

**REVOLUTIONIZING ROMANIA FROM THE RIGHT:
THE REGENERATIVE PROJECT OF THE ROMANIAN LEGIONARY
MOVEMENT AND ITS FAILURE
(1927 - 1937)**

Valentin Adrian Săndulescu

A DISSERTATION

in

History

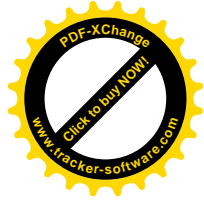
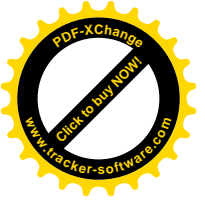
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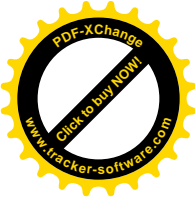
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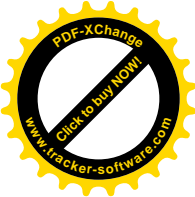


ABSTRACT

Rewriting and rