Master Thesis
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Feeling the nation
Romanian nationalist quasi-feminist women and the road to alternative emancipation

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Abstract

Member states in the European Union's Central and Eastern region are facing an increase in nationalist and populist movements that threaten their fragile democracies. As a result of democratic backsliding, provoked by the emergence of nationalist and right-wing parties that end up in Parliaments, scholarly interest has been drawn to the topic of women's voices and motives for joining this new type of politics. Right-wing nationalist parties are frequently seen as reactionary, conservative organisations that advocate patriarchal and anti-feminist values. Surprisingly, the Alliance for Romanian Unity (AUR) party has the greatest gender ratio of any legislative party in Romania, with more than one-third of its National Board and more than 22 percent of female members, making it Romania's most women-friendly political party. What drives women to join this political party? Furthermore, how do these women reconcile their gender identities with those of members of a right-wing nationalist party? To address this puzzle, I suggest the concept of nationalist quasi-feminism, which explains how the party's nationalist and gender discourses are linked. Based on eight interviews with AUR women politicians, I argue that they engage in a bricolage of nationalism and cardinal feminist beliefs, with potential implications and effects on Romanian politics, such as the leveraging of women and women's vote in the AUR's catch-all strategy in preparation for the 2024 elections.

Acknowledgements

I do not remember when my passion for women in politics started, let alone the interest for the experience of women in nationalist parties. However, I do remember the women who motivated and supported me into finishing this project: Mihaela Herbel, the woman whom I owe everything, starting from my getting accepted into CEU, to watching over every step I made in these last two years, Margit Feischmidt, the first professor in CEU who academically empowered me, by recognising my potential as a researcher and lastly, my loving mother, Florentina Nae, who is my role-model and my life's most important pillar.

This research, as humble and raw as it is, was possible thanks to the eight women politicians from AUR, who were so kind to answer all my questions which were not always comfortable. The results of my thesis and their salience couldn't have been outlined in the following pages without the help of five experts: Jill Massino, Luciana Jinga, Ionela Băluță, Claudiu Tufiș and Ovidiu Raețchi, who were so open to discuss my findings.

As the process of writing your thesis is sometimes a battle you have with your thoughts and ideas, I am grateful to Gina, Shwetha and Hadil for creating a safe space for me to share my worries and doubts. I am also thankful to Markus for always reminding me that we may lose the battles, but not the war, while lifting me up and pushing me forward.

During the time I wrote this thesis, and even before that, I have grown and matured so much as a woman, as an adult and as a researcher. For this, I thank them all.

Introduction

Research context

In a world of liberal democracies, fully supporting and expanding their citizens' rights and freedoms, half of the world's population remains underrepresented, particularly the social group of women. While there are several measures to reduce gender disparities, the political arena is one sector of almost every society where women still cannot completely make their voice heard.

Moreover, member states in the Central-Eastern region of the European Union are faced with the resurgence of nationalist and populist movements that threaten their weak democracies. This phenomenon can be conceptualised as neonationalism, which refers to "the reemergence of nationalism in relation to far-right populist politics and to symbolic strategies manipulating notions of national culture and history"[1]. In the face of the democratic backsliding[2] provoked by the emergence of these neonationalist and right-wing political parties which end up in parliaments or governments, the issue of their membership becomes relevant.

Women's motivations to join this new type of politics has been approached by numerous scholars. While the relationship between western right-wing nationalist parties and women has been studied by multiple scholars such as Mayer[3] or Rippeyoung[4], who tried to explain the existing gender gap and the reason for which women do not vote for right-wing

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[1] Margit Feischmidt, "Memory-Politics and Neonationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 1 (January 2020): 131, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.72.

[2] Andrea Krizsan and Conny Roggeband, "Towards a Conceptual Framework for Struggles over Democracy in Backsliding States: Gender Equality Policy in Central Eastern Europe," *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 3 (2018): 90–100.

[3] Nonna Mayer, "The Closing of the Radical Right Gender Gap in France?," *French Politics* 13, no. 4 (2015): 391–414.

[4] Phyllis L. F. Rippeyoung, "When Women Are Right: THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER, WORK AND VALUES ON EUROPEAN FAR-RIGHT PARTY SUPPORT," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9, no. 3 (September 2007): 379–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740701438259.

nationalist parties, the same phenomenon has been given little scholarly attention in the case of Central and Eastern European states, not only when it comes to the gender gap, but also to the motivations of women who do join these types of movements.

Looking East, Aniko Felix conceptualises the Hungarian women' motivation to join right-wing nationalist parties as *alternative emancipation.* With its diverse characteristics, the right-wing can provide opportunities for women to be seen and heard, while also increasing their self-esteem and providing an environment in which they can feel equality with men[5]. In discursive terms, the motivation and agency of women joining radical right and nationalist movements can be conceptualised with the help of the "nationalist quasi-feminism"[6] concept, introduced by Kajta for the case of Poland to define the heterogenous character of women's involvement in nationalism. Nationalist quasi-feminists are women members of right-wing movements who are more critical and feminist in nature than most of their colleagues and who advocate for the advancement of women's positions both within and beyond the movement.[7]

Research problem

Most commonly, right-wing nationalist parties are seen as conservative, reactionary groups that embrace patriarchical and anti-feminist values. Peace and Justice in Poland or Jobbik in Hungary are two of the many exemples fitting this category. However, surprisingly, the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) political party turns out to have the highest gender quota in Romania, with more than one third of its National Board occupied by women[8]

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[5] Anikó Félix, "Towards an Alternative Emancipation? The New Way(s) of Women's Mobilisation in the Hungarian Radical Right Subculture," in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, ed. Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 98, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43533-6_7.

[6] Justyna Kajta, "Calling for an Alternative Emancipation? Female Discourses in the Polish Radical-Nationalist Movemen," n.d., 23.

[7] Kajta, 68.

[8] George Simion, Interview conducted by author with the leader of the Alliance for the Union of All Romanians, April 27, 2022.

and over 22% of women members, making it the most women friendly political party in Romania, at least judging by these numbers. What drives those women to join this party? How do they negotiate their identity as women with the one of members of a nationalist right-wing party? To make sense of this puzzle, I employ the concept of nationalist quasi-feminism to explain how the party's nationalist discourse interacts with these women's gender identities. While most studies on the subject investigated women's motivations for joining right-wing nationalist parties, my research will concentrate on the actual voices and experience of women in AUR and how they construct their discourse by merging their gender identity and party membership.

Research objective

My empirical goal is to explore the experience of women as members of AUR. This goal is motivated by the fact that, until recently, no research on women in right-wing nationalist parties in Romania has been performed. Given that Romanian nationalism is considered to be a masculine and chauvinist phenomenon[9], I aim to explore the implications of AUR women's discourse on a potential softening of the party's image. By doing so, I hope that my findings will contribute to the literature on right-wing nationalist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as to the research on women in Romanian politics.

Research question

In order to meet my research objective, this thesis will answer the following research question:

How are women in AUR combining nationalism and their identity as women on the discursive level?

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[9] Cristian Norocel, "The Panoptic Performance of Masculinity for the Romanian Ethno-Nationalist Project: Disciplinary Intersections in Populist Radical Right Print Media," *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2015): 143–56.

Research argument

Based on eight interviews with AUR female politicians, I suggest that their discourse can be understood as nationalism quasi-feminism, a concept that I borrowed from Kajta and which I define as a bricolage[10] of nationalism and feminism/feminist cardinal beliefs on the ideational level and a combination of emotional labour and emotion work on the emotional level. Three categories of women that I have identified exemplify the ideational dimension, defined by how women articulate ideas that are then embraced and altered to best fit the distinctive political rhetoric of Romanian nationalism[11]: 1) conservative nationalists women, 2) unionist nationalists women, and 3) religious nationalists women. The emotional dimension, on the other hand, refers to how women process and adapt their feelings in diverse situations. Thus, the second component of my argument is that when women talk about nationalism, they are doing emotional labour [12], whereas when they talk about gender identity, they are doing emotion work.[13].

Roadmap

This thesis is organized into four chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusions. The first chapter is a review of the literature in which I argue that gender has become an a-national political concept as a result of the imposition of gender politics within the EU. Right-wing nationalist political organisations battling gender a-nationalization are

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[10] Martin B. Carstensen, "Paradigm Man vs. the Bricoleur: Bricolage as an Alternative Vision of Agency in Ideational Change," *European Political Science Review* 3, no. 1 (February 25, 2011): 147–67, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773910000342.

[11] Vivien A. Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 11 (2008): 303–26.

[12] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, 20th anniversary ed (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2003).

[13] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 551–75.

attempting to re-nationalize the concept. This argument emphasises the need of researching women's voices and experience within right-wing nationalist political organisations in order to understand the consequences of renationalizing gender in Central and Eastern Europe. In the second chapter I aim to conceptualise the notion of *nationalist quasi-feminism* on two dimensions: 1) the ideational dimension, by using the discursive institutionalism framework developed by Schmidt and 2) the emotional dimension, by using the emotional labour and emotion work framework developed by Hochschild. The methodology chapter focuses on the data collection and analysis process and on the ethical and moral implications of conducting research on right-wing nationalist parties. The case study chapter is divided in two sections. In the first section I give voice to both the women politicians in AUR and to my argument that, at the discursive level, they do not only have a rhetoric based on their identity as women, but one based on some feminist cardinal beliefs and that this discourse is performed through a combination of emotional labour and emotion work. In the discussions section, I raise and answer the question whether the collective voice of women in AUR is authentic or if it is leveraged as a party strategy, with the help of 5 expert interviews. In the conclusion chapter, I summarise the results of my research, I present my contribution to the literature, together with my research limits and future research agenda.

Literature review: women in Central-Eastern European radical right

Gender as an a-national concept

The accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU was a time-consuming and difficult process involving both institutions and individuals. Women's issues and social representation is one topic that has sparked various arguments in the context of accession, but these disputes date back to the twentieth century. For this niche to be tackled properly, a short historical overview of the situation of women in the post-communist states of Central-Eastern Europe is required. The overview will focus on the situation of women during the inter-war time and the communist regime and how the old "practices" were transferred to the new democratic societies. Thus, even though there existed feminist traditions during both inter-war and communist times which had a strong nation-oriented character, starting with the EU accession process, the concept of gender and the situation of women, defined as a political discourse about the representation of women in politics, becomes an a-national concept.

One reason which led to the a-nationalisation of gender is the "one size fits all" character of EU policies. Similar to Krastev's concept of imitation, the EU accession is done through a kind of "value transfer", meaning a standard European model of democracy promotion based on respecting human rights and rule of law.[14] However, this "one size fits all" model was criticised for being rather insensitive towards cultural and socio-economic differences and diversity[15]. When looking at the issue of gender equality, an example of 'one size fits all' policy is what is known as gender mainstreaming. Thus, EU aims to construct a

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[14] Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "One Size Fits All! EU Policies for the Promotion of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law," in *Workshop on Democracy Promotion*, vol. 4 (Stanford University Stanford, 2004), 30.

[15] Börzel and Risse, 30.

routine procedure for promoting gender equality instead of on a case-by-case basis[16]. The downside of gender mainstreaming is that it not only fails to acknowledge differences among women as far as race, ethnicity and class are concerned[17], but it also fails to impact the member states, national policy makers remaining mostly unresponsive to the concept[18].

In order to understand why gender mainstreaming and other 'one size fits all' policies are contributing to the a-nationalisation of the concept of gender, the historical perspective on gender equality must be tackled. Historically, a common intellectual basis for European progress is defined by the demand for equal rights in work, which was part of the agenda of democratic women's movements since the end of the 19th century[19]. Feminist traditions have been present in the region of Central-Eastern Europe since the inter-war period. The International Council of Women (ICW), which took place in Vienna in 1930 is one example where feminist traditions transcended freshly drawn national borders. Made up of women who had the time and resources to travel abroad and a degree of political or scholarly influence in their home countries, the ICW aimed at bringing together the liberal, progressive vision of female solidarity across borders[20]. The aim of the women present at ICW was to improve women's status, by advocating for equal political and civil rights, promoting safe working conditions, and protecting women from discrimination[21].

Even though Romanian feminism developed in close connection and in reaction to 'Western' models of womens' representation, Cheschebec argues that "more attention should be paid to how formulations of 'local' or 'national' particularities used, translated, and

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[16] Andrea Pető and Ian Manners, "The European Union and the Value of Gender Equality," *Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy*, 2006, 102.

[17] Catherine Hoskyns, *Gender Perspectives* (na, 2004).

[18] Charlotte Bretherton, "Gender Mainstreaming and EU Enlargement: Swimming against the Tide?," *Journal of European Public Policy* 8, no. 1 (2001): 60–81.

