife of the revolutionary C.A. Rosetti and mother of socialist activists Horia and Vintilă Rosetti, established in 1865 the first journal dedicated to Romanian mothers, *Mama și copilul*. The programmatic article of the magazine, signed by Maria Rosetti, emphasizes its aim: to ensure a patriotic education for children who are destined to become Romania's future heroes. The second paragraph of the article states: "You are mothers, and so am I. Your children are Romanians, and so are mine. Our children share a common mother: Romania. But isn't there a bond between us when our children are brothers?"<sup>23</sup>. This reflects several assertions made by C.A. Rosetti. Patriotic education is

<sup>20</sup> *Manual de patriotism* [*Handbook of Patriotism*]. Transl. and revised by Iancu Nicola, Iași, Tipografia Sfî[nței] Mitr[opolii], 1829.

<sup>21</sup> Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, p. 238.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*: "Virtutea politică a renunțării la sine însuși, capacitatea de a pune interesul public mai presus de cel personal".

<sup>23</sup> Maria Rosetti, "Către mame" ["To Mothers"], *Mama și copilul*, 1, 1865, 1, p. 1: "Sunteți mame și sunt eu. Copii voștri sunt Români – ai mei asemenea – și ai voștri și ai mei au uă mamă comună, România. Nu e dar într-adevăr un legământ între noi când copiii noștri sunt frați?".

mandated by the revolutionary fathers, who blend their love for family with their dedication to the nation. Thus, C.A. Rosetti viewed his children as the nation's future, giving purpose to their struggles. Maria and C.A. Rosetti named their first daughter Liberty Sofia: "Oh, my little daughter! I love you, and I love you more than a father, I love you as freedom, and as Revolution!"<sup>24</sup>.

Patriotism was a crucial element in the structure of revolutionary families in 1848. According to the few monographs dedicated to Maria Rosetti, the idea of dignity is consistently emphasized, as what drives a woman's courage and beliefs is her husband's name, which she must uphold. For example, during C.A. Rosetti's involvement in the Russian-Turkish war, "she just had to stay strong: head of the family, caring mother, worthy wife of the revolutionary"<sup>25</sup>. In this way, patriotism is a shared principle within the family, defining their goals as both a couple and a family, as their aspirations align with the need for social change under the economic and social domination of the boyars, reflecting the context of the alignment of the Eastern European territories to the Western cultural and social evolution, imposed by the need for modernization. We cannot talk about women's involvement in the patriotic discourse; it is not happening under ideological pressure, and it is not an effect of propaganda. Moreover, their purposes are defined by the necessity of social changes; their aims are not propagandistic. Thus, the magazine, which is dedicated to mothers and children, offers a patriotic education based, first of all, on the study of history. The articles on the first pages of the magazine contain a text on a historical topic, both Romanian history and universal history, starting from ancient history to the history of Great Britain or France. Maria Rosetti explains in a child-friendly way that history is essential for instructing people: "History is the narration of true events to advise people. History teaches mankind by giving them examples of virtuous and vicious characters, and by showing the effects those characters have produced both on the individual and on society as a whole"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> C.A. Rosetti, *Note intime 1844–1859* [*Intimate Notes 1844–1859*], vol. II, București, Tipografia Lucrătorilor Asociați Marinescu și Șerban, 1903, p. 71: "Oh fetița mea! Te iubesc și te iubesc mai mult decât un tată, căci te iubesc ca Libertate și ca Revoluție".

<sup>25</sup> Elisabeta Ioniță, *Maria Rosetti*, București, Editura Militară, 1979, p. 40: "trebuia să rămână puternică, cap de familie și mama grijulie, soție demnă a revoluționarului".

<sup>26</sup> Maria Rosetti, "Catechismu de istoria universală. Capitolul I – Despre natura istoriei" ["Catechism of Universal History. Chapter 1 – On the Nature of History"], *Mama și copilul*, 1, 1865, 1, p. 6: "Istoria înseamnă nararea unor întâmplărilor adevărate avându drept țință instruirea și petrecerea oamenilor. Istoria întruiește omenirea dându-i espemle de caractere virtuose și vițioase, ș'aretându' efectele ce au produsu acele caractere atâtă asupra individelorū acelora cătu ș'asupra societății întregi".



