

The Many Meanings of “Colonisation” in Nineteenth-Century Romania

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The present paper shall briefly outline the importance of “colonisation” as a concept and interpretive framework for making sense of both national history and the contemporary pressures of nation-building in mid-nineteenth century Romania. Firstly, it shall make the case for the structural importance of “colonisation” as one of the basic concepts in historically-informed debates. Secondly, it shall take stock of the complexity of the concept. Thirdly, it shall illustrate the former two points by highlighting its uses in a well-known, influential classic text. Finally, it shall explore the continuum between such understandings of “colonisation” and those more commonly associated with the term.

Property, Past and Present

The dichotomy through which the history of property in Romanian lands gradually came to be narrated and debated was that between “colonisation”, on the one hand, and “conquest”, on the other. The former, which was in fact the outcome of the Roman conquest of Dacia in 106 CE, was seen as *the* foundational moment of land-apportionment. “Colonisation” – a more ambiguous concept than may seem at first blush – imbued the nation with both an egalitarian spirit and a commitment to private property. “Conquest”, identified with the feudal subjection of a Latin West by Germanic hordes, was seen as conspicuous in its absence. This enabled a narrative of Eastern exceptionalism which required a localised explanation for the kind of serfdom that had actually existed in Moldo-Wallachia. Or, alternately, it allowed for a Conservative dismissal of the notion of feudal unfreedom altogether, permitting the unfettered retrojection of modern categories unto property relations past and present. In turn, this impelled Liberal reformers to question the earnestness of this fundamentally redescriptive process that had only recently begun translating local arrangements into Western terms and concepts. Was it fair and accurate to refer to peasants living on boyars' lands in the here-and-now as “tenants” [*chiriași*]? Was it not even less fair to presume that they had always been *just that*? In sum, this was a history of contracts and necessary anachronisms, where a tension between historical arguments and abstract, transcendent principles arose: ultimately, did attempts to situate property and its origins infringe upon its sacred nature?

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If the history of property was an unbroken chain of (more or less free) contracts, the wealth of the few and the poverty of the many was the consequence of a non-ethnic, a-historical law – that of an unequal distribution of ambition. However, set against this parable of ancestral thrift was the counterargument that peasants had been indeed forcibly lashed into serfdom and tied to the land. Surely, then, the improvements they added to it with each generation had to give them – or, indeed, restore them – a right over what they tilled. Finally, if history divided the country between those who owned the land and those who owned their labour alone, what of the unfree but footloose proletariat to come? Contemporary historiography has taken notice of the strategy of denying the existence of a feudalism born of Germanic, Western-style conquest, though it has explained this away as a quirk of a flexible “historical imaginary” peculiar to the Conservative movement.² Alternatively, it has identified the denial of feudalism with the Conservatives' key spokesperson, Barbu Catargiu, rather than with the (otherwise fractured) movement at large.³ Even when comparing how multiple East European scholars envisioned feudal conquest – including the Liberal historian and statesman Mihail Kogălniceanu – the focus has remained on the trope of denial, without fully engaging with colonisation as its perceived antithesis, at least in the Romanian context.⁴ This leaves obscured both the growing consensus on the relevance of this dichotomy across party lines at the time, and the almost universal acceptance of “colonisation” – and later waves of re-colonisation – as the origin of legitimate land ownership in Moldo-Wallachia. This, to put it plainly, is due to the fact that the structure and evolution of the debates in which historical arguments were deployed have not been approached as such.⁵ But, to begin unpacking the concept of “colonisation” is a difficult task. More than one thing could be meant by “colonies” as socio-territorial entities, “colonisation” as a socio-historical process, or even “colonists” – as vanguards, victims or intruders. All of these notions spoke of the permeability of borders, of empty lands as witnesses of past misrule or as promises for future growth, of ethnic assimilation or indigestible admixture.