[19] Pető and Manners, "The European Union and the Value of Gender Equality," 101.

[20] Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, *Women's International Activism during the Inter-War Period, 1919–1939*, *Women's History Review*, vol. 26 (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 166.

[21] Jill Massino, *Ambiguous Transitions: Gender, the State, and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania*, 1st Edition (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 44.

contextualised feminist concerns and ideologies expressed within the internationalist feminism of the period, into Romanian feminists' own organisational, ideological, and programmatic framework"[22].

Whilst inter-war feminist traditions can be understood as a bottom-up initiative organised by influential women in Europe at that time, gender equality during the communist period in Central-Eastern Europe, and especially in Romania, can be conceptualised as a state-imposed emancipation. The communist ideology was mostly known for the fact that it provided equality in all domains, including the political one. We see, thus, how gender inclusiveness played an important role in the communist society, with women having the same opportunities as men, starting from equal pay, work, education, up until the possibility of getting involved into politics.[23] Nonetheless, the reality behind the communist regimes' rhetoric revealed that women remained marginalised, with the majority of their integration focusing on the lowest groups of society, leaving these women with no way out of their "traditional" roles as good mothers and wives. [24] New communist states in Eastern Europe controlled gender discourse from above and prevented it from veering off in radical directions[25].

This marginalisation of women is rooted mostly in the patriarchal mentality of the communist states[26]. Regardless of the presence of women in all leadership structures as a result of the implemented quota system, at the end of the day, the communist style of doing politics was not representative of women's interests, but of the interests of the party as they were

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[22] Roxana Cheşchebec, "Reclaiming Romanian Historical Feminism: History Writing and Feminist Politics in Romania," *Aspasia* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 262, https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2007.010119.
[23] Pamela Marie Paxton, Melanie M. Hughes, and Tiffany Barnes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), 277.
[24] Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes, 278.
[25] Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, 2014, 4.
[26] Mihaela Miroiu, "Communism Was a State Patriarchy, Not State Feminism," *Aspasia* 1, no. 1 (2007): 197–201.

connected to women's lives.[27] After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the imitation process of the post-communist states took place in all aspects of the society, resulting mostly in "grey zones"[28]. These grey zones are illustrated by transitioning states' efforts to fully adapt to Western norms and cultures, but due to the unique characteristics of each state and opposing societal and political pressures from within, these adaptations took the shape of a hybrid.

Gender equality and women's representation are two examples of the hybrid model in action. By the time post-communist states transitioned to democracy, Western countries had already developed norms, values, and policies surrounding women's representation. To keep up with these trends, the political elites of the East turned to "room-service feminism"[29]. This concept refers to "a strategy of emancipation from above, which in fact covers a weakness of the post-communist society: the rejection of ideologies, the acceptance of the 'integration' as a messianic solution for all social evils and forms of injustice."[30] Room-service feminism comes as a result of the hybrid model of patriarchy that post-communist states have adopted, the modern patriarchy. In this new framework, women living in post-communist societies are still the victims of tacit misogynism, not finding enough motivation to get involved in the political arena and have their interest represented. [31] Additionally, Jinga reinforces the lack of women participation after 1989 by arguing that "the low presence of women in all political structures can be attributed to the post-communist propaganda that demonized women's presence in politics based on a mythology that women in the communist-era leadership were numerous and incompetent."[32]

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[27] Mihaela Miroiu, "On Women, Feminism, and Democracy," *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five: Linking Past, Present, and Future*, 2015, 89.

[28] Miroiu, 91.

[29] Mihaela Miroiu, "State Men, Market Women. The Effects of Left-Wing Conservatism on Gender Politics during the Romanian Transition," *Feminismo/s, n. 3 (Jun. 2004); Pp. 207-234*, 2004.

[30] Miroiu, 215.

[31] Miroiu, "On Women, Feminism, and Democracy," 102.

[32] Luciana-Marioara Jinga, "Women in the Communist Party:," 2022, 97.

The re-nationalisation of gender in Central and Eastern Europe

Therefore, the a-national nature of gender in Central Eastern Europe comes as a result of 'one size fits all' policies which disregard the national and historical characteristics of Eastern states. The main consequences of these policies are 1) room service feminism and 2) emancipation fatigue. The latter refers to the resurgence of right-wing populist parties in Europe and their relationship with women. Whilst less women vote for European RWP parties (except for France), social surveys and attitude studies show that women share the resentments and convictions of right-wingers[33], getting themselves into a mindset which Dietze conceptualises as 'emancipation from the emancipation' or emancipation fatigue[34]. More exactly, emancipation comes here as a norm dictated by an elite, making women who support RWP parties frustrated and "feeling bad for embarrassing the larger women's collective with their old-fashioned existence as a wife and mother"[35]. Thus, one can see how feminism, in the eyes of some women, stands for fixation with victimhood and "being unsexy"[36]. Furthermore, McRobbie refers to this phenomenon as "double entanglement", which refers to the coexistence of neoconservative ideas about gender, sexuality, and family life with liberalisation trends addressing choice and diversity in domestic, sexual, and kinship relationships[37].

Emancipation fatigue comes as a direct result of the imitation fatigue. The imitation process[38] former communist states had to go through led to the emergence of a new wave of nationalism and populism in the Central-Eastern region of Europe. Moreover, the current international context is characterized by the phenomenon of democratic regression and the

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[33] Beate Küpper, "Das Thema Gender Im Rechtspopulismus–Empirische Befunde Zur Anschlussfähigkeit Bei Frauen Und Männern," *Femina Politica–Zeitschrift Für Feministische Politikwissenschaft* 27, no. 1 (2018): 13–14.

[34] Gabriele Dietze, "Why Are Women Attracted to Right-Wing Populism? Sexual Exceptionalism, Emancipation Fatigue and New Maternalism," n.d., 150.

[35] Dietze, 150.

[36] Dietze, 151.

[37] Angela McRobbie, "Post-feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 256.

[38] Krastev and Holmes, "Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents."

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reappearance of autocratic leaders within the states. One of the causes for the existing democratic regression is the weakening bonds between traditional, mainstream parties and the people, namely the trend of de-alignment, referring to different social categories inside a state which feel neglected by the ruling elites.[39] At the moment, Member States in the Central-Eastern region of the European Union are faced with the resurgence of nationalist and populist movements that threaten their weak democracies. The most cited examples of weakening democracies in the region are found in countries such as Hungary, Poland.

One common phenomenon in weakening democracies is the emergence of anti-gender manifestations. The religious and civilizational discourse is seen as the basis of the most recent anti-gender manifestations in the region. Ayoub states that conservative understandings of religion are a catalyser for opposition to gender and sexual equalities. Moreover, this discourse often intersects with issues related to nationalism and a defence of national sovereignty[40]. The invention of "gender ideology" is closely connected to debates within the Catholic Church and is seen as a response to gender mainstreaming understood as a political strategy[41]. This not only intersects with rising right-wing populism in Europe but it also enforces the Vatican's attempts to promote a "new feminism"[42], which aims to foster the collaboration between men and women rather than exacerbating their antagonism. As a result, gender is one of the major foundations of the rebirth of nationalism and populism and the region. Furthermore, while gender a-national concept after 1989, recent developments indicate an internal drive inside states to renationalize this idea in the name of national and regional identity.

[39] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy* (Penguin UK, 2018), 15.

[40] Phillip Ayoub, *When States Come Out* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[41] Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 6.

[42] Denise Couture, "The Anti-Feminism of the 'New Feminism' Promoted by the Holy See," *Cahiers Du Genre*, no. 1 (2012): 23–49.

The clear discursive demarcation between "us" and "them", together with an anti-establishment discourse supported by voters, made it possible for radical-right political parties to gain popularity. Bonikowski explains the resurgence of this type of parties in the region by framing it in terms of supply and the demand of radical-right political claims, with the latter understood as the aggregate prevalence of attitudes aligned with populist, ethnonationalist and authoritarian claims made in each polity[43]. Another way to conceptualise the rise of radical right political parties is suggested by Feischmidt, who proposes the term *neonationalism.* Neonationalism refers to "the reemergence of nationalism in relation to far-right populist politics and to symbolic strategies manipulating notions of national culture and history"[44]. Radical right political parties attract similar groups, regardless of the geographical region. Thus, the voter profile revolves around characteristics such as lower education, suburban or rural residence, lower- or middle-class occupational status, native birth, and dominant ethno-racial group membership.[45]

Neonationalism or the resurgence of radical right parties differs from one European region to another. In the western part of Europe, one common practice is linking nationalist agendas and gender equality – women's rights in particular. Thus, radical right political parties do not necessarily oppose gender equality explicitly and could as well endorse selected women to stigmatise specific sections of the population such as people of colour, or migrants with different religions or ethnicity[46]. This approach is also known as 'femonationalism'[47], where the oppressive treatment of women is used to mobilise an emancipatory rhetoric of women's

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[43] Bart Bonikowski, "Ethno-Nationalist Populism and the Mobilization of Collective Resentment: Ethno-Nationalist Populism," *The British Journal of Sociology* 68 (November 2017): 191, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12325.

[44] Feischmidt, "Memory-Politics and Neonationalism," 131.

[45] Bonikowski, "Ethno-Nationalist Populism and the Mobilization of Collective Resentment," 196.

[46] Daria Colella, "Femonationalism and Anti-Gender Backlash: The Instrumental Use of Gender Equality in the Nationalist Discourse of the Fratelli d'Italia Party," *Gender & Development* 29, no. 2–3 (2021): 271.

[47] Colella, 275.

rights that actually promotes racist ideologies and anti-immigration policies. Thus, following Farris, femonationalism "describes the attempts of European right-wing parties, among others, to co-opt feminist ideals into anti-immigrant and anti-Islam campaigns."[48]

Voices of women inside the Central and Eastern European radical right

Looking through these lenses, the renationalisation of gender can be then understood as a form of femonationalism. However, this phenomenon has mostly been studied in Western Europe. When it comes to the agency of women who join nationalist movements or radical right parties in Central Eastern Europe, there has been little scholarly attention. Most explanations of Western women's support of the radical right focus on family values or a fear of violence. The elevated status of women's roles as mothers seems to be especially important in research examining the European region[49]. Moreover, right-wing women can be characterized by their focus on differences: between themselves and men, themselves, and left-wing women, and themselves and 'others', meaning immigrants, people of different races. Also, these women tend to focus on the private sphere, with a focus on motherhood and sexuality[50].

Looking East, when it comes to the reasons for which women join the radical right, Aniko Felix conceptualises their motivation under what she terms as *alternative emancipation.* Felix argues that the radical right, with its multifaceted characteristics, can give women opportunities to be seen and possibilities to make their voice heard, while raising their self-esteem, and offering them an environment where they can enjoy equality with men[51]. Moving

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[48] Sara R. Farris, "Femonationalism and the" Regular" Army of Labor Called Migrant Women," *History of the Present* 2, no. 2 (2012): 187.
[49] Rippeyoung, "When Women Are Right," 383.
[50] Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists around the World* (Routledge, 2013), 7.
[51] Félix, "Towards an Alternative Emancipation?," 98.

from their reasons and motivations to join these parties to the actual activity as party members, Rashkova and Zankina shed light by looking at the Bulgarian lot of radical right women. Their findings suggest that these women espouse an essentialist view of gender, where the woman's role as a mother and caretaker is emphasised and other roles in society are de-emphasised, or even ignored[52]. The Bulgarian case fits in the broader paradigms set by Paxton, namely the focus of women's political integration is put on the lower sectors of the society, women having no way out of their "traditional" duties as *good mothers and wives.*[53] In discursive terms, the motivation and agency of women joining radical right and nationalist movements is conceptualised with the help of the Polish example.

"Nationalist quasi-feminism" was introduced by Kajta, in their article focusing on the intersection of the radical right and gender, aiming to explore the discourses on gender reproduced within the radical-nationalist movements in Poland[54]. When explaining the heterogenous character of women's involvement in nationalism, Kajta distinguishes two main wings among female nationalists: (dominant) nationalist conservatives and (less present) nationalist quasi-feminists. When it comes to the latter wing, Kajta refers to nationalist quasi-feminists as a group of women who are more critical and feminist-oriented, arguing for the enhancement of women's position within and outside the movement.[55] Moreover, they try to renegotiate the meaning of feminism by calling for a real welfare state and economic support for women, along with new spaces of female political involvement.[56]

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[52] Ekaterina R. Rashkova and Emilia Zankina, "Are (Populist) Radical Right Parties *Männerparteien* ? Evidence from Bulgaria," *West European Politics* 40, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 864, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1285580.