Maria Rosetti as *Revolutionary Romania*, by Constantin D. Rosenthal, c. 1850.  
Reproduced by kind permission of the National Art Museum, Bucharest, Romania.

Maria Rosetti sees the role of the mother exercised on the patriotic front of bringing up children in the spirit of a strong bond with the national identity and the nation itself. She thus transforms motherhood into an activist experience in the service of the nation. In the magazine supplement called *Românul de duminică* [*The Sunday Romanian*], Maria Rosetti receives a series of letters from mothers and other women who admire her work. In one of her replies, in an 1863 issue, Maria Rosetti announces the importance of solidarity as a citizen: “Love mankind as you love your brothers, and do not forget that it is impossible for a woman to be a good woman if she is not a good citizen as well”<sup>27</sup>. Later, Nicolae Iorga and other historians will classify Maria Rosetti’s work as essential in terms of orienting mothers and children towards a form of patriotism based on liberal, moral, and humanitarian principles. According to Maria Rosetti, children

must be made aware of their duty to themselves and others, and to fulfil those duties – and as an ambition, I would like them to see their homeland differently, so that everywhere and always they can hold their heads high and say: “I am Romanian”<sup>28</sup>.

The education that Maria Rosetti transforms into patriotic activism is neither a propaganda effect, nor does it instil a regime of terror and rigorous order. Patriotic

<sup>27</sup> See Ioniță, *Maria Rosetti*, p. 55: “Iubește omenirea, precum iubești pe frații tăi, și nu uita că este peste putință să fie o femeie bună de nu va fi și bună cetățeană”.

<sup>28</sup> Rosetti, “Către mame”, p. 1: “Trebuie să li se cultive o conștiință de datoria lor către ei înșiși și către ceilalți și să îndeplinească acele datorii și drept ambițiune le-aș dori aceea de a vedea Patria lor altfel, că pretutindeni și totdeauna să poată țină capul sus zicând: ‘Sunt român!’”.



education is detached from the sensibilities of the time. In 1848, as I said above, patriotism was configured as a secularized religion. Mircea Rosetti, the son to whom Maria Rosetti was closest because of his frail health, dedicates a large part of his writing to his mother, who does not in any way remind him of an authoritarian or constraining figure, but on the contrary, he is struck by her candour and generosity. The protagonists in Mircea Rosetti's proses are strongly inspired by his mother's biography. He depicts strong women who have fought for various causes and have shown virtue, single mothers who heroically bring up their children. Such characters are the mother of Ion Bernard in *14 iuliu al Mamei Bernard* [*14<sup>th</sup> July of Mother Bernard*], or Elena in *Lacrimi de mamă* [*A Mother's Tears*]<sup>29</sup>.

In contrast to nationalism, which encourages an authoritarian education, patriotism lacks an authoritarian tone, although the 19<sup>th</sup> century family structure embedded violence as structural part of the institution of family<sup>30</sup>. For instance, Sabina Cantacuzino will testify about Maria Rosetti that her libertine way of educating her children led the conservative, demanding, and rigorous I.C. Brătianu to distance his children from Rosetti's family because the latter were educated in a far too libertine spirit, the opposite of the strict education that the Brătianu children had<sup>31</sup>. In other words, maternity in the context of the Revolution of 1848 was not at all a moment of women claiming the right over their bodies and implicitly the right to motherhood. However, the patriotism in whose frame the maternal role of the revolutionaries was cast called for cohesion, empathy and general solidarity. This is because the patriotism of 1848 subscribed to a form of general mobility that called for cohesion and solidarity, not exclusion, isolationism, and hatred, as would be the case with patriotism that was nationalist in its orientation and stripped of its original meaning.

The perversion of this historical discourse in the contemporary context reveals a rupture and a distorted reinterpretation. Extremist currents project a plethora of reveries designed to change the interface of society and bring it closer to changes. The visions of the fortyeighters and the historical Revolutionary movements in 1821, 1848, and 1989 were fuelled by a progressive dynamic rather than a regressive one, as fantasized by the far-right groups. They are completely disconnected from the historical context, regarding the figures, concepts, and events they are vehiculating: patriotism, family, mothers, marriage, independence, and the free state. Moreover, one difference between the patriotism of the mothers of 1848 and today's familist-nationalist views of the far-right supporters is that,

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<sup>29</sup> Mircea Rosetti, *Nuvela* [*Novellas*]. Preface by Emil Costinescu, București, Tipografia Românul "Carol Glöbl", 1882.

<sup>30</sup> Nicoleta Roman, "A Dimension of Private Life in Wallachia: Violence between Parents and Children (1830–1860)", *The History of the Family*, 19, 2014, 2, pp. 182-201.

<sup>31</sup> Sabina Cantacuzino, *Din viața familiei I.C. Brătianu 1821–1891* [*From the Life of I.C. Brătianu Family 1821–1891*], București, Univers, 1933, p. 44.

while the former is born out of a necessity determined by social and cultural reality, the latter regurgitates patriotism and the institution of the family in the absence of a contact with reality, and without any implications for political practice. Therefore, the re-interpretations they impose about family, motherhood, and patriotism are no more than a recovery of important and contextually functional historical instances in a propagandistic discourse of a nationalist and radical nature.

*Misrepresentation of the Mother in Contemporary Nationalist Discourse – from the Patriotic Mother to the Romanian Contemporary TradWife*

A first feature that reveals the rupture between the patriotic and the nationalist discourse, cultivated especially in its post-communist form in Romania, is the way it relates to the descendants, children, and the younger generation. Right-wing discourses have cultivated nationalism and conservatism in opposition to the young, deprived generations. While during the patriotic era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children represented the future heroes, destined for patriotic education through the cultivation of the national language and literature, in the nationalist discourse the descendants are denigrated for their lack of “historical consciousness”, understood in the most tendentious and propagandistic way possible, since for extremist movements, difference means nothing but denial: “What shall we do, Father, with all these young people who don’t want to know anything about history, our nation’s martyrs, tradition and faith, and who spend all day in bars, night clubs, discos or otherwise live in a virtual world?”<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the conflict between generations, between parents and children, reveals the fact that the institution of the family is working more as a propagandistic tool rather than as a real institution that restores traditional values and is meant to defend the national glory, as the far-right movement postulates.

Recent studies on the family structure in contemporary Romania increasingly suggest that the average family is either based on a violent relationship or is a single-parent unit. For instance, in a survey conducted by Cornelia Rada, 35% of the respondents admitted they were victims of parental violence, and more than 50% declared that they were victims of family violence<sup>33</sup>. In the name of patriotism, the revolutionary parents of the 1848 Revolution imprinted on their

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<sup>32</sup> See Dan Puric, *Sufletul românesc [The Romanian Soul]*, București, s.n., 2013, p. 27: “Ce facem părinte cu toți tinerii ăștia care nu vor să mai știe nimic, de istorie, de martirii neamului, de tradiție și de credință, și care stau toată ziua în baruri, la cluburi de noapte, discoteci și în rest trăiesc într-o lume virtuală?”.

<sup>33</sup> Cornelia Rada, “Violence against Women by Male Partners and against Children within the Family: Prevalence, Associated Factors, and Intergenerational Transmission in Romania, a Cross-sectional Study”, *BMC Public Health*, 14, 2014, 129, <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-129>. Accessed September 24, 2025.

children's education the importance of cohesion and the study of the history, language, and literature of the nation, whilst the contemporary traditional and conservative family devoted to the nationalist beliefs often impose "discipline" on their children in a violent way, without understanding their perspectives, as a direct effect of the propaganda of external institutions (such as the church, political and social influences or the Christian and religious right movement in Romania, such as the aptly-named Coalition for the Family).

It is not exaggerated to say that the religious influences and the right-wing movement meant to defend the national identity and "ensure the continuity of the Romanian people"<sup>34</sup> established the traditional gender roles and the patriarchal structure of the family, where the role of women is subordination to men. As such, violence often appears as a way of disciplining the family. The encouragement of violence is present in the nationalist and radical right-wing discourse. For instance, Romanian far-right ideologue and politician Mihail Neamțu published a collection of essays in 2016 in which this aspect of violence is seen as a structural dimension of the family. The appropriation of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century sensibility is clear even at the stylistic level; the plot and way of writing imitate the Romanian 19<sup>th</sup>-century naïve sentimental writing style. In this book, he emphasizes the fact that women must first be "conquered": "Through clever tactics of annexing female territory, the man becomes the master and the woman falls under his spell"<sup>35</sup>. Reproduction is represented as an act of blessing of women by their men. He pleads against the performance of sex without reproductive aims: "The experience of orgasm – not always reciprocal, not always asymmetrical – is incomplete without the protective gesture of the man who, after offering the woman the warmed seed, offers her the word and the life"<sup>36</sup>. Further, Mihail Neamțu raises the question of women's pride regarding their male partners. In relation to the heroic engagement of men, who charge women with this burden of dignity, he claims women should honour their male partner's names, as I exemplified above in the case of Maria Rosetti. This pressure placed on women reveals their secondary role in the family and society, as an extension of their partners. Nevertheless, in contemporary radical right-wing writing, women have to be proud of their male partners only because they are men, not because they are acting in a certain way, and are involved in crucial missions. From the misogynistic, radical right perspective, it is enough for men to get