The Many Faces of Colonisation

Now, let the terminological tangle unravel. What did Roman “colonisation” really mean? Firstly, the question of just how generic a term “colonisation” was for “settlement” in historical texts at the time would deserve more extensive research, for both Latin and other languages: indeed,

2 Lucian Boia, History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness, CEU Press, 2001, pp. 43-44

3 Diana Mishkova, “The Uses of Tradition and National Identity in the Balkans”, in Maria Todorova (ed.), Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory, Hurst & Co., 2004, p. 289. Separately, the existence of this rhetoric in the discourse of a less well-known Conservative has been remarked upon recently: Alexandru Gavriș, “Manolache Costache Epureanu: Les livres et l’homme”, *The Romanian Journal of Modern History*, Vol. III, No. 1, 2012, pp. 53-71

4 Monika Baár, Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 196-223

5 For an otherwise excellent survey of historical writing at the time that nevertheless fails to capture what the debates were presumed to be *about* by those involved, see Baláys Trencsényi, “Visions of National Peculiarity in the Romanian Political Discourse of the 19th Century”, in Diana Mishkova (ed.), We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe, CEU Press, 2009, p. 145

a conceptual history of “colonialism” is much-needed.⁶ But, if “colonisation” could be (in)vested with a meaning differentially determined in opposition with “conquest”, this allowed for strategic flexibility. As such, the ambiguity with which historians could refer to the arrival of the Romans in Dacia dates from at least 1837, when the young historian and future founding father Mihail Kogălniceanu rendered Eutropius' account of Roman “settlement” as “colonisation.”⁷ As ulterior conquest was denied, making use of concepts such *ager publicus* for describing unoccupied lands in Moldo-Wallachia from Roman days to well until after the birth of the Principalities was not seen as a merely convenient anachronism, but as a genuine reflection of the very categories employed then and there.⁸ Secondly, the specific Roman institution of the *coloni* was at the heart of French and German debates regarding the origins of feudalism in the first half of the nineteenth century,⁹ and is to this day considered to be a still-enigmatic missing link between ancient slavery and medieval serfdom.¹⁰ However, not only did its socio-economic emergence postdate the conquest of Dacia in the history of the Roman Empire. Owing to its restrictive placement on a legal gradient between freedom and unfreedom, the *colonat* has seldom been exalted as a bulwark of liberty, but rather the contrary.¹¹

Thirdly, one similar social institution akin in its substance to late-empire Roman colonies, but also similar serfdom in Romanian lands, had also existed in medieval France.¹² Of this fact, Romanian pamphleteers were aware, even if not universally so.¹³ But, even when they were, they had diverging views on the freedom or unfreedom of the various waves of labourers resettled during the supposed general re-occupation of Moldavia and Wallachia by Transylvanian Romanians in the aftermath of barbarian invasions. This went straight at the heart of debates regarding the (in)existence of a local, exotic form of serfdom, further complicated by debates on the original ethnicity of these *colons à la française*. In the eighteenth century, Dimitrie Cantemir had put forth

6 The language and uses of “colonisation” *qua* foundational settlement has been richly documented, up until the nineteenth century, in J.G.A Pocock, *Barbarians, Savages and Empires*, Cambridge University Press, 2009

7 Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Histoire de la Valachie, de la Moldavie et des Valaques Transdanubiens*, Berlin, 1837, p. 9-11. In all likelihood, however, Kogalniceanu took his cues from Transylvanian historians of the previous generation.

8 *Ager publicus* was the term by which land seized through conquest and destined for redistribution to veteran colonists was referred to. Nicolae Bălcescu made use of the term in *Starea socială a muncitorilor plugari*, reprinted in *Acte și legiuri privitoare la chestia țărănească, de la Vasile Lupu până la 1866, Seria 1*, [henceforth ALPCT] Vol. 4, pp. 36-7

9 A comprehensive overview of such debates is Donald R. Kelley, *Historians and the Law in Postrevolutionary France*, Princeton University Press, 1984; for a concise, yet more broadly contextualised account, see Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith, “What Was Property? Legal Dimensions of the Social Question in France (1789-1848)”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 128, No. 3, 1984, pp. 200-230

10 On the legal/social institution, see Cam Grey, “Contextualizing *Colonus*: the *Origo* of the Late Roman Empire”, *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 97, 2007, pp. 155-175.