[53] Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective*, 278.

[54] Kajta, "Calling for an Alternative Emancipation? Female Discourses in the Polish Radical-Nationalist Movemen."

[55] Kajta, 68.

[56] Kajta, 77.

Therefore, Eastern European women seem to join radical right and nationalist movements as an alternative emancipation which is based on promoting their traditional duties of being mothers and wives, all these while refusing the label of feminist, while still arguing for more substantive representation of women. When reviewing this small body of literature on women in Central-Eastern Europe, I noticed that the voices of Romanian women who join nationalist movements are not studied at all. Therefore, the objective of my thesis is to explore the experience of Romanian women who joined the new nationalist conservative political party, The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR), together with the way they combine a nationalist rhetoric with cardinal feminist beliefs.

Theoretical framework: defining nationalist quasi-feminism

Feminism and its discontents

In order to fill in the aforementioned gap, I have decided to use a theoretical framework revolving around the concept of "nationalist quasi-feminism". Until recently, the concept "quasi-feminism" has been used in disciplines such as Gender Studies and Women's Psychology. However, before defining quasi-feminism, one must first understand feminism. According to Hooks, feminism is a long-standing response to sex-based discrimination and marginalization, aiming to empower women and produce equality.[57] Moreover, when discussing feminism, the existing debates on the literature show that a distinction must be made between feminist attitudes and the feminist identity. According to Zucker & Bay-Cheng, there is a significant distinction between being feminist-minded, namely holding feminist values but not a feminist identity, and identifying as feminist[58]. To measure feminist identification, Zucker created the Feminist Beliefs and Behaviour measure[59] through which three categories of women can be distinguished. The first category is being a feminist, meaning holding feminist beliefs and accepting the label of 'feminist'[60]. The second category is being a nonfeminist, meaning rejecting at least one cardinal belief of feminism[61] and the 'feminist' label. The third category- and the most important one for this research- is represented by the women who are at the confluence of the former two. The women who are part of this category are usually

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[57] Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Pluto Press, 2000).

[58] Alyssa N. Zucker and Laina Y. Bay-Cheng, "Minding the Gap between Feminist Identity and Attitudes: The Behavioral and Ideological Divide between Feminists and Non-labelers," *Journal of Personality* 78, no. 6 (2010): 1896.

[59] Alyssa N. Zucker, "Disavowing Social Identities: What It Means When Women Say,'I'm Not a Feminist, But…,'" *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2004): 423–35.

[60] Zucker, 426.

[61] There are three cardinal beliefs of feminism: 1)girls and women have not been treated as well as boys and men in our society; 2)women and men should be paid equally for the same work; and 3)women's unpaid work should be more socially valued (Zucker and Bay-Cheng, "Minding the Gap between Feminist Identity and Attitudes: The Behavioral and Ideological Divide between Feminists and Non-labelers.")

endorsing all three cardinal beliefs of feminism but refuse to identify as feminists. Researchers preoccupied with this category have been using multiple concepts to define them, ranging from ''fence-sitters''[62], "weak feminists"[63], "egalitarians"[64], to "nonlabelers"[65]. However, regardless of the language used, there is a consensus in the literature that these women are "quasi-feminist".[66]

Conceptualising nationalist quasi-feminism

Moving from the literature revolving around feminism and going towards the field of nationalism studies, the concept of "nationalist quasi-feminism" was introduced by Kajta, in their article focusing on the intersection of the radical right and gender, aiming to explore the discourses on gender reproduced within the radical-nationalist movements in Poland[67]. When explaining the heterogenous character of women's involvement in nationalism, Kajta distinguishes two main wings among female nationalists: (dominant) nationalist conservatives and (less present) nationalist quasi-feminists. When it comes to the latter wing, Kajta refers to nationalist quasi-feminists as this group of women who are more critical and feminist-oriented, arguing for the enhancement of women's position within and outside the movement.[68] Moreover, they try to renegotiate the meaning of feminism by calling for a real welfare state and economic support for women, along with new spaces of female political involvement.[69]

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[62] Pamela Aronson, "Feminists or 'Postfeminists'? Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations," *Gender & Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): 903–22.

[63] Lauren E. Duncan, "Women's Relationship to Feminism: Effects of Generation and Feminist Self-Labeling," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2010): 498–507.

[64] Zucker, "Disavowing Social Identities: What It Means When Women Say,'I'm Not a Feminist, But….'"

[65] Caroline C. Fitz, Alyssa N. Zucker, and Laina Y. Bay-Cheng, "Not All Nonlabelers Are Created Equal: Distinguishing Between Quasi-Feminists and Neoliberals," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (September 2012): 274–85, https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312451098.

[66] Zucker and Bay-Cheng, "Minding the Gap between Feminist Identity and Attitudes: The Behavioral and Ideological Divide between Feminists and Non-labelers," 1903.

[67] Kajta, "Calling for an Alternative Emancipation? Female Discourses in the Polish Radical-Nationalist Movemen."

[68] Kajta, 68.

[69] Kajta, 77.

While the concept "quasi-feminism" has been used to refer to how women identify with feminism in general, it has also been used in an interdisciplinary context, with one of its connotations referring to women who belong to nationalist movements. Given that Kajta is the first scholar to use the concept of "nationalist quasi-feminism", the term lacks a theoretical foundation. In the following paragraphs, I aim to contribute to the theoretical underpinning of the concept, by arguing that "nationalist quasi-feminism" is a combination between nationalism and cardinal feminist beliefs, which takes place on two levels: the ideational level and the emotional level. In order to define these two dimensions, I borrow from two different bodies of literature: 1) discursive institutionalism and 2) sociology of emotions.

The ideational dimension of nationalist quasi-feminism

When it comes to the ideational dimension of "nationalist quasi-feminism", I define it by using the framework of discursive institutionalism. According to Schimdt, "discursive institutionalism focuses on the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional context"[70]. Schmidt also argues that discursive institutionalism looks at "the role of ideas in constituting political action, the power of persuasion in political debate, the centrality of deliberation for democratic legitimation, the construction and reconstruction of political interests and values, and the dynamics of change in history and culture."[71] In the article where they introduce the concept of "discursive institutionalism", Schmidt stressed the need to look at the implications of agency when assessing ideational success. This means that, in the process of ideas going "from thought to word to deed"[72], one needs to look not only at how ideas are conveyed, adopted or adapted, but also at who conveys them, to whom, how,

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[70] Vivien A. Schmidt, "The Discursive Construction of Discontent: Varieties of Populist Anti-System Ideas and Discursive Interactions in Europe," *Journal of European Integration* 44, no. 2 (2022): 167.
[71] Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," 305.
[72] Schmidt, 309.

where and why. In order to take agency into consideration, the analysis of discourse, seen as a more overarching concept than ideas, is necessary. Discourse, Schmidt's words, "serves to articulate not only different levels of ideas, different types of ideas (cognitive and normative) but also different forms of ideas—narratives, myths, frames, collective memories, stories, scripts, scenarios, images, and more."[73] Thus, when looking at political actors, discourse contributes to both the success or failure of ideas, depending on how it articulates their substantive content. The communicative type of discourse which usually occurs in the political sphere consists of the individuals and groups, such as where political leaders or spokespeople or party activists involved in the presentation and legitimation of political idea to the public. Schmidt calls this a "mass process of public persuasion"[74].

The natural question deriving out of my explanation of what discursive institutionalism is should be "What is the connection between discursive institutionalism and nationalist quasi-feminism?". As mentioned before, I theorise nationalist quasi-feminism as an ideational combination of nationalism and feminism. That is, parts of nationalist and feminist ideology are put together to obtain a nationalist quasi-feminist discourse. This process is possible with the use of "bricolage". Carstensen defines the process of bricolage as "an innovative recombination of elements that constitutes a new way of configuring organizations, social movements, institutions, and other forms of social activity', which entails 'the rearrangement of elements that are already at hand, but it may also entail the blending in of new elements that have diffused from elsewhere"[75]. More exactly, the process of bricolage comes as an alternative to the classical version of discursive institutionalism where systems of ideas are most often conceptualized as closed, coherent, stable, and generally thought to be homogeneous, only a

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[73] Schmidt, 310.
[74] Schmidt, 311.
[75] Carstensen, "Paradigm Man vs. the Bricoleur," 154.

crisis destabilizing this homogeneity[76]. This alternative refers to how actors are using a toolkit[77] of habits, beliefs or symbols while drawing on their already existing resources to create a discourse. Therefore, the actor who bricolages becomes a bricoleur who focuses on combining ideational elements to create resonance in the public and support in the political system. According to Carstensen, this approach is done pragmatically, due to the bricoleur's undogmatic approach to politics, by focusing on putting together ideas that may create the support necessary for them to get through the political process[78].

The emotional dimension of nationalist quasi-feminism

While the first body of work I borrowed from helps to understand how nationalist quasi-feminism can be theorised at an ideational or cognitive level, I will present an overview of how it functions from an emotional position to complete my theoretical approach to the concept. To accomplish this, I chose to draw on the literature on sociology of emotions. Sociology of emotions, as a field of study, has two fundamental tasks: studying the social nature of emotions and studying the emotional nature of social reality[79]. A definition of the term is required before I provide my perspective on the implications of emotions for nationalist quasi-feminism. Given the several theoretical approaches to the concept in the field, I chose to use Hochschild's definition:

"What is emotion? Emotion, I suggest, is a biologically given sense, and our most important one. Like other senses-hearing, touch, and smell-it is a means by which we know about our relation to the world, and it is therefore crucial for the survival of human beings in group life. Emotion is unique

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[76] Carstensen, 156.

[77] Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 273–86.

[78] Carstensen, "Paradigm Man vs. the Bricoleur," 158.

[79] Eduardo Bericat, "The Sociology of Emotions: Four Decades of Progress," *Current Sociology* 64, no. 3 (2016): 495.

among the senses, however, because it is related not only to an orientation toward action but also to an

orientation toward cognition. "[80]

Moreover, Hochschild states that the incorporation of emotions into sociological studies involves investigating and "theorizing all that becomes apparent when we make the simple assumption that what we feel is fully as important to the outcome of social affairs as what we think or do".[81] And given that the structure and processes of a society create specific emotional climates, emotional cultures, or even societal emotions, all these end up conditioning the general sentiments of the population.[82]

Being a symbolic interactionist, Hochschild views emotions as primarily dependent on definitions of the situation, emotion vocabularies, and emotional beliefs, which vary across time and location. Thus, one could say that their approach to emotions is similar to Carstensen's approach to ideas. If Carstensen suggested the term of "bricolage" when understanding the way agents are combining ideas in order to successfully convey a message, Hochschild suggests two concepts: "emotional labour" and "emotion work". According to the definition Hochschild provides[83], emotional labour "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. This kind of labour calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality."[84] On the other hand, emotion work or emotion- management fosters attention to how people try to feel, and not to how they try to appear to feel[85]. More exactly, emotion work refers broadly to the act of evoking or shaping,

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[80] Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 229.

[81] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Ideology and Emotion Management: A Perspective and Path for Future Research," *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions* 117 (1990): 117–42.

[82] Daniel Bar-Tal, Eran Halperin, and Joseph De Rivera, "Collective Emotions in Conflict Situations: Societal Implications," *Journal of Social Issues* 63, no. 2 (2007): 441–60.

[83] Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*.

[84] Hochschild, 7.

[85] Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," 560.

as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself. There are three techniques to emotion work: cognitive, bodily, and expressive. The first technique is of most importance to this research as it refers to how individuals attempt to change images, ideas, or thoughts in hopes of changing the feelings associated with them.[86] As with discursive institutionalism and its bricolage, individuals are subjects of either emotional labour or emotion work, depending on the context, groups, or situations in which they find themselves.

When applied to the discourse of women members of nationalist groups, nationalist quasi-feminism can be thought of as a discursive act of bricolage of nationalist and feminist concepts that, depending on the circumstances, can compel women to undertake emotional labour or emotion work.

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[86] Hochschild, 561–62.

Methodology

Data Collection

I will start this sub-chapter by explaining why I have decided to conduct a qualitative research study. Following Luker[87], I also state that my job as a researcher writing this thesis is to first explore and generate hypotheses rather than to build theory. Luker straightforwardly states in their book that "as we are the first to tell you, we are engaged in an enterprise of discovery rather than verification".[88] Moreover, all research done on the reasons women join nationalist movements in Central- Eastern Europe and on their specific actions after joining use qualitative methods[89]. Thus, on one hand, it is hard to imagine a quantitative research model, given the narrowed sample I chose to look at. On the other hand, since I have decided to look at the voices of Romanian women who join nationalist movements and how these voices are constructed on the ideational and emotional level – a subject which has not yet been covered – I believe that using qualitative research methods is the most appropriate way to approach it.