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<sup>34</sup> Ionela Băluță, Claudiu Tufiş, "Preaching the 'Traditional Family' in the Romanian Parliament: The Political Stakes and Meanings of a Hegemonic Narrative", *East European Politics and Society*, 38, 2023, 2, pp. 616-638.

<sup>35</sup> Mihail Neamțu, *Vârstele iubirii. Cum transformăm întâmplarea în destin* [*The Ages of Love. How We Turn Chance into Destiny*], București, Doxologia, 2016, p. 27: "Prin tactici inteligente de anexare a teritoriului feminin, bărbatul devine stăpân, iar femeia se lasă vrăjită".

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32: "Experiența orgasmului – nu mereu reciprocă, nu mereu asimetrică – e incompletă fără gestul protector al bărbatului care, după ce-i oferă femeii sămânța încălzită, îi dăruiește cuvântul și viața".

exquisite clothes, and that imposes their authority on women, a weak and superficial species of human being:

As a male suitor, you can't go wrong if you want to greet your heart's chosen one in festive attire: a clean blazer and a pressed shirt, scrubbed and perfumed, even wearing a tie or fancy shoes. It's not snobbery that's at play here so much as the desire to shine in the face of a woman who wants to be proud of her man<sup>37</sup>.

It is worth noting that the reintegration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's *zeitgeist* regarding women and family has certain limitations. It is undoubtedly true that the 19<sup>th</sup> century established a misogynistic social structure, as Ionela Băluță pointed out in her studies<sup>38</sup>. Women's role during that period was limited to reproduction, and this role idealized the image of a woman as a mother. At the same time, it can be said that the presence of mothers in the nationalist contemporary discourse has become very shrill. Mothers in Romania are concerningly adhering to the far-right discourse<sup>39</sup>. Without questioning which regime – the patriotic or the nationalist – was more open to women's agency, the distinction between the two sensibilities consists in the degree of toxicity and in the vulnerability of women. In both contexts, the patriotic context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the current radical right movement, the main aim of women is to become mothers.

Nevertheless, the struggle of the activist women involved in the Revolution of 1848 was also focused on building a support network for all women. The women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not idealize motherhood. For instance, in her correspondence and private notes, Maria Rosetti mentioned her struggle as a single-mother many times, talking about the necessity of a support platform for all mothers. For example, in many letters sent to Adèle Dumesnil, Maria Rosetti complains about the difficulties of taking care of her children because of their illness:

D'abord mon cher petit nous a donné de vieilles inquiétudes pendant 3 jours; j'ai tremblé, j'ai pleuré, je l'ai serré plus fortement contre mon sein et je me demandais si le malheur pouvait avoir plus de force que l'amour que je lui opposais<sup>40</sup>.

She also talks in the programmatic article of the first issue of her magazine about the importance of a support network for mothers, especially single mothers.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57: "Ca pretendent de sex masculin, nu greșești dacă vrei să-ți întâmpini aleasa inimii în straie de sărbătoare: un sacou curat și o cămașă călcată, frezat și parfumat, purtând chiar și cravată sau pantofi de calitate. Nu snobismul e la mijloc, aici, cât dorința de-a străluci în fața unei femei care dorește să fie mândră de bărbatul ei".

<sup>38</sup> See Băluță, *La Bourgeoise respectable*, p. 7

<sup>39</sup> Andra Mureșan, "Votez pentru copiii mei. Cum a prins propaganda extremei drepte la mamele din România" ["I'm Voting for my Children: How Far-right Propaganda Took Hold among Mothers in Romania"], *Scena9*, 6 December 2024, <https://www.scena9.ro/article/votez-pentru-copiii-mei-extrema-dreapta-mame-romania>. Accessed September 20, 2025.