11 On this ambiguity, see Miroslava Mirković, “The Later Roman Colonate and Freedom”, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 87, No. 2, 1997, pp. I-viii+1-144.

12 On the institution of *métayage* as a type of sharecropping, see Jean-Philippe Colin, “De Turgot à la nouvelle économie institutionnelle. Brève revue des théories économiques du métayage”, *Économie rurale*, No. 228, 1995, pp. 28-34.

13 For instance: Constantin Boerescu, *De l'amélioration de l'état des paysans roumains*, Durand, Paris, 1861, pp. 24-27

that a significant proportion of Moldavia's peasantry were the descendants of unfree labourers resettled from the principality's ethnically heterogeneous hinterlands.¹⁴ Pantheonised as a polymath and relied upon as a historical authority both by Liberals and Conservatives, Cantemir was more likely to be invoked by the latter group, in hopes of de-legitimising more recent Liberal scholarship, as well as in order to question the notion that all peasants had once been freeholders. Still, even when some Conservatives rejected the basic Roman narrative, it was still “colonisation” that their counterargument relied upon, as this was the term used in making sense of the process described by Cantemir.

This brings us to our final and most general terminological/conceptual issue. Finding analogies/continuities between these various kinds of *coloni* and contemporary colonists was complicated by the common parlance of many languages in the nineteenth century, as the latter term could denote both free and unfree labourers.¹⁵ Were *all* tenants colonists? Were projects of settling the fallow steppes with foreign farmers subversively anti-national, or were they merely answering to an imperative of political economy? As southern Bessarabia became part of Moldavia once more in the wake of the Crimean War, Bulgarian “colonies” that had settled there in the first half of the century maintained their special status, as guaranteed before the annexion by their contracts with the Russian government.¹⁶ Though generally tolerant towards Bessarabian Bulgarians, Romanian governments nevertheless had a puzzling example of colonialism on their hands: one that blurred the boundary between internal and external. In short, we must be keenly aware of the omnipresence of such a complex concept – or, rather, this polysemic cluster of partly overlapping concepts.

National History as a History of Colonisation

This alien world pulses just beneath the surface of the most cherished and well-rehearsed national narratives of Romanian history, which ostensibly draw more or less directly from the authors involved in the debates we shall examine, and are still regnant to this day. Romans conquer Dacians – Romans retreat – Transylvanians found Wallachia and Moldavia – valiant princes attempt to repel Ottomans – Phanariote misrule creeps in – the nation finally reawakens. On its part, the Liberal faction of '48 had a virtual monopoly on history writing, though this did not mean that the Conservatives were unfamiliar with their arguments, nor that these were not deconstructed and turned against themselves. To understand what the Liberal argument sought to highlight, let us begin by more closely reading a canonical, wholly conventional example of the narrative described

14 Operele principelui Demetriu Cantemiru: Typărite de Societatea Academică Română, Vol. 2, Tipografia Curții, Bucharest, 1872, pp. 129-134. Rarer editions in both Latin and Romanian had been used prior to this.

15 For instance, the German case is documented in James Q. Whitman, The Legacy of Roman Law in the German Romantic Era: Historical Vision and Legal Change, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 158-162

16 Their rights were reconfirmed by Așăzământul coloniilor bulgare, Instrucții pentru datoriiile autorităților sătești, Privilegiile hărăzite coloniilor bulgare și hrisovul pentru scoala din Bolgrad, Iași, Tipografia Buciumului Roman, 1858.

above, mindful of “conquest” and “colonisation”.

In 1844, the historian and future 1848er Nicolae Bălcescu¹⁷ published a pamphlet on “The Social State of Working Ploughmen”, one of the inaugural texts of the “rural question”, as the massive series collecting all relevant documents on the subject and published presciently on the eve of the Great Revolt of 1907 suggests.¹⁸ From the outset, Bălcescu argued that “the difference between the ploughmen of various nations” lay in the difference between private and common property, the first originating in colonisation, the other in conquest. While the former was typical to the emergence of property in Europe, the latter was endemic to Asia and elsewhere: the one was reliant on agriculture, willing to assimilate indigenous populations and was egalitarian in dividing the land – whereas the other was despotic and extractive.¹⁹ In positing this basic dichotomy, Bălcescu did not cite or quote any authority to back his claims: it would be difficult to argue that any of the French or German authors who, at the time, explored the history of property as a history of the nation and vice-versa, were as unambiguous in separating Roman from Germanic laws when imagining “feudalism”. In fact, the very authorities who popularised the dichotomy nuanced it: luminaries such as Francois Guizot and Edouard de Laboulaye urged readers to think of conquest as an uneven, diffuse and not entirely bloody process. This was not least in the name of the historian's professional *sang froid*, as opposed to the early-medieval eyewitnesses' sense of tragedy.²⁰ Authors such as Barthold Georg Neibuhr, who posited an intimate link between ethnicity and legal custom, were keen to examine (dis)continuities between the Roman world and the middle ages.²¹ And yet, subsequent debates in Romanian lands took Bălcescu's simplified dichotomy as a starting-point: Roman colonisation provided the basis of not simply ethnic, but also social and legal continuity between Roman law in its original state and Roman law as understood in the nineteenth-century, retrojecting “freedom” and “equality”.²²

When he did marshal an authority to his aid, Bălcescu called upon Edward Gibbon and interpreted one footnote stating that the Wallachians were “surrounded by, but not mixed with, the barbarians”. Gibbon's footnote enjoyed some popularity among Romanian historians at the time,

17 Hailed as a founder of Romanian historical writing alongside Kogalniceanu, Balcescu has been typically labelled a Romantic – his untimely death of consumption in post-'48 exile is a helpful cliché in this regard. However, even a cursory reading of his work beyond the framework of national narratives he himself is assumed to have first built suggests a more complex account. The extent to which he perceived the nation as a primarily ethnic entity and the degree to which economy and class complicated its inner workings have been over-, and understated, respectively. See Gheorghe Zane, *Nicoale Balcescu: opera, omul, epoca*, Editura Eminescu, Bucharest, 1975.

18 The aforementioned *ALPCT*, which to this day remains a crucial and comprehensive contribution.

19 *ALPCT*, Vol. 4, pp. 33-4

20 Francois Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en France, depuis la chute de l'empire romain jusqu'en 1789*, Pichon et Didier, Paris, 1829, pp. 289-300 and Edouard de Laboulaye, *Histoire du droit de propriété foncière en occident*, 1839, pp. 241-248.

21 Whitman, *The Legacy of Roman Law*, pp. 156-161

22 It was in a later pamphlet of 1850 that Bălcescu nuanced this, arguing that barbarian invasions rather fortuitously put an end to the beginnings of property accumulation and slavery in Roman Dacia. *ALPCT*, Vol. 4, p. 50

which is not surprising²³ – though its usage was taken out of context. In the original, Gibbon spoke, lines above it and in clear terms of the “degenerate Romans” who “dreaded exile more than a Gothic master”, once Dacia was abandoned by the imperial administration.²⁴ Whether this was a deliberate misreading on Bălcescu's part,²⁵ or a result of Romanian historians quoting each other on the scarce authoritative sources documenting national history, making due with marginal quips, is debatable. While Gibbon argued for the ethnic purity of the Romanians, but also spoke of their conquest by the barbarians, Bălcescu construed the former as evidence for the absence of the latter.

The author then went on to repeat his manoeuvre of denying conquest when referring to the founding [*descălecat*] of a not-entirely barren Wallachia and Moldavia by Transylvanian chieftains. This meant a temporal leap of well-nigh a thousand years, during which, importantly, barbarian conquest and settlement had not occurred. That the Moldo-Wallachian lands, hitherto exposed to the attacks of migratory peoples, were not empty at the time of the *descălecat* was crucial for the author's argument. One, he could thus posit the continued habitation of the *moșneni*, freeholders in mountainous regions who, it was implied, had retained their freedom since Roman times – and who would become, in the course on the debate, a liminal figure of agency. Two, the strength of the *moșneni* and the relative weakness of the Transylvanian princelings allowed Bălcescu to emphatically deny that this could have been an instance of conquest, but rather of a second colonisation:

if Radu Negru [the legendary founder of Wallachia] and Bogdan Dragoș [an ambiguous reference to the founding princes of Moldavia] found the countries already populated, they could not be conquerors, for the lords of small states such as Făgăraș and Maramureș were not powerful enough to subject such provinces. [...] feudalism could not have been introduced by these princes.²⁶