I have decided to specifically look at the role of women in AUR due to a former research I have conducted and which was focused on the experiences of women MPs in Romania and Poland. During my data collection process, I conducted an interview with a woman MP from AUR and I noticed that her views on the issue of women and their emancipation was in line with the cardinal beliefs of feminism[90] , stating that the main difference between men and women in politics is that the latter is utilising emotions when appealing to the voters. Moreover,

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[87] Kristin Luker, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

[88] Luker, 37.

[89] Kajta, "Calling for an Alternative Emancipation? Female Discourses in the Polish Radical-Nationalist Movemen"; Félix, "Towards an Alternative Emancipation?"; Rashkova and Zankina, "Are (Populist) Radical Right Parties *Männerparteien*?"

[90] Zucker and Bay-Cheng, "Minding the Gap between Feminist Identity and Attitudes: The Behavioral and Ideological Divide between Feminists and Non-labelers."

in a recent interview I had with them, it was mentioned that women make up for 16% of the whole 10% representation the party in the Romanian Parliament[91].

I have decided to conduct semi-structured interviews to collect my data. Being the most widely used method in qualitative research[92], interviews will thus help me identify the main lines of thought my interviewees have and how they interpret[93] and make sense of topics such as nationalism, feminism, and their self-representation and motivation as women in politics. In my case, the chosen sample for semi-structured interviews is comprised of women who are official members of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians Party. I have divided my 8 interviewees in 2 categories: 1) women who are members of the Parliament and 2)women who are part of different structures inside the party (the Youth Organisation or the Women Organisation). On top of the 8 interviews with women, I have also conducted an interview with the leader of the party (male), which has been used to better understand the reasons for which these women have decided to join the movement.

As my research is a pilot, with a strong explorative nature attached to it, I have decided to use a non-probability research sample, namely a snowball sample. I made initial contact with a small group of women who are relevant to the research topic and then asked them to help me establish contact with others.[94] My initial contact was the woman MP I already had an interview with, in summer 2021. I have initially contacted her to have a pilot interview in order to check if my hypotheses are valid. After the pilot, she put me in contact with other respondents. I have followed the same practice up until I have met my interviews quota of 8 women and the male leader of the party. While starting a snowball from a single person raises the risk of moving within the same social network, interviewing people who are more similar to each

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[91] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author, April 7, 2022.
[92] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford university press, 2016), 240.
[93] Bryman, 242.
[94] Bryman, 160.

other than other members of my general population, I do not consider this to be a distortion of my findings in the case of my thesis. First, during my preliminary research on the respondents, I have identified 3 broad categories of women: 1) women involved in representative positions in the Romanian Parliament, 2) women involved in the party's Women's Organisation and 3) women involved in the Youth Branch of the party. Therefore, when asking the respondents to put me in contact with other women, I was either asking them for targeted people or for possible members of these three categories. Second, throughout the interviews, I have discovered 2 more possible categories: 1) women involved in diasporic branches and 2) women serving as advisors to the leader of the party. Thus, even though my snowball started from a single respondent, during the data collection process (which lasted between 7th of April 2022 up until 15th of May 2022) the respondents have proven to be part of different sub-groups of the party, which provided me with a holistic outlook when it comes to the voice women have in AUR and how this voice is constructed.

The interviews lasted between 37 minutes and 1hour and 40 minutes. Even though some of the questions asked during the interviews may be regarded as too direct, such as *How do you feel when people call you an extremist?* Or *What does nationalism mean to you?,* the interviewees responded comfortably and openly to all of them. The overall atmosphere during the interviews was relaxed, both the women and I being open to find out more about the topics discussed. Most of the respondents admitted to never thinking about the possible connection between their identity as women and nationalism, or about what it means to be a woman. Focusing more on their personal experiences and life story, I have found their responses reliable and honest. This was possible due to my positioning as an objective listener who is not biased by the media-promoted image of the party.

Table 1: List of respondents

No. crt.	Age	Sub-group affiliation	Original profession before joining the party	Family status	Length of interview	Date of interview
R1	40	Representative position	Highschool teacher	Married	1h40m	7th April
R2	50	Representative position	Business	Married	54m	15th April
R3	45	Leader's advisor	Journalism	Married	1h13m	28th April
R4	45	Women's Organisation	University professor	Married	1h10m	7th May
R5	38	Representative position	Business	Married	37m	9th May
R6	42	Diaspora branches	Tourism	Married	58m	11th May
R7	48	Leader's advisor	Shop keeper	Married	40m	12th May
R8	21	Youth branch	Highschool student	Unmarried	1h15m	15th May
L	35	Leader of the Party	Activist	Unmarried	1h6m	27th April

Interview guide

Since I have decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, I came up with four categories of questions which were created in accordance with my chosen theoretical framework on nationalist quasi-feminism. Moreover, if given the chance during interviews, I did not follow the exact order of questions as presented in my interview guide and I have also asked follow-up questions. The four categories of questions were as follows: 1) context questions, 2) the internal/external dimension of their position as women, 3) the bricolage of nationalism and cardinal feminist beliefs and 4) the emotional implications of being a woman in politics. The first category of questions aimed at determining the social-economic context the respondents come from, their beliefs and motivation to join the nationalist movement. The second category focused on their experience as women in politics, their views regarding the main issues women are faced with and what would be their role in resolving the issues. The third category of questions looked at how the respondents relate to ideas such as nationalism, cardinal feminist beliefs, and their implications on the situation of Romanian women. The last

category of questions highlighted the way respondents feel in relation to the overall feedbacks coming from voters, supporters, or media, how they relate to labels such as "extremists" or "nationalists" and what sort of emotions these create in their activity. Usually, the interviews lasted for about 1 hour and they were conducted online, via Zoom. In the case of the interview with the leader of the party, I have prepared a different semi- structured interview guide. The interview took place in person, inside the Romanian Parliament. In this case, the categories of questions revolved around the leader's position towards women, their take on the need for more women in politics, what is their definition of a woman and lastly, what were the reason behind their choice of promoting and encouraging the existing women in the party.

Data analysis

I have decided to apply discourse analysis in order to test my hypotheses. I follow Gill in understanding discourse analysis as having four main themes: 1) a concern with discourse itself; 2) a view of language as constructive and constructed; 3) an emphasis upon discourse as a form of action; and 4) a conviction in the rhetorical organization of discourse[95]. Moreover, a discourse analysis is a careful, close reading that moves between text and context to examine the content, organization, and functions of discourse[96]. Thus, I am rather interested in the content and the organisational aspects of the discourse my respondents have. More precisely, I am interested in how respondents use their discourse to justify their nationalist quasi-feminist position.

Therefore, I transcribed all the interviews and code them. The categories used for coding will obviously be determined by the questions of interest[97]. For this I have used the four

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[95] Rosalind Gill, "Discourse Analysis," *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound* 1 (2000): 174.
[96] Gill, 188.
[97] Gill, 179.

categories of questions I outlined earlier. The initial coding for this involved going through the transcripts and highlighting or selecting out all occasions where concepts such as nationalism, feminism, beliefs, or women were mentioned. After I have finished coding all my interviews, I analysed the content with regards to two categories of analysis, as they were presented in my theoretical framework :1) the emotional dimension of nationalist quasi-feminism and 2) the ideational dimension of nationalist quasi-feminism. By inserting all the useful data from the interviews, I have created a table to identify more easily the common patterns which support my hypothesis. After completing the table, I have compared the rows, based on the two categories of analysis.

Moral and ethical dimensions

Examining women in nationalist movements and their self-representations has special moral and ethical dimensions for researchers. Given the fact that I come from a completely opposing political spectrum than them, I experienced a moral challenge with my respondents each time they have invited me to join the party officially, or when the leader of the party wanted to film our interview and publish it on social media platforms. However, my political bias did not represent any impediment during the interviews, as I have always approached my respondents with objectivity and openness, positioning myself as a listener. Regardless of the social stigma which is casted upon the political party I have decided to analyse for my thesis, after each interview, my respect for them, as individuals, before anything else, and for their ambition and perseverance grew. During the analysis, I also tried to avoid judgements, and refrain from applying my own values and ideological preferences, focusing on portraying an image as similar as possible to the one I had during interviews. All my interviewees were informed from the beginning about who I am, what is my institutional affiliation and what is

the aim of my research. I have assured all of them that their names will be anonymised, and the content of the interview will be deleted after submitting my thesis.

Expert interviews

As an addition to the 9 semi-structured interviews that I have conducted with women who are members of AUR and the male leader of the party, I have decided to conduct 5 more expert interviews working on gender, feminism in Romania, the history of Romanian nationalism, and Romanian political parties. The reason behind these five interviews is strongly related to the fact that my initial hypothesis - women who joined AUR are creating a bricolage between a discourse focused on women's issues and a nationalist discourse in order to 1) decrease the gender gap and 2) to soften the masculine image of the party – did no longer apply. More exactly, I have discovered that women are not only employing a conservative feminist discourse inside the nationalist framework of the party, but they are also arguing that AUR, despite its extremist and nationalist conservative labels, is a space where women's voices are both amplified and listened to. As these findings do not fit in the usual paradigm of similar studies, I have reached out to certain experts with whom I have shared my findings and subsequently asked about their own views on this. The interviews with experts lasted 1hour each and for each one of them I have prepared different semi-structured interview guides. After introducing my thesis idea and presenting my findings from the interviews, I would ask the experts to comment on the overall results and then to explain more in detail either the historical context of issues such as feminism, gender or nationalism, or explain how AUR is perceived in the Romanian political space. I have conducted these 5 interviews from 10th to 20th of May 2022, online. The experts have agreed to be cited with their full name in the Discussions section of my thesis.

Table 2: List of expert interviews

No. crt.	Name	Profession	Topic discussed	Date
1.	Jill Massino	Associate Professor, Department of History, University of North Carolina Charlotte	Gender politics in Romania	10th May
2.	Ionela Băluță	Professor, Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest	Feminism in Romania	11th May
3.	Ovidiu Raețchi	Diplomat	Romanian nationalism and political parties	13th May
4.	Claudiu Tufiș	Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest	Romanian political parties, gender politics	17th May
5.	Luciana Jinga	Researcher, Institute for the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism and the Memory of the Romanian Exile	Historical perspective on gender politics in Romania, Romanian nationalism	20th May

Case study: Romanian nationalist quasi-feminist women and the road to alternative emancipation

AUR and its revival of Romanianness

Romania is one of the new states inside European Union which experienced the resurgence wave of radical right parties. The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians is a right-wing conservative and nationalist new political party, founded in 2019. AUR aims for the unification of all Romanians from Romania and Romanian-populated neighboring zones, and for the support of the Romanian diaspora in other countries. The party's self-described four main pillars are "*family, nation, Christian faith, and liberty*".[98] The party is opposed to what it refers to as gender ideology and believes that a nation has no chance of surviving "unless it cultivates the original pattern of the classic family".[99] This position is also portrayed in the official Program of AUR, where it is stated that the alliance "*openly opposes any form of contemporary Marxism. Currents of political correctness, gender ideology, egalitarianism or multiculturalism are camouflaged forms of the neo-Marxist wound*"[100]. The party's representatives became popular on social media as a result of their positioning against measures taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the party has been critical of the impact of the local autonomy of Hungarians in Romania on the rights of ethnic Romanians in the center of the country, leading to accusations of being Magyarophobic.[101]

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[98] "English," Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor - AUR, accessed December 23, 2020, https://www.partidulaur.ro/english.

[99] "Care Este Programul Politic al AUR. Partid Conservator Care Vrea Educație Sexuală Pentru Adolescenți | Adevarul.Ro," accessed December 23, 2020, https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/care-programul-politic-aur-partid-conservator-vrea-educatie-sexuala-adolescenti-1_5fce05855163ec4271a2feee/index.html.

[100] "PROGRAM – AUR," accessed June 5, 2022, https://partidulaur.ro/program/.

[101] "Rookie Nationalist Party Makes Shock Entry into Romania's Parliament," *Balkan Insight* (blog), December 7, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/07/rookie-nationalist-party-makes-shock-entry-into-romanias-parliament/.

