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## **Beyond the East and the West: Intellectual Networks and the Restoration of Historical Monuments in 19th century Romania**

The proposed paper will detail some of the theoretical insights gained after four years of working on my PhD topic. One of the broader scope of my research is to challenge the way we normally think and analyse the development of national art or national artistic styles. While most of the research done so far takes into account a particular style or artistic movement within a state or region, my thesis aims to look above geographical borders and focus on how ideas were exchanged transnationally, in various places and between artists and intellectuals of different nationalities. In the case of my project, intricate networks of intellectual exchange between French, German, Austrian, Italian and Romanian artists and intellectuals led to the restoration of historical monuments in Romania and their promotion as symbols of the new nation-state. Therefore, my research moves the focus away from individuals and geographical space to what has been called ‘relational’ history, the focus on how ideas circulate and are shaped from various perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

The approach further has the potential to destabilise the idea of a straightforward Western influence on Eastern Europe, especially during the ‘Europeanisation’ process of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Important steps have already been made in this regard, including the switch of perspective to how Easterners viewed and perceived Western Europe, and thus ‘provincialized’ the West; or how contributions from the East shaped ideas and concepts in the Western World.<sup>2</sup> But what if one would drop the dichotomy East/West altogether? What if instead of geographies as a main analytical category, one would speak of class, gender, race or ethnicity? My research contends that artists and intellectuals in Romania or indeed elsewhere in the region were defined by their studies, work methods, and circle of friends much more than by geography, their place of birth or where they worked.

In the case of my research, Romanian artists and intellectuals studied mostly in France and Germany, had solid connections in these countries, were fluent in more than one foreign

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<sup>1</sup> The term has been defined by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30-50.

<sup>2</sup> Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008).

language, had properties in Paris or Berlin and were much more connected to the European intellectual milieu than to their compatriots, out of which about 90% were illiterate and survived by labouring on small patches of land. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century debates about the meaning of historical monuments and the concept of national architecture were not so different in a café on Champ Elyse or on Calea Victoriei, the main boulevard of Bucharest. Indeed, the affluence of French or German artists based in Romania also indicates that Eastern Europe was not just an exotic place to work but an attractive, life-long career choice. Therefore, my research aims to add to the post-colonial theories the attempt to see the geographical space as less influential for 19<sup>th</sup> century artists and intellectuals and thus contest and complicate the boundaries between centre and periphery. In turn, this approach could draw attention to other, often more clear-cut boundaries that defined class, gender or racial identities.