<sup>40</sup> See *Papiers Alfred Dumesnil, Correspondance* MS 1571, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.



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On the other hand, there is no organized system of solidarity against poverty, and a social system that can support mothers and children nowadays. The current context exposes mothers to radical right ideologies, which resonate more and more with this neglected category of mothers. The adherence of women, and especially mothers, to the movement of the radical right can be explained firstly as a gesture of “protecting children”. The aggressive promotion of the traditional family and its values does not equal the lack of resources and support necessary for mothers. Still, they are included in such a discourse because they are not part of the agendas of any of the established political parties. In this way, the radical right exploits a vulnerable category and, at the same time, legitimizes their own discourse regarding the traditional family, gaining mothers’ support.

Another important distinction is that the public sphere has been replaced by the online space, where many social and political movements are articulated. As such, TradWives is one of the movements mobilized on social media platforms (TikTok), which enthusiastically recuperate the traditional gender roles, boycotting feminism and all progressive political forms and promoting a cosmeticized recovery of history. Briefly, this movement is “something from a Garden and Gun conservative’s fever dream: Southern belles defend the nation from homosexual, feminist, integrationist, communist totalitarianism by canning jam, wearing pearls and homeschooling”<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Tebaldi and Dominika Baran, “Of TradWives and TradCaths: The Antigenderism Register in Global Nationalist Movements”, *Gender and Language*, 17, 2023, 1, pp. 1-13.

The aim of defending national or racial identity is the most common aspect of these movements, and is charged with the purpose of women's reproductive role. The cultivation of national identity occurred through founding and promoting the national culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the contemporary context, the defence of the nation has a harmful connotation by inciting hate, exclusion, racism, homophobia, and misogyny. The role of women is not to educate, as it was emphasized in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century discourse. As the contemporary discourse shifts the focus on the power of procreation, women are even less than educators; they are giving birth to children to maintain either the White race, or the Romanian national identity: "TradWives have thus utilized motherhood to advance the goal of defending the White nation by advocating for women to have several children to support the White race"<sup>42</sup>. Lack of support and education makes many conspiracy theories very popular among mothers. The new reality of "the Carpathian mothers"<sup>43</sup> warns women about their health issues if they are not exerting their femininity and not giving birth. Moreover, as social media platforms have replaced the public sphere, all the acts of violation of mothers' representation have exposed women to pseudoscientific information meant to constrain them to reproduce their traditional gender role.

### *Conclusions*

Romanian far-right intellectuals often reference 19<sup>th</sup>-century historical moments to compare historical patriotic movements and their contemporary ideologies. For instance, many radical intellectuals highlight the efforts of 19<sup>th</sup>-century revolutionary figures who struggled for national unity and independence, viewing them as precursors to modern nationalist ideas. Their inspired perspectives from the 19<sup>th</sup> century are applicable in the case of the family too. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Wallachia, the family was established as the most important social institution, "the basic cell of society", and interpreted by national ideology as the key element for the survival of the nation<sup>44</sup>. As such, the representation of both family and mothers has functioned as a referential element in all historical contexts since then, and has been reinterpreted in different ways, constituting the main argumentative pillar for legitimizing the existence of the traditional family.

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<sup>42</sup> Alexandra Ballos, *The Propaganda of TradWives and ShieldMaidens: A Critical Analysis of the Far-Right Radicalization of Women and its Connections to Right-Wing Extremist Theory*, Honors Thesis Library, University of Alberta, <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/political-science/media-library/-honors-thesis/ballos-thesis.pdf>. Accessed September 24, 2025.

<sup>43</sup> The expression belongs to Cristela Georgescu, a Romanian influencer who offers courses on nutrition and holistic medicine and promotes traditional gender roles, as well as dangerous practices such as home birth and medication defiance. See Mureșan, "Votez pentru copiii mei".

<sup>44</sup> See Băluță, Tufiș, "Preaching the 'Traditional Family'".

In the Romanian public sphere, it has taken the shape of a toxic phenomenon targeting mostly women, and particularly mothers. Romanian scholars and intellectuals warn about revisiting the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding women's status in society, and about trying to re-establish the traditional gender roles and the discourse on motherhood, which contains the same nationalist nuances. This assertion is entirely correct, especially regarding women's agency on their reproductive power, but there must be nuanced distinctions between the patriotic *zeitgeist* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the contemporary nationalist discourse, which is more radical and offensive concerning the women's rights over their bodies. I have attempted to read comparatively the way motherhood was conceived in the patriotic discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the way this approach, rooted in the old patriotic conceptions, is recovered and appropriated today by radical right movements, which are boycotting not only women's agency, but their fundamental rights regarding reproduction. Lastly, I have brought up the way in which many categories of mothers resonate with the radical right movements and thoughts. The adherence of women is different and this is marked by their condition and intentions. The social and political activism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is transformed into manipulation and propaganda, which is actioning on the basis of women's vulnerability and mass misinformation. The two pictures illustrate this discrepancy between the patriotic mothers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who symbolize Free Romania, as Rosenthal entitled his work, and, by contrast, the mother figure of the propaganda, who illustrates the contemporary Romanian "tradwives" aspirations.

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FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY PATRIOTIC MOTHERS TO THE  
CONTEMPORARY NATIONALIST DISCOURSE: THE APPROPRIATION OF  
THE IMAGE OF THE MOTHER IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF 1848  
AND THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALIST DISCOURSES TODAY  
(Abstract)

The paper proposes a comparative survey of how the current Romanian nationalist discourse reinterprets the concepts of patriotism and deploys images of mothers, two elements that are closely intertwined in the history of Romanian culture. The two timeframes considered are the upheavals of the Revolution of 1848, and the beliefs of the contemporary conservative and radical right movements. The motivation for selecting this dialogue between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the contemporary context lies in the connection that the radical and far-right aspirations claim to the glorious past of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period that has increasingly been referenced in their discourse. Although many scholars have already demonstrated that the traditional gender roles in Romanian society were established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, confirming this assertion, the paper intends to analyse the differences between patriotism and nationalism, as well as the role and significance of mothers in both contexts. I find that the appropriation of women's reproductive capacity manifests differently in each context. The primary differences are delineated by the dichotomy between the need for progress, which defines women's activism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the current propaganda. I question the role of the image of mothers in the political and ideological discourse and the influence of this image on women's agency over their bodies and reproductive rights, aiming to shape a specific case for misreading 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature and reintegrating family and motherhood themes into a dangerous agenda. In this context, the radical right's engagement with the 19<sup>th</sup> century does not reveal genuine similarity, but rather a historical exploitation of the topic used for self-legitimization.

*Keywords:* Revolution of 1848, motherhood, family, misreading, contemporary radical right writing.

IMAGINEA MAMEI PATRIOTICE ÎN DISCURSUL NAȚIONALIST:  
DE LA APROPIEREA SIMBOLULUI MATERN ÎN EPOCA PAȘOPTISTĂ LA  
EMERGENȚA NAȚIONALISMULUI CONTEMPORAN  
(Rezumat)

Lucrarea analizează comparativ modul în care discursul naționalist din România contemporană reinterpretează patriotismul și confiscă imaginea mamei, teme centrale și în agenda politică a secolului al XIX-lea. Studiul pune în dialog Revoluția de la 1848 și emergența mișcărilor naționaliste actuale, având în vedere raportarea constantă a acestor grupări extremiste la un trecut „glorios”, folosit ca instrument de autolegitimare. Analiza urmărește diferențele dintre patriotismul pașoptist și naționalismul de azi, precum și rolul atribuit maternității și corpului femeii în aceste două momente de criză. Dacă în secolul al XIX-lea maternitatea era integrată într-un proiect al modernizării, discursul actual o instrumentalizează într-o direcție regresivă din punct de vedere socio-cultural. Articolul pune în lumină un caz specific de interpretare eronată a literaturii secolului al XIX-lea și de reintegrare a temelor familiei și maternității într-o agendă periculoasă ideologic. În acest context, angajamentul extremei drepte față de secolul al XIX-lea nu relevă o similitudine autentică, ci mai degrabă o exploatare istorică a unei teme utilizate cu scopul de a se autolegitima și de a ranforșa clivaje existente.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* Revoluția de la 1848, maternitate, familie, patriotism, pervertire istorică, extrema dreaptă contemporană.