Recorder, a Romanian online publisher, argues that the 2020 electoral campaign of AUR has been adapted to the rural environment, which lacks modern technology, relying more on messages desired by the masses than on a coherent ideology. In this way, they argue, in addition to a core of supporters who voted for radical messages, they managed to attract also the wider category of electorate strictly attracted by populist messages.[102] The recent polls published in February 2022 position AUR on the second position in terms of popularity amongst citizens[103] and the usual voter profile is that of a young man (18-30 years old) with minimum level of education (high-school) and active in the working field. In terms of gender, only 39% percent of their votes are coming from women.[104]

Nowadays, the party has been raising their number of supporters by invoking a discourse centred on national nostalgia and Romanianness. Nostalgia refers to AUR constructing a discourse around important national figures in the state's history that together with its revolutionary pretentions make voters reminisce about the 'good old days'[105]. The concept of Romanianness is portrayed by AUR through the usage of national ethnic symbols. Whilst no researcher has been tackling the usage of symbols in relation with AUR, a short search on media engines will depict the members wearing traditional costumes or playing Romanian traditional music during their protests, amongst other things. What is important to mention here is that the Romanianness promoted by AUR refers to what Sibii conceptualises as the *perceived and informal Romanian national idea*[106]. He describes Romanianness as "a

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[102] "Cum a Ajuns AUR a Patra Forță Politică Din România," accessed December 23, 2020, https://recorder.ro/cum-a-ajuns-aur-a-patra-forta-politica-din-romania/.

[103] Cristian Andrei, "Un an cu AUR | Cum a ajuns partidul de tip reality-show primul pe Facebook, al doilea în sondaje," *Europa Liberă România*, 07:08:56Z, sec. Politică, https://romania.europalibera.org/a/aur-locul-2-in-sondaje-partid-anti-certificat/31633545.html.

[104] "EXCLUSIV SONDAJ Cine sunt alegătorii AUR? 60% au liceu sau postliceala, 30% sub liceu / 40% angajați, 32% fără ocupație/ 80% împotriva certificatului verde la locul de muncă și 65% împotriva vaccinării," G4Media.ro, February 8, 2022, https://www.g4media.ro/exclusiv-sondaj-cine-sunt-alegatorii-aur.html.

[105] Hans-Georg Betz and Carol Johnson, "Against the Current—Stemming the Tide: The Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 324.

[106] Razvan Sibii, "National Identity Through Prototypes and Metaphors: The Case of" Romanianness"," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective* 6, no. 2 (2012): 2.

diffuse feeling of belonging, of togetherness"[107] which is constructed with the help of self-stereotypes Romanians create about themselves.

Given the unexpected electoral success of AUR, Romanian media and political analysts created the theory according to which the party was created and supported by Russian Federation in order to weaken the ties Romania has with the European Union[108] Another explanation for the emergence of AUR and its popularity is that the party was created in the Romanian "laboratories", referring to an intended resurgence of Romanian nationalism which has been anyway anticipated inside the society.[109] Another explanation for its success is rooted in the close relationship some leaders of the party have with the Romanian Orthodox Church. According to Oliver Schmitt, AUR has grown slowly, within the Orthodox Brotherhood, a group of neo-legionary origin which has been tolerated by the Romanian Orthodox Church.[110] The neo-legionary discursive tendencies of AUR represents the main reason for which the party is labelled as an extremist political force. This explanation is one of the most solid ones, given that a large part of AUR's members got to be known to the public during the 2018 Referendum initiated by The Coalition for Family. The Coalition for Family is a Romanian civic initiative reuniting more than 30 NGOs focusing on an anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ rights and the preservation of 'traditional' family on religious and nationalist grounds.[111] The civic movement

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[107] Sibii, 16.

[108] Emilian Isailă, "AUR, un partid care a crescut în două luni de la 0,77% la 9%. Indicii că ascensiunea e legată de serviciile de informații," *spotmedia.ro* (blog), December 10, 2020, https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/opinii-si-analize/aur-un-partid-care-a-crescut-in-doua-luni-de-la-047-la-9-indicii-ca-ascensiunea-e-legata-de-serviciile-de-informatii.

[109] "BREAKING Iulian Fota, fost șef al Colegiului Național de Informații al SRI și fost consilier prezidențial de securitate: "AUR este un proiect rezultat din laboratoare neaoșe românești din țară și din străinătate. Sunt evaluările mele personale"," G4Media.ro, December 8, 2020, https://www.g4media.ro/breaking-iulian-fota-fost-sef-al-colegiului-national-de-informatii-al-sri-si-fost-consilier-prezidentiale-de-securitate-aur-este-un-proiect-rezultat-din-laboratoare-neaose-romanesti-din-tar.html.

[110] Magda Grădinaru, "Cum a crescut AUR în Frății ortodoxe tolerate de Biserică, așa cum BOR l-a tolerat și pe Zelea Codreanu. Manipulările via Sputnik și pericolul real - Interviu," *spotmedia.ro* (blog), December 11, 2020, https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/politica/de-citit-cum-a-crescut-aur-in-fratii-ortodoxe-tolerate-de-biserica-asa-cum-bor-l-a-tolerat-si-pe-zelea-codreanu-manipularile-via-sputnik-si-pericolul-real.

[111] Diana Margarit, "LGBTQ Rights, Conservative Backlash and the Constitutional Definition of Marriage in Romania," *Gender, Place & Culture* 26, no. 11 (2019): 1575.

and its founders in Romania were supported and funded with the help of external resources provided by the American neo-protestant communities[112]. Going back to AUR and its possible source of funding, during my expert interview with Ionela Băluță, she reinforces the possibility of AUR being funded by both the American Neo-Protestant Church which played an important role in the promotion of the agenda of the Coalition for Family, and by the a "Putinist branch"[113].

Whilst the theories behind the emergence and popularity of AUR are diverse, I have chosen to look at the most grounded one, namely the alliance between the members of two civic movements: The Unionist Platform Action 2012 and the Coalition for Family. The Platform Action 2012 is a coalition of non-governmental organizations and initiative groups that support the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania and militate for achieving the goal having Romanians on both banks of the Prut River within the same state[114]. The founder of Platform Union 2012 is George Simion, the current leader of AUR. The other civic movement is the Coalition for Family, which I have already mentioned. Claudiu Târziu, the co-founder of AUR, was also one of the members of the National Coordination Council of the Coalition for the Family and one of the supporters of the anti-abortion movement[115].

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[112] "How Romania Became a Battleground in the Transatlantic Backlash against LGBT Rights," openDemocracy, accessed May 29, 2022, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/romania-battleground-backlash-lgbt-rights/.

[113] Ionela Băluță, Expert interview on Feminism in Romania, conducted by author, May 11, 2022, 25–26.

[114] "Despre Noi | Platforma Unionistă Acțiunea 2012," accessed May 29, 2022, http://www.actiunea2012.ro/despre-noi.

[115] "Cine este Claudiu Târziu, unul dintre liderii partidului AUR? Declarații homofobe și antiavort, simpatii legionare," Libertatea, December 7, 2020, https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/claudiu-tarziu-lider-partid-aur-3315204.

George Simion: a multi-dimensional character, not a "Bucharest Führer"[116]

George Simion, the leader of AUR, is a key character in this research as he not only is a "multi-dimensional character… an intelligent and nuanced man… and an energetic leader"[117], as Ovidiu Raețchi described him during the expert interview I conducted with him, but also the person who advocates publicly for the need of more women in politics. According to my interviews, he is also the person who encouraged all respondents to join politics, thus his importance for this study. AUR is "an alliance of political currents"[118] and Simion comes from the Unionist branch of the party, a topic which has not been receiving scholarly attention up until now. Thus, special attention must be given to the history of Platform Action 2012 and how this civic movement got transformed into a point on the Romanian political agenda.

Before the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, the unionist movement in Romania has been acknowledged and supported not only by citizens, but also by the political leadership. During the mandates of Traian Basescu as the President of Romania (2004-2014), the union with the Republic of Moldova has become an official position of the state. "It was not just an exotic position; it was a position assumed by the head of state and automatically by the structures under his order."[119] One way this position was supported at the institutional level was through the formation of a Parliamentary Group called "The Union Friends". This group was created at the initiative of George Simion and comprised over 50 members of the Parliament from both Romania and Republic of Moldova[120]. The aim of this group was to support the unionist civic movement, through legislation, lobbying, political representation, as well as through promotional actions and intermediation of dialogue with

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[116] Ovidiu Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author, May 13, 2022.
[117] Raețchi.
[118] George Simion, Interview conducted by author with the leader of the Alliance for the Union of All Romanians.
[119] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.
[120] Valeriu Dulgheru, "ADUCEM BASARABIA ACASĂ," n.d., 5.

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other relevant institutions[121]. More exactly, according to Raețchi, "if you were joining this unionist group, which – I repeat – in 2012 it was absolutely legitimate and assumed by the state, you were part of the friendship group, you were exchanging visits, you were going to Chisinau, you were bringing books there and things like that."[122]

Thus, George Simion played a key role in the collaboration between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, both at the grassroot level and at the institutional level. Things changed completely at the time of the annexation of Crimea. At the same time, a change of political power was taking place in Bucharest and Klaus Iohannis became President of Romania. That was the moment when the Romanian state "understood that unionism could be a way to create ethnic and cultural tensions in the Republic of Moldova, and to be somehow used by the Russian Federation for contextual destabilization purposes."[123] This also marked the time when Simion changed his approach, from a civic activist to a protest organiser and a political provocateur. According to Ovidiu Raețchi,

Simion's career changed when he probably felt a withdrawal of the Romanian state from this unionist dimension. I was amazed to see how he moves from a student organizer to a political provocateur, between 2015 and 2017 when he organized protests. He came and sat down in the University Square demanding immediate union, he had some clashes with the riot police in Victory Square, things that were not necessarily compatible with the character I remembered. He was a changed man, but I put this change on the absence of the Romanian state when it comes to supporting the unionist dimension and I thought he was looking for a new ideology ... and indeed that is what happened. I think his evolution from this role of a unionist protester to the head a political party was to be expected.[124]

The purpose of George Simion, since he had funded AUR and had managed to obtain 10% of the seats in the Romanian Parliament, is none other than "to work for a majority in the

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[121] Agora Media, "'Prietenii Unirii' Preocupați de Românii Din Republica Moldova," AGORA MEDIA, accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.agoramedia.ro/index.php/politic/33-diverse-politic/2662-prietenii-unirii-preocupati-de-romanii-din-republica-moldova.
[122] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.
[123] Raețchi.
[124] Raețchi.

next Parliamentary elections"[125]. However, the diversity of members' profiles and political orientations build the extremist image of the party. Members of AUR use antisemitic preconceptions, mentioning that the Holocaust is an "unimportant issue"[126] and that it should not be allowed to be taught in schools. On top of this, the vocal sympathies of some party members towards the leaders of the Legionary Movement in inter-war Romania completes the overall image of the party as a far-right extremist party. The phrase found in the official program of the party, "Our alliance speaks out against any formula of contemporary Marxism"[127] is borrowed from the book "For my Legionaries"[128] written by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the interwar Iron Guard[129]. Amidst all similarities and labels, George Simion is seen as the lesser evil in comparison with the other leaders in the party, due to his main affiliation with the unionist movement, which is not perceived as having an extremist orientation. Raețchi reinforces my affirmation by stating that "The charismatic leader is theoretically the least extremist of the other leaders around him. He is apparently, from a European perspective, a better solution than Claudiu Târziu[130] and other pro-legionnaires in the story."[131] Despite the moderate position of Simion in comparison with the others, he is still the main factor of electoral cohesion for AUR. Thus, the responsibility of AUR remaining in the political arena and not "radicalising outside of the polity"[132] lies on his shoulders:

[125] George Simion, Interview conducted by author with the leader of the Alliance for the Union of All Romanians. Min. 4:57

[126] Andrada Oana, "Presa germană, despre AUR: 'Partid extremist de dreapta, cu idei antiseminte' / 'Minimalizatori ai Holocaustului,'" DCNews, accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.dcnews.ro/presa-germana-despre-aur-partid-extremist-de-dreapta-cu-idei-antiseminte-minimalizatori-ai-holocaustului_854651.html.

[127] "PROGRAM – AUR."

[128] "AUR și Mișcarea Legionară - o comparație - ce spun doi istorici?," RFI România: Actualitate, informații, știri în direct, December 20, 2020, https://www.rfi.ro/politica-128758-aur-si-miscarea-legionara-o-comparatie-ce-spun-doi-istorici.

[129] Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was a Romanian politician of the far right, the founder and leader of the Iron Guard or The Legion of the Archangel Michael (also known as the Legionary Movement), which was an ultranationalist and violently antisemitic organization active throughout most of the interwar period. The Iron Guard was seen as the main variety of local fascism and was known for its mystical and Romanian Orthodox-inspired revolutionary messages.

[130] Claudiu Tarziu is the co-president of AUR as of the new internal elections happening in March 2022.

[131] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.

[132] Raețchi.