Now, a third colonisation came into question: the settling of the *vecini* (literally, “neighbours”) onto the still-empty lands that Balcescu referred to by the Latin *ager publicus* – again, as much a retroactive description as a concept presumed to be familiar to medieval Romanians in some sense. The author here chose to make recourse to an older, still authoritative-source, namely Dimitrie Cantemir's aforementioned Descriptio Moldaviae, hastening to qualify the narrative of the latter by insisting that these settlers were ethnically Romanian, in actual fact returning at long last from south of the Danube, whence they had fled from the barbarians, centuries before.²⁷

23 Kogălniceanu, Histoire de la Valachie, p. 26; Historian August Treboniu Laurian chose Gibbon's quote in the original English as the motto for the German, Latin and French editions of his Coup d'oeil sur l'histoire des roumains, Imprimerie du College National, Bucharest (all three published in 1846).

24 Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. 1, Birch & Small, Philadelphia, 1804, pp. 331-333

25 In fairness, both Bălcescu and the aforementioned Laurian dealt with Gibbon's interpretation more meticulously in Vol. 5/1847 of their Magazin istoric pentru Dacia, cu tiparul colegiului național, Bucharest, p. 192 and p. 387

26 ALPCT, Vol. 4, pp. 34-5

27 *Idem*, pp. 36-7

Let us note that this was only the first in a series of great migrations that troubled nineteenth-century nationalists in Romania. The trauma of migration and a depleted body politic necessarily translated into discontinuities in the ownership of the land, making the writing of a history of property and its laws all the more difficult. The ebb and flow of Romanians across the Danube or elsewhere was emphatically identified with times of strife and misrule: the prospect of its continuation could only trouble discourses that sought to legitimise the 1848ers and their successors. Aside from medieval population depletion, the lead-up to the first abolition of serfdom in 1746/9²⁸, or the Russian protectorate of the 1830s were examples of emigration-inducing misrule routinely invoked throughout the century. To the eye of the politician, such past exoduses resembled the effects of the proletarianisation that an ineffective land reform could potentially give rise to, as peasants could well become wholly separated from the land.

But, for Bălcescu, sources of past flight were more complex. Even before the Phanariote or Russian yoke, the constant wars with the Turk²⁹ impoverished freeholding warriors and therefore eroded equality. Famously, the author then went on to decry the tragedy that gave rise to what could indeed be termed a local form of feudalism. This was the legal enserfment of the aforementioned peasants by an otherwise glorious prince – Michael the Brave, who, at the end of the sixteenth century, briefly united Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia. His decree paved the road to future decay and the Phanariote takeover: “ever since then, the country has been divided into two warring factions, with opposing interests. Since then, the people became insensitive to the voice of prince and *boyar*, no longer willing to sacrifice itself for a motherland that left it no rights and a liberty it could not enjoy”.³⁰ This well-known narrative must, therefore, be re-read with the overlooked premiss of Bălcescu's argumentation in mind. It took a wholly exceptional set of circumstances for serfdom to arise where, equally exceptionally, the typical origins of Western feudalism were absent.

Colonial Anxieties

In 1861, the Central Commission tasked with harmonising the legislative frameworks of the recently-united Principalities (1859) would come to debate the ethnic limits of property laws, in terms of both population settlement and right to buy. While sympathetic to the perceivedly peaceable Csangos of Moldavia, the Bulgarians of Southern Bessarabia and the “industrious Serbs and Bulgarians” who practiced agriculture in Wallachia, one delegate cautioned against considering the economic imperatives of populating empty plains in isolation from the international dimension

28 *Idem*, p. 39, where the primary source is given as Le General de Baur [Monsieur de B*], Memoires historiques et géographiques sur la Valachie: avec un prospectus d'un atlas géographique & militaire de la dernière guerre entre la Russie & la Porte Ottomane, Henry-Louis Broenner, Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1778, p. 101 *et passim*.

29 ALPCT, Vol. 4, pp. 36-7 a hypothesis taken from Jean-Alexandre Vaillant, La Roumanie, ou histoire, langue, littérature, orographie, statistique des peuples de la langue d'or: Ardaliens, Vallaques et Moldaves résumés sous le nom de Romans, Vol.1, Arthus Bertrand, Paris, 1844, p. 187

30 ALPCT, Vol. 4, pp. 38-9

of colonialism:

During the Crimean War, I read the writings of an important man who was part of the expedition [against Russia] and who, speaking of the Principalities, noted, among other things, that the vastness and fertility of our lands could well allow for thrice the population. As we now lay the groundwork for liberal institutions under a constitutional regime, foreigners would flock to a country that would grant them greater security than elsewhere [...] and we would end up Romanians in name only.³¹

That unnamed foreign author was most likely Sir Patrick O'Brien, who wrote toward the end of 1853 that “the population of Wallachia is less than three millions, but the country is capable of feeding five times that number”, noting how a significant proportion of its agricultural surplus fed British subjects.³² In turn, O'Brien was likely to have taken his cues from the fairly popular Edmund Spencer, who, in the 1854 revised edition of a travelogue originally published in 1836, spoke of how “the population of Moldo-Wallachia is about 4,000,000, which when we take into consideration the great fertility of the country, is about one fourth the number of the inhabitants we meet with in the same extent of territory in Western Europe”.³³ But, the rabbit hole goes deeper still – in 1818, a traveller by the name of Adam Neale also made similar observations, explicitly downplaying the originality thereof by mentioning two famous eighteenth-century forerunners:

General Baur³⁴ laments that this beautiful country with so fertile a soil and so fine a climate should be thus thinly peopled, being persuaded that it might nourish five or six times more inhabitants than it at present contains, and Carra³⁵ says that there is only one fortieth part of the arable soil in tillage. The famished inhabitants of Switzerland might here find a refuge without crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and I am happy to learn that the tide of emigration even at this time has begun to flow down the Danube from the regions of the lake of Geneva.³⁶

The trope of fourfold growth was so widespread, that even the Greek conspirators who attempted to foment a Romanian offshoot of their Revolution in 1821 matter-of-factly assumed it to be true.³⁷ What we have here, then, is the troubling idea that, by the time a growing would-be proletariat finally colonised the entirety of Moldo-Wallachia, the pull of *terra nullius* would have long

31 ALPCT, Vol. 2, pp. 297-9

32 Patrick O'Brien, Journal of a Residence in the Danubian Principalities, in the autumn and winter of 1853, R. Bentley, London, 1854, pp. 72-3

33 Edmund Spencer, Turkey, Russia, the Black Sea and Circassia, Routledge, London, 1854, p. 128

34 Baur's notes were the original source cited by concerned '48ers with regard to the depopulation caused by Phanariote misrule a century earlier – see footnote no. 27 *supra*.

35 Jean-Louis Carra, Histoire de la Moldavie et de la Valachie: avec une dissertation sur l'état actuel de ces deux provinces, Impr. de la Société Typographique, Neuchâtel, 1781

36 Adam Neale, Travels Through Some Parts of Germany, Poland, Moldavia and Turkey, Longman, London, 1818, pp. 166-7

37 1821 v1 p 130 cu nr loc si ca mai loc de 3-4 ori

attracted foreign intrusion – as it indeed it attracted unwanted attention.

These were conflicting temporalities to the imperatives of political economy, though conjoined, and not entirely separate; let us consider one instance in which the gaze of the Westerner was appropriated strategically by the cunning nation-builder. In 1849, Wallachian emigres had attempted to convince both the British political establishment and the reading public that their country had a moral obligation of intervening in favour of the Moldo-Wallachian cause, as construed by the revolutionaries. A memorandum, signed by the radical Dimitrie Brătianu, was expertly calibrated to arouse public curiosity, after a meeting with Lord Palmerston had failed to persuade British diplomacy. Ostensibly addressed to the Parliament, it took to heart the lesson of the travellers' eyes:³⁸

Sufficiently shielded against the illusions of patriotism, I can safely affirm that independently of the importance of their geographical position, the Principalities have a considerable intrinsic value once restored to liberty: they would be of invaluable resource to the commerce and industry of Great Britain. In fact the extent of their territory being sufficient for a population four times as great as it is at present would permit their affording extensive hospitality to millions of colonists; the peculiarity of its soil might make of that country a rich store house whence England might draw her supplies without any outlay; for the Wallachians having no manufactures of their own would be glad to barter the produce of their soil against those of British manufacture, and the Principalities being in need of works and ameliorations of all kinds and wanting money, English capital might there be usefully employed³⁹

This rather extreme and isolated example came at a time when the vanquished revolutionaries of 1848 sought political leverage in exile. But, by the 1860s or 1870s, any similar stance would become anathema. As of 1866, the first Romanian Constitution's Article 4 explicitly forbade “the colonisation of peoples of foreign stock” on the country's territory.⁴⁰ At the same time, an ever-growing fear of German – Austrian or Prussian – economic colonialism took root, both before and after the arrival of Charles I of Hohenzollern on the throne (also in 1866). Romanian economists were keenly aware not only of the occasional pamphlet that suggested Danubian lands as a more convenient destination than faraway America for European colonists in general.⁴¹ They were also haunted by the explicit encouragement given in 1841 by the German economist Friedrich List,

38 For the social and cultural context, see Angela Jianu, *A Circle of Friends: Romanian Revolutionaries and Political Exile, 1840-1859*, Brill, Leiden, 2011, p. 130

39 Dimitrie C. Brătianu, *Documents concerning the Questions of the Danubian Principalities. Dedicated to the English Parliament*, Detkens, London, 1849, p. 16

40 In the first half of the nineteenth century, various projects of creating agricultural colonies in Moldavia and Wallachia did exist, but remained largely unsuccessful: Raluca Tomi, “Colonizarea cu populații străine a principatelor române (1831–1866). Între nevoia de modernizare și cea de menținere a ‘ființei naționale’” in *Minoritățile etnice în România în secolul al XIX-lea*, Viorel and Venera Achim (eds.), Editura Academiei, Bucharest, 2010

41 Virgile Doze, *Un mois en Moldavie*, pp. 57-8

whose memorable admonition that “Germany has an immeasurable interest that security and order should be firmly established in [Moldo-Wallachia and Serbia], and in no direction so much as in this is the emigration of Germans so easy for individuals to accomplish” did little to assuage their fears.⁴² It is true that this anxiety, too, was a passing frenzy, closely linked to a more generally Teutophobic and anti-Pangermanist attitude in the Romanian public sphere, already on the wane by the mid-1870s.⁴³ By that time, the defeat of France – Romania's main Western cultural model – felt less acutely painful, and the German dynasty had become more popular.⁴⁴

It is nevertheless instructive to even briefly consider, as a coda, the nature of a discourse that brought together “colonialism” as more widely understood, and as heretofore unpacked in our essay. Two variations on the theme co-existed and completed each other: one that focused on the perceived economic colonialism of Austria, thought preventable via tariffs and industrialisation – and one that focused on the potential immigration of German colonies.⁴⁵ Both, however, were seen as fundamentally similar, antithetical to a “national system” of political economy, where ethnocentrism played a crucial part. The foreword to the first Romanian-language handbook of political economy took stock of Europe's sudden interest in Romania, from assorted travellers, to alleged Latin-race allies such as France or Belgium, to “Germany, who sees us as an orchard ripe for the picking, let alone Austria, who has long monopolised our trade.”⁴⁶ Whereas Austrian influence appeared more draining than fatal outright, German settler colonialism had one potential argument that had to be countered on its own: civilisation. As one economist noted in 1875,

it is objected that the land of our country lies fallow, that industry is stagnating, while others claim that we remain uncouth and uncivilised, and that, therefore, our most vital interests demand that we bring foreign colonists. Though there might be some truth to these assertions, it is undeniable that the economic development of a state is secondary when compared with its political existence.⁴⁷