Simion is a multi-dimensional character, and you can't just catch him in some of these 'extremist führer' colours. He knows how to escape from these schemes that reduce him to a simplicity worthy of caricature. He is an intelligent and nuanced guy, not a führer from Bucharest, but the big problem with him is that all these nuances sometimes fall apart in the face of dangerous political actions. Take Uzului Valley[133] for example.[134]

Simion's tendencies to resort to dangerous political actions has also been noted by Respondent 3 whom I will name "the Woman Mastermind" throughout this chapter. When describing the relationship she has with Simion and how their power dynamic comes in play, the Woman Mastermind, about whom I will talk later in this chapter, mentions that despite the trust and sincerity-based relationship they have, "not all the actions George has taken over time, since he entered Parliament, fit my way of being, but I have tried to find an explanation for each one and when I did not agree and I have had a radical position, I told him clearly."[135] Therefore, in order for Simion to maintain his credibility and be one step closer to a political majority during next Parliamentary elections, he has two strategies at his disposal. The first is to attract even more members from ethnic minorities in the party, Simion stating that "the 5% ethnic Hungarians are an important pool that we cannot neglect and we want to have representatives among them"[136]. The second strategy is not mentioned directly in the interview with Simion, but is stated clearly in the one with the Woman Mastermind, namely, to attract more women in AUR:

If we want to win elections, we need to have proper representation and not only to put women there for the image. People vote for what they see and you attract what you are. I also have to attract women with earrings up to the shoulder and maybe crazier, I also have to attract young women, that if I want to be a big party.[137]

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[133] On June 6, 2019, several hundred Romanians who came to commemorate their heroes buried in the international cemetery in Valea Uzului forced their entry into the location closed by ethnic Hungarians. Enraged by the situation on the Uzului Valley, they broke wood from the main gate and forcibly entered the cemetery, pushing with the gendarmes who tried to prevent their access and assaulting some ethnic Hungarians. The current AUR co-president George Simion was at the head of the unleashed crowd.

[134] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.

[135] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author, April 28, 2022, pt. 55:55.

[136] George Simion, Interview conducted by author with the leader of the Alliance for the Union of All Romanians.

[137] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.

Listening to the voices of women in AUR- "Psychologically speaking, men are failed women"[138]

Despite the extremist label attached to the party, one surprising fact about AUR is that it is the political party in Romania with the biggest number of women in the National Board. During the Congress held by AUR on 27th of March 2022, George Simion won the presidency of the party and out of his 18-member National team, 6 of the members are women.[139] On top of this, 16% of the 10% seats in the Parliament which AUR holds are occupied by women.[140] Even more, out of the 24 councillors of the Members of the Parliament, 11 of them are women[141].

The large number of women in leading positions may come as a surprise to anyone who does not look more in depth at how the party was created. One reason which explains these numbers is related once again to George Simion and the unionist movement. As I have also found out from the 8 interviews that I have conducted with women in AUR, but also from the expert interview with Ovidiu Raețchi, George Simion has always been working with women and has validated and supported their activity. When asked to comment on the relation between the large number of women and the nationalist and extremist labels of the party, Raețchi links this phenomenon back to the unionist civic activity of Simion:

The unionist current had this from the beginning. There were a lot of girls, maybe because unionism was a strong emotional, national-emotional binding dimension. A student from Bessarabia who came to study in Bucharest was very much attracted by nostalgia for Bessarabia. They became more involved than the boys, and later continued with George in the political structures, so it was a continuation of the very significant female involvement in the unionist movement from the beginning.

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138 Respondent 3.

139 "Congres al AUR. George Simion, Noul Președinte al Alianței. Cum va Fi Ales Viitorul Candidat al Partidului La Prezidențiale," adevarul.ro, 1648364502, https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/congres-aur-alianta-ramane-singur-presedinte-arata-listele-candidati-cele-doua-motiuni-1_62400aff5163ec4271b5c128/index.html.

140 Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.

141 Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author, May 12, 2022.

This somehow proves that the party leader is a person who has a good institutional collaboration with women. And this is true, given the institutional history of the two movements[142].

Raețchi's comment is strengthen by Simion himself who mentions that even though he is continuously looking for women who would be willing the join AUR, he has great confidence in "the girls who come from the unionist movement and who have been with us since the age of 15-16 and who grew up with us and I think they will be future parliamentarians, future dignitaries of success."[143]

Apart from Simion's own view on women and the lobby the Woman Mastermind is doing for their emancipation, AUR is still a nationalist conservative party that is basing its program on pillars such as "*family, nation, Christian faith, and liberty*".[144] Therefore, if the Woman Mastermind is the only respondent who willingly identified as a feminist[145], saying that she supports "women, the women's movements because there is a need for these and we cannot hide, we cannot say that everything is alright when actually it is not"[146], during my other 7 interviews with women who are members of AUR, I have identified 3 other categories: 1) national-conservative women, 2) unionist-nationalist women and 3) nationalist-religious women. Even though I term these as categories of women, I am referring to the types of discourses performed by these women.

These three categories of discourse will serve as the main categories of analysis in the next segments of this chapter and I will use them in order to conceptualise how nationalist quasi-feminism is constructed from both an ideational perspective and an emotional perspective.

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[142] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.
[143] George Simion, Interview conducted by author with the leader of the Alliance for the Union of All Romanians.
[144] "English."
[145] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[146] Respondent 3.

The construction of nationalist quasi-feminism on the ideational level

As explained earlier in the theory chapter of this thesis, the concept of nationalist quasi-feminism refers to the heterogenous character of women's involvement in nationalist movements.[147] More exactly, this group of nationalist quasi-feminist women are more critical and feminist-oriented, arguing for the enhancement of women's position within and outside the movement.[148] In my conceptualisation of the term, I go even further and argue that this new category of women is possible due to the bricolage[149] between nationalist and feminist ideas. In order to understand how this bricolage is done when it comes to the women who joined AUR, it is important to mention that amongst my sample, I have identified three dominant identities or group affiliations they have: 1) nationalist- conservative women, 2) nationalist-unionist women and 3) nationalist- religious women. Whilst in the case of some of the respondents one of these three affiliations is more prominent than the others, usually I observed an intersection of the three, depending on the broad topics discussed, which in this case were nationalism and feminism and/ or their identity as women. In the next sections I will assess how nationalism and feminism are perceived by the respondents, followed by the bricolage done by women in their discourse.

When it comes to their understanding of nationalism, the majority of respondents defined it as "love for the nation". In the case of nationalist-unionist women, nationalism is understood as being a "lover of traditions and of the nation who keeps the fire alive"[150], as "something which doesn't go to the extremes and that it doesn't refer to the hate for foreigners, but which is a simple love for the country and for your kin"[151], being " the same thing as

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[147] Kajta, "Calling for an Alternative Emancipation? Female Discourses in the Polish Radical-Nationalist Movemen."
[148] Kajta, 68.
[149] Carstensen, "Paradigm Man vs. the Bricoleur."
[150] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author, May 11, 2022.
[151] Respondent 8, Interview conducted by author, May 15, 2022.

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patriotism"[152] and on top of all of these, it refers to "the strong emotion you feel when you hold the flag of Romania in your hand"[153]. In the case of this category of women, nationalism is strongly connected with the unionist pillar of the party, and it refers to the relationship between Romania and Republic of Moldova. Following the narrative about the need for the two states to unite, nationalist-unionist women go even further to state that "unionism refers to uniting people who have something in common"[154], therefore the common national identity of the people from both states needs to be protected under the same borders. Thus, nationalism is understood as Romanianness, as described by Sibii[155], where there is no distinction between Romanians and Moldovans: "for me there is only one identity: Romanian".[156]

Nationalist-religious women have a different approach to nationalism, in this case the concept being linked to the Orthodox religion. Mentioning from the beginning of the interview that the most important pillar of the party for them is the Christian faith[157], the women from this category define nationalism based on the Biblical writings, where you cannot and should not wrong *your kin*[158].

> *The action of loving your kin, but within pre-established limits, more exactly. Nationalism is a distilled term and we are a party with Christian values and thus our nationalism cannot be compared with other types of nationalisms, like the one during Hitler's times, which was a nationalism separated from the Church. We have a Christian basis and we do not stray away from it.*[159]

The third category of women, the nationalist conservative ones regard nationalism from a rational point of view. If the former two categories attach nationalism to an emotional

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[152] Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author.
[153] Respondent 2, Interview conducted by author, April 15, 2022.
[154] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.
[155] Sibii, "National Identity Through Prototypes and Metaphors: The Case of" Romanianness"."
[156] Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author.
[157] Respondent 7.
[158] Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author, May 7, 2022.
[159] Respondent 4.

dimension, the nationalist-conservative women understand the concept as something which "highlights the strengths of a nation."[160]

Nationalism means that I am aware of the nature of my existence. I am aware that in my country, I make the laws, I make the rules, we know here what is best for us and what suits us. Nationalism also means capitalizing on national resources, from cultural folklore to our traditional products.[161]

Moreover, nationalism refers to "protecting your national values and you either have it or not. And if you don't have it, then you pretend you have it. You make use of nationalism, but, at the same time, it doesn't mean that if I put the flag on the wall, I am nationalist. You have to be born with it."[162] Nationalism, in this case, refers to never wishing to "get to the point where I would wish to leave Romania, to leave to other places. Just like I take care of my house, this is how I need to take care of Romania, as it is the place where I leave and raise my children."[163] If, in the other two categories, nationalism is understood and conceptualised in relation to either the union with Republic of Moldova or to respecting the Christian teachings, in this last category, nationalism is perceived as the responsibility these women have towards their children and future generations.

Generations died, they fought wars, they were part of the '89 revolution so that we receive and have a country. The thought that my kids will not have a country in which they would want to live is my main drive to get into politics and to make a change[164].

If the women's understanding of nationalism fits in the paradigms of a nationalist conservative political party, ranging from emotional descriptions such as "love for the country" to more rational descriptions such as "generational responsibility", in the case of feminism, some women no longer fit in the same categories as before. More exactly, if in the case of

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[160] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[161] Respondent 1.
[162] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[163] Respondent 5, Interview conducted by author, May 9, 2022.
[164] Respondent 5.

nationalism, it was easier to explain what the basis of their definitions is, in the case of feminism, I have discovered intriguing and interesting findings.

If nationalism was more stringent in the case of nationalist-unionist women, in the case of feminism/gender identity, the category which shares three cardinal beliefs of feminism closest to how they are described by Zucker and Bay-Cheng, namely 1) girls and women have not been treated as well as boys and men in our society; 2) women and men should be paid equally for the same work; and 3) women's unpaid work should be more socially valued[165] is the category of nationalist-conservative women.

When asked about the situation of women in politics, the nationalist-conservative women condemn the social paradigms where women have to work harder than men just to be recognised as equal partners : "I also told my colleagues and they said that I am too feminist, I think it is somehow a gender fracture, of logic, somehow because women work so hard that some men on the list get into politics."[166] They go on to say that "we are in the era in which people change their perception, and even though there are branches in AUR where women are there only for the image and if they somehow dare to say more, they are marginalised. There are 2 or 3 of these cases, but we keep then under the loop and slowly these isolated cases will be resolved."[167] This category of women is the only one who talks about the need for models for women in the society and the need for making the voice of more women heard. Some talk about how they "train the women in the party to come forward and make their presence known"[168], while others talk about being "a source of inspiration, especially assuming the disgrace of a part of society, assuming the role of educating society and even changing the

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[165] Zucker and Bay-Cheng, "Minding the Gap between Feminist Identity and Attitudes: The Behavioral and Ideological Divide between Feminists and Non-labelers."
[166] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[167] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[168] Respondent 3.

mentality of the political vision."[169] The main argument for why there is a need for more women in politics is usually resuming to the concept of "balance" that women bring into the field. This is backed by other comments such as " we are also in need of brains, not only muscles"[170] and as "men find it difficult to give up the authority and cannot digest women who become authoritarian and are on their feet."[171] If in the case of these two women that I just cited, the term "feminist" is something that they have no problem associating with, there are other conservative women in this category who reject the term from the beginning, but end up advocating for feminist cardinal values, without assuming the label of feminism. So is the case of respondent 5 who, after rejecting the feminist label which is "a neo-Marxist trend with which I do not relate"[172], mentions that this does not mean that she does not support women.

I will always support women, women can be equal to men, but from certain points of view. I don't want to be equal with my husband, I want my husband to open the door for me, to pay at the restaurant. However, I can be equal and even better than men intellectually and I can have the same salary or even bigger than men, but let's keep the proportions: women need to remain delicate, they need to remain mothers and supportive wives.[173]

When looking at the way women in AUR approach the concept of feminism, one could regard it as a top-down movement, where the conservative women showcase attitudes closer to those of women who identify as feminists and nationalist- religious women find themselves at the opposite end of the spectrum. Before looking at the way religious women relate to feminism is worthwhile taking a look at the category of unionist women. In the case of this category, when asked to share their views on women, they start the conversation by saying "I am not a feminist. Even more, I consider them frustrated. I don't need anyone to come and tell me I am equal with men. I don't need to be reminded every time about equal chances and

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[169] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[170] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[171] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[172] Respondent 5, Interview conducted by author.
[173] Respondent 5.

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gender and all that"[174] Even more, when asked if patriarchy is still present in the Romanian

society, the nationalist-unionist women deny its existence, arguing that "women have started

to state their own point of view. There might be some problems, but we adapt to them."[175] This

sort of approach to the position women have today in society is coming from the mindset that

even though women have rights and are emancipated, this comes as a loss for them, given that

"women should be first mothers, wives and then politicians or businesswomen".[176]

Even though on some levels women have gained the right to vote and other rights that women have today, on the other hand they have also had to lose because women, in addition to having a job that they go to every day, when they come home from work, they have a second job at home.[177]

If for the conservative and unionist women, feminism and the position of women is still

perceived in more rational terms as it has to do with rights, social standing, and empowerment,

in the case of religious women, the idea of feminism is understood as maternity and is in strong

connection with the Christian teachings.

The emergence of Christianity meant enormously for the condition of the woman in the world that she was raised, the woman received value. Virgin Mary means the mother of God, so above all she is a mother, our mother. This motherhood structures the thinking and functioning of civilizations. It is a tradition that we have brought into the 21st century, it is a set of values that are specific to Romanian culture, and Christianity is at their core. Women should not try to be what they are not; they should not take on a role that doesn't suit them.[178]

As I have mentioned before, the three categories of women I have identified are often

intersecting during their discourse and depending on the tackled subject. Similar to these three

categories, nationalism and feminism also intersect in the discourse of the respondents. I term

this intersection as "bricolage" and I argue that by bricolaging a nationalist and a feminist

cardinal beliefs rhetoric, the women of AUR are constructing the ideational level of their

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[174] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.
[175] Respondent 2, Interview conducted by author.
[176] Respondent 5, Interview conducted by author.
[177] Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author.
[178] Respondent 7.

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identity as nationalist quasi-feminists. In order to show this bricolage, I asked all my respondents if they think that nationalism influences the condition of women. The results of the question are once again worth being put in categories.

Therefore, the nationalist-conservative women don't see a direct link between the two of them. One possible explanation I attach to this is due to the rational approach this category of women has to nationalism.

I don't know if it influences ... from my point of view and from the party's point of view, the woman is very important in the evolution of the society and her role in educating the society of tomorrow, that is in educating the child.[179]

In the case of religious women, whilst nationalism is understood as "a somewhat traditional way of thinking, even if we face generically in the world a form of secularization of society, still in Romania there is still this vein of Christian love which remained, which is related to the assumption of values which can be corelated to the concept of woman, which means survival."[180] Thus, once again women, who are perceived as the mothers of the nation, can be in strong connection with nationalism due to their capacity of continuing the main pillar of the Romanian identity, which for this category is understood as Christianity.

The last category of women, the nationalist- unionist ones, proved to be the ones who are bricolaging nationalism and feminism the most. Understood not as a possible result of the combination between the two concepts, this category of women regards this bricolage as being mandatory, stating that "every woman must have this love. It's like a mother's love for her baby"[181]. They go on to explain that "women, by definition, are more emotional, their emotional side is better developed and nationalism is something you feel, and thus there is a strong connection between women and nationalism"[182]. Moreover, as "nationalism is a feeling

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[179] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[180] Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author.
[181] Respondent 2, Interview conducted by author.
[182] Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author.

and men are not sentimental"[183] one could deduct, thus, that it is the job of the woman to be nationalist. On top of this, "Romanian women are the most beautiful women. Why? Because they love their country"[184] .

The construction of nationalist quasi-feminism at the emotional level

The ideational level of the nationalist quasi-feminism concept is constructed differently inside the three categories of women I have identified, and it is grounded on the bricolage of nationalist and feminist cardinal beliefs which can be either more intense or diffuse, depending on the context. The context, in this case, can refer to certain situations the respondents are put into and how they react to them. Reaction, in the case of this research, refers to the way women deal emotionally with situations in their political activity and how these situations affect and construct their identity as women. More exactly, dependant on the situation, when reacting to it, respondents can do either emotional labour or emotion work. Just as I mentioned in the theoretical chapter, emotional labour "requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. This kind of labour calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality."[185] On the other hand, emotion work or emotion- management, fosters attention to how people try to feel, and not to how they try to appear to feel[186]. More exactly, emotion work refers more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself. There are three techniques to emotion work: cognitive, bodily, and expressive. The first technique is of most importance to this research as

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[183] Respondent 5, Interview conducted by author.
[184] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.
[185] Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 7.
[186] Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," 560.

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it refers to how individuals attempt to change images, ideas, or thoughts in hopes of changing the feelings associated with them.[187]

When it comes to doing emotional labour, most of the respondents have shown it is related to their interaction with party's supporters. In this case, emotional labour applies when they have to go out on the streets during electoral campaigns and promote the party.

Women are the ones who work for men to become politicians: they share posters, they socialize, they are more empathetic, they can more easily engage with men, women and young people.[188]

And because of this enhanced capacity of engagement that women have, they have "learned how to listen to people, how to convince them to sign the candidates' lists, all this, because we are struggling to show another face to politics."[189] And there is no other way of doing that than by doing emotional labour. This labour can also be understood as a strategy women have when approaching the people.

I speak to them from the bottom of my heart. First, when I get somewhere to communicate with people, I usually let them talk, I listen to them. After all, I don't have a specific recipe, it differs from person to person, some are introverted, others are very open. There are different characters and temperaments, and you must know how to take each one and how to talk to each one.[190]

Another context where emotional labour is required is when the respondents have to deal with people who are attaching labels such as "extremist" to both them and the party. As per Hochschild's definition of the concept[191], women in AUR are supressing their feelings in order to create a pleasant atmosphere for the others. This form of suppression can be done by "responding all the time, responding in a civilised way"[192] or "trying to communicate with delicacy and, if necessary, even inviting the person to the office of the party and trying to

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[187] Hochschild, 561–62.
[188] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[189] Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author.
[190] Respondent 8, Interview conducted by author.
[191] Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*.
[192] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.

understand what made them have such opinions"[193]. Overall, women understand the need for empathy and openness when it comes to interacting with the audience and how suppressing their initial reactions is in the end benefitting their image.

> *Emotions are elementary in the dialogue with the audience. They are usually constructive, I still have negative emotions, but now less than I started to detach myself from the situation because they are the same people who comment on the same nonsense, never with arguments.*[194]

When one has to undertake emotional labour, the natural reaction is to also conduct emotional work. More exactly, when you have to suppress or adjust your emotions during your interaction with others, you also need to manage those feelings, manage how you try to feel, and not to how you try to appear to feel. This process is termed by Hochschild as emotion work[195]. In the case of the respondents, one way to identify emotion work is when they say that "At first I was very frustrated and nervous and I was always upset, but now we have overcome this state of affairs and we are moving forward, we know what we want to do, what we have to do."[196] The majority of instances of emotion work that I have observed in interviews with women occur when they discuss the labels that are ascribed to them by the media or the public.

Reactions such as "I acutely feel all the labels and I'm outraged and it bothers me a lot"[197] or "What hurts me the most is to hear that we are pro-Russian, then secondly, that we are extremists. We must fight for both those who spit on us and for those who love us. We think and act for everyone, even for those who say we are supported by the Russians, or that we are Soros's people"[198] refer to the emotions respondents feel intrinsically but are unable to show to the outside world. Another way of doing emotion work is by supressing or diminishing the impact certain emotions have on you. In the case of the respondents, this approach is seen

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[193] Respondent 2, Interview conducted by author.
[194] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[195] Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure."
[196] Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author.
[197] Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author.
[198] Respondent 8, Interview conducted by author.

in such reactions as "painful, very painful, but I learned to get over it"[199] or "I received many apostrophes, and it gave me a state of inner nervousness that did not define me. I said ok, let it go. If I can ignore them, I ignore them."[200]

As a result, emotional labour and emotion work can be regarded as a bricolage of emotional states encountered by women as a result of their political activity. Emotional bricolage complements the cognitive bricolage that exists between a nationalist discourse and a discourse grounded on cardinal feminist ideas. I employ these two types of bricolage to explain the nationalist quasi-feminist identity of the women of AUR.

Discussions

This section is dedicated to discussing the results of this research and the possible theoretical, but also political implications and outcomes of the way women in AUR are bricolaging a nationalist and a rhetoric based on feminist cardinal beliefs while doing both emotional labour and emotion work. In order to provide the reader with more nuanced and objective results, I have conducted five expert interviews with scholars familiar with topics such as gender politics, feminism and nationalism in Romania and Romanian political parties. My results, along with the experts' opinion about them will be divided in three categories as follows: 1) women's contribution to AUR's mainstreaming, 2) the party's reasons behind the promotion and alternative emancipation of women and 3) the labels attached to the party and its position in the Romanian political field.

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[199] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.
[200] Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author.

Women in the catch all strategy of AUR

Looking at AUR from an outsider's position and without understanding its diverse and controversial history as a group of multiple civic movements which came together in 2019 under the umbrella of a political party, one could regard AUR as a new political party which is not only popular amongst citizens, but also women friendly. Only looking at numbers, in just two years, the party reached a number of 20.000 members[201], out of which approximately 3000 are members of the youth branch of the party[202], another 3000 are members of the diaspora branches[203] and, when it comes to women, approximately 22% of the total number of members are women.[204] Moreover, the party has members from most of the ethnic minorities in Romania, starting from Roma people, Hungarians, Jewish people or Aromanians[205] and, according to George Simion, is planning to attract even more Hungarians. These promising numbers which were shared by the members of AUR are backed by all the 8 women respondents I conducted interviews with, who say that the reason more women should join AUR is because "this is the party that represents best the interests of Romanian women"[206] and it is the place where "women's voices are heard and cherished"[207]. However, as this research is aiming to look at the reasons for which this nationalist conservative party is gaining popularity amongst women and how this popularity can lead to its mainstreaming, there is a need to take a couple of steps back from the image created as a result of my fieldwork and cross-check the individual testimonials of the respondents with the actual position of the party.

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[201] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.
[202] Respondent 8, Interview conducted by author.
[203] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author.
[204] George Simion, Interview conducted by author with the leader of the Alliance for the Union of All Romanians.
[205] George Simion.
[206] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author; Respondent 1, Interview conducted by author; Respondent 8, Interview conducted by author.
[207] Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author; Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author; Respondent 2, Interview conducted by author.

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Following my discussion with Ionela Băluță[208] regarding this image of women the respondents created for me, she noted that " it is important to look at what the party showcases because what it shows, especially on the official Facebook pages, the party's official program and positions, is rather a very traditional model of woman who is before anything else a mother."[209] Moreover, the nationalist quasi-feminist discourse women in AUR have can also be seen as a way of instrumentalising feminism/feminist cardinal values and it is in close relation to the way the anti-gender discourse is constructed[210], namely what Ionela Băluță identifies as a "rhetorical strategy"[211] used to soften the extremist image of the party, which leads to "a reinvention of forms of extremism and nationalism by co-opting various minority groups in the state."[212] Jill Massino follows the same line of argumentation as Ionela Băluță and argues that "they define the nation as kind of a melting pot, in a way, they don't define it in ethno-national terms. Being Romanian, for AUR, is a national, civic identity for them, not an ethnic identity"[213].

Based on this, the case of the nationalism promoted by AUR, my findings show that we can talk about a nationalist discourse based on three pillars: nation, family, and religion. Claudiu Tufiș shares that in a previous research project he undertook on AUR, he discovered the same three fundamental pillars when it comes to how AUR builds its discourse. He goes on to say that this discourse is a method to bring women to the party, alongside with their votes, while keeping the link with values such as national identity and religion"[214]. In a more

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[208] Ionela Băluță, together with Claudiu Tufiș published a study on the representation of women in Romanian politics, in which they have analysed the Facebook profiles of Women's Organisations and how these organisations relate to issues such as gender equality or gender roles. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/18817.pdf

[209] Băluță, Expert interview on Feminism in Romania, conducted by author.

[210] Băluță.

[211] Băluță.

[212] Băluță.

[213] Jill Massino, Expert interview on Gender Politics in Romania, conducted by author, May 10, 2022.