German colonies existed in the Dobruja (later annexed by Romania after the last Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8) and in Bessarabia – but various public debates, in 1860-1 and 1875 in particular, raised the issue of deliberately settling Germans on understaffed agricultural estates, with the ostensible aim of bolstering the work ethic of local Romanian peasants.⁴⁸ Parliamentary debates dealing with

42 Friedrich List, The National System of Political Economy, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1909, p. 347

43 The first Romanian edition of List's tome, in 1887, explicitly downplayed the possibility of German colonialism; see pp. 356-8.

44 The topic is explored at length as one of the main topics of Silvia Marton, „Republica de la Ploiești“ și începuturile parlamentarismului în România, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2016.

45 For a succinct assessment of German colonial visions in the region, see Malte Fuhrmann, 'Germany's Adventures in the Orient: A History of Ambivalent Semicolonial Entanglements', pp. 123-145 in German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany, Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (eds.), Columbia University Press, 2011

46 Ioan Strat, Tratat complectu de economia politica, Bucharest, 1870, pp. 2-3

47 P S Aurelianu, Economie națională (2nd ed.) Vol. 1, Bucharest, 1880 pp 11-12

48 Proposals for colonisation submitted to Parliament reprinted in D.P. Marțianu, Colonistii Germani și România (2nd ed., 1st ed. 1861) Bucharest, 1870

such proposals saw the full deployment of the conceptual arsenal of “colonisation”, from references to the settlement of the Romans, to the problem of relative underpopulation, to the sluggish or potentially growing birthrate of the Romanian peasant. Shrewdly, one argument for colonisation-as-civilisation hinged on the fact that the peasant was perfectible – but without being so uncivilised as to be vulnerable to colonial subjection by his future German neighbours, as he was “not a redskin”.⁴⁹ But, in 1861, amid a crisis surrounding the trans-border ebb and flow of Bulgarian colonies in Bessarabia, all of the above was met with a decisive rejection, lamenting that, unlike such migrants. “Romanians have no protection other than that of a Chamber of plutocrats that sees them as a 'capital for exploitation', and have no other motherland or kin-folk to run to”.⁵⁰

Even when, at the time, Romanian economists acknowledged the potential need for colonisation, their first choice were Transylvanian Romanians, themselves driven out of their native lands not by overpopulation, but, ostensibly, by German or Bohemian colonies.⁵¹ But dealing with this domino effect was rendered delicate by the inherent dangers of settler colonialism in Europe – when considering, for instance the fate of the Dobruja under the Romanians (pre-existing German settlements included), caution was to be exercised: “we are neither in Africa, nor in America, so as to freely populate our country with foreigners. We are in Europe, where international disagreements arise from seemingly unimportant circumstances.”⁵² A second attempt to approach Parliament with a proposal for colonial settlement was made in 1875, and included broader demands on restricting the constitutional rights of an as-of-yet immature populace – but the document was leaked to public outcry and buried before debates ever began.⁵³ As Teutophobia was gradually replaced by Russophobia in the final quarter of the nineteenth century and outright colonial anxieties subsided, the memory of such proposals continued to live in infamy, reviled by nationalist politicians as an all-time low.⁵⁴ But, taken in its conceptual context, the colonial anxiety that stretched for a decade and a half proved part and parcel of a broader preoccupation with “colonialism” as a well-nigh universal fact of history and economy.

49 D. P. Martianu, Annale economice privitoare la partea Munteniei din România, vol. 1861 pp. 25-33

50 *Idem*, pp. 33-45

51 D. P. Martianu, Annale economice, Vol. 1860, pp 34-5

52 P S Aurelianu, Economie națională, pp. 324-5

53 Titu Maiorescu, Istoria politică a României sub domnia lui Carol I, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1994, pp 37-46

54 For instance, one parliamentary speech by Barbu St. Delavrancea, Opere, Vol. 8, Bucharest, Minerva, 1971 p. 260