[214] Claudiu Tufiș, Expert interview on Romanian Political Parties and Gender Politics, conducted by author, May 17, 2022.

theoretical sense, the nationalist discourse of AUR is similar to what Brubaker terms as "eastern civilizationism"[215] that, when applied to gender politics or the emancipation of women, could be also understood as a "narrative of return"[216]. This narrative is similar amongst the anti-gender political campaigns in the region[217], thus the skeleton AUR is building on is a common phenomenon.

Even though this "narrative of return", alongside the narrative of nationalism as a melting pot and the party's "catch-all" attitude may give the impression that mainstreaming is possible and "could be regarded as an interesting move done by AUR, as it has not been done up until now by other Romanian parties"[218], the history of new populist political parties in Romania shows the contrary. Romania is defined by two types of anti-establishment electorates: there is a modernizing electorate, according to which the Romanian political and administrative system is outdated, corrupt, and this public is rather the USR[219] type. There is also a past-oriented electorate, with an AUR-type public that says the system is too modern, too friendly with the EU and gender politics and who is looking at a return to Ceaușescu's era when there were no such rights[220]. According to Ovidiu Raețchi, AUR is

the party that occupies a position that is constantly occupied by a newcomer to the system, which ranges between 20% in the maximum version and 5% in the minimum version, which has an anti-system public, with a rather nationalist inclination, maybe sometimes conspiratorial, nostalgic, but a nostalgia where you can find both Ceausescu and Antonescu[221]. It is a standard audience in Romania, which in certain contexts of social frustration can go up to 20%, but it is an unstable audience that usually disappears in one election cycle, maybe two

[215] Rogers Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (June 21, 2017): 1191–1226, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700.

[216] Băluță, Expert interview on Feminism in Romania, conducted by author.

[217] Kuhar and Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*.

[218] Tufiș, Expert interview on Romanian Political Parties and Gender Politics, conducted by author.

[219] Union Save Romania is a progressive political party whose main electorate is formed by the elites in the society

[220] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.

[221] Ion Antonescu was a Romanian military officer who presided over two successive wartime dictatorships as Prime Minister during most of World War II. Antonescu enforced policies independently responsible for the deaths of as many as 400,000 people, most of them Bessarabian, Ukrainian and Romanian Jews, as well as Romanian Roma.

election cycles, but as we have evolved since the revolution in 1989, these parties are disappearing faster and faster.[222]

On the other side of the table, Ionela Băluță finds it "very problematic that the only political party who understands the need to talk with the people is an extremist party"[223] and she states that the other political parties in Romania do not realise the danger AUR will pose in 2024, when the next elections in Romania take place. As far as my conclusion is concerned, whilst the history of other new populist political parties in Romania shows that they disappear after one or two electoral cycles, the case of AUR can be considered special as it is the first nationalist conservative party after 1989 which has a catch-all approach to all groups in the society and which is promoting women. Thus, the possible mainstreaming of AUR by 2024 should be taken into consideration by political analysts and scholars.

Women in AUR – alternative emancipation or male patronage?

Whilst I consider the information provided in the interviews with the respondents reliable, as a researcher I have to take into consideration a possible bias they might have had when talking to me, especially as I have introduced myself as a CEU student and as one of the women refused to talk to me because of my institutional affiliation. Even more, when it comes to reaching a conclusion regarding the reasons behind AUR's promotion and emancipation of women, the political discourse of the respondents cannot be seen as the only possible answer. Looking back at the 60's and 70's in the United States, Claudiu Tufiș finds resemblances between what is happening now in AUR and the active and radical feminism that comes with a similar mobilisation in the field of right-wing politics, which was trying to create a counter-movement against feminism, which was seen as too progressive.[224] In the case of AUR, the

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[222] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.
[223] Băluță, Expert interview on Feminism in Romania, conducted by author.
[224] Tufiș, Expert interview on Romanian Political Parties and Gender Politics, conducted by author.

wish to return to a "normalcy" and to the roots of the Romanian nation is understood through the nationalist discourse of the members. However, the reason for which conservative nationalist women of AUR come with a discourse revolving around the need to promote women, to respect their rights and to advocate for gender equality is not clear.

One possible explanation I bring to this question is found in the interview with the Woman Mastermind who admits that promoting women and bringing more women into the party is the only way they can win votes and become "a big party".[225] Thus, following this line, the reason for which women are promoted and empowered is to further instrumentalise them into becoming a mainstream party. The reason for which I used the term alternative emancipation refers to what Ionela Băluță also agreed on, namely that "women have a voice in AUR as long as the only thing they actually do is to strengthen the ideology of the party"[226]. This sort of alternative emancipation, according to Jill Massino, is similar to the situation in Hungary, where Katalin Novak, the new Hungarian woman president, "thinks women should definitely work, but it is ok if they do not get paid as much as men because they have this special role about raising children, and because God gave them that role, they are actually superior to men"[227].

Another explanation can be that the reason due to which so many women are members of AUR is related to the fact that when the party was created in 2019, the initial members did not have enough people to put on the electoral lists, so the wives and relatives of male members were added. This explanation is also in line with some of the answers I have received during interviews, where women admit they had to be placed on lists because there was no one else[228]

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[225] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[226] Băluță, Expert interview on Feminism in Romania, conducted by author.
[227] Massino, Expert interview on Gender Politics in Romania, conducted by author.
[228] Respondent 6, Interview conducted by author; Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author.

or that they joined the party because they were friends with one of the leaders of the party.[229] Claudiu Tufiș enforces my argumentation by saying that there is a problem of interpretation because "we have only one round of elections that we can analyse and the question then becomes: they put women on the lists because that's how the party thinks women should be represented - which would be ok, or there is this other interpretation that certain data support, namely that they put women on the list because they are actually relatives, either spouses or partners, or from the families of men who are on the list simply because they did not have enough candidates with which to fill the lists and that was the simplest solution, to trust the family members and that's how women got on the list"[230]. Due to the interview with the Woman Mastermind where she states that she "*trains* the women to come and make their presence felt"[231] and that "George listens when I tell him we need more women"[232], my conclusion is that, whilst women in AUR do have a feminist-oriented discourse which is mixed with/in the nationalist discourse, the reason for which the party is promoting them is to create a more appealing image of the party and to soften labels such as "extremist" or "masculine party" and to "emancipate the women without being a progressist party"[233].

AUR and its labels – what is extremism and what comes next?

"It's unfair towards the party. Just because there are one, two, three ideas which are indeed problematic, they are afterwards generalised to the whole party, without taking into consideration there might be worthy people who joined the party."[234] This quote from my interview with Claudiu Tufiș sums up my own conclusion regarding the labels attached to

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[229] Respondent 4, Interview conducted by author; Respondent 7, Interview conducted by author; Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[230] Tufiș, Expert interview on Romanian Political Parties and Gender Politics, conducted by author.
[231] Respondent 3, Interview with the Woman Mastermind, conducted by author.
[232] Respondent 3.
[233] Luciana-Marioara Jinga, Expert interview on Historical perspective on gender politics in Romania, and Romanian nationalism, conducted by author, May 20, 2022.
[234] Tufiș, Expert interview on Romanian Political Parties and Gender Politics, conducted by author.

AUR. According to the data from the interviews, the xenophobic label attached to the party should not be valid, given the diverse constituency of AUR. The masculine label attached to the party is also not valid, given the high number of women it has. The same goes for the pro-Russian label, given the Unionist pillar the party has, where Russians are the main adversaries of the project of a union between Romania and Moldova. However, given the large number of people with extremist attachments who surround George Simion, as I was outlining earlier in this research, "all the nuances and all the correct steps he takes are sometimes overridden by other gestures that seem to contradict each other."[235] More exactly, the actions and declarations of certain members of the party should not account for the overall image of AUR. However, this does not entail that AUR is free of any form of extremism.

Following Ionela Băluță, I agree that AUR is redefining the labels of extremism in Romania, creating what she terms as "an extremism à la Roumain"[236]. This new form of extremism is found in the official program of the party[237] and it is strongly connected to the Iron Guard in the 20th century Romania. These neo-legionnaire ideologic tendencies of the party, together with incidents like Uzului Valley or the more recent events when members of the party tried to minimise the effects of the war in Ukraine[238] show clearly that AUR, as an alliance of multiple political currents, is at critical times unable to maintain its discursive identity as a nationalist conservative or Christian conservative party, and hence risks sliding into the extremist category.

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[235] Raețchi, Expert interview on Romanian Nationalism and Political Parties, conducted by author.

[236] Băluță, Expert interview on Feminism in Romania, conducted by author.

[237] "PROGRAM – AUR."

[238] "Partidul extremist AUR, reacție anti-Ucraina și retorică rusă de minimalizare a victimelor invaziei ruse, la propunerea redenumirii unei străzi din Galați în "Eroii Ucrainei": "Atât inoportună, cât si neîntemeiată"," G4Media.ro, April 3, 2022, https://www.g4media.ro/partidul-extremist-aur-reactie-anti-ucraina-si-retorica-rusa-de-minimalizare-a-victimelor-invaziei-ruse-la-propunerea-redenumirii-unei-strazi-din-galati-in-eroii-ucrainei.html.

Conclusions

Summary of results

In this thesis I explored the way women politicians in AUR combine the nationalist rhetoric of the party with a discourse based on feminist cardinal beliefs. For this, I defined the concept of *nationalist quasi-feminism* on two dimensions: 1) the ideational dimension and 2) the emotional dimension. Based on the 8 interviews I have conducted with women politicians in AUR, I have identified 3 categories of possible identities these women have: 1) nationalist-consevative, 2) nationalist-unionist and 3) nationalist-religious. Through bricolage, these women construct a discourse which includes both nationalist elements and cardinal feminist beliefs such as: 1) girls and women have not been treated as well as boys and men in our society; 2) women and men should be paid equally for the same work; and 3) women's unpaid work should be more socially valued.[239] Moreover, I argue that nationalist quasi-feminism performed on the discursive level is a way for these women to achieve an alternative emancipation. Specifically, by mixing the two types of discourses, women gain opportunities to be seen and heard, all while enhancing their self-esteem and enjoying equality with men.[240]. On the emotional level, women perform either emotional labour or emotion work, depending on the setting, groups, or situations they are in, just as they do on the ideational level.

Contributions to the literature

My thesis makes an empirical contribution in that I am the first researcher to explore Romanian women's experiences in right-wing political groups. Furthermore, this thesis

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[239] Zucker and Bay-Cheng, "Minding the Gap between Feminist Identity and Attitudes: The Behavioral and Ideological Divide between Feminists and Non-labelers."

[240] Félix, "Towards an Alternative Emancipation?"

contributes to the small body of research on right-wing political parties in Romania. My project is significant not only for the field of research on similar parties in Central and Eastern Europe, but also due to the fact that it points to the party's ambitions to pursue a catch-all strategy by leveraging women's votes, which may be important for the Romanian elections in 2024. My theoretical contribution consists in an effort to define Kajta's concepts of nationalist quasi-feminism. In my research, I defined this concept on both an ideational and an emotional dimension. Furthermore, by applying the concept to a Romanian case study, I contributed to Aniko Felix's initial research on the alternative emancipation of Hungarian women involved in right wing politics.

Limits of research

In this dissertation, I attempted to add to the outstanding work that has already been done in the field of women in right-wing politics by delving deeper into how they construct their voice and how they relate to both their identity as women and as members of a nationalist party in a small country like Romania. This thesis offers insights on how concepts such as alternative emancipation, nationalist quasi-feminism or emotion work and emotional labour can be applied on a single-case study as the one I have chosen. Nonetheless, my conclusions could have been strenghtened should I have interviewied more women in AUR who are not necessarily in positions of representation or leadership. More interviews with such women would have had the additional value of presenting a more complete picture of the production of nationalist quasi-feminist discourse. Similarly, only in a few cases did I perform a triangulation of my data obtained from interviews with with data from other sources, such as the Romanian National Electoral Office or other publicly available data on the number of women in the party. As a result, the number of data points in this thesis is limited. Furthermore,

because I conducted a qualitative analysis of my interviews, my findings are illustrative rather than generalizable.

Future research agenda

Due to its exploratory nature, this study is only the beginning of an investigation into women's voices and experiences inside right-wing nationalist parties in Central and Eastern Europe. My future research agenda includes expanding my research to women in similar parties in the region. Furthermore, concerning Romania specifically, one issue that came up during my research but that I did not investigate further was the role of young women within the Unionist movement associated to AUR. Because no research has been undertaken in Romania or abroad on the Unionist movement and the involvement of women in supporting it, thus converting it from a student and civic movement in the '90es to a pillar of Romanian foreign policy during the administration of president Traian Băsescu (2004-2014), this is a niche I would like to explore in the future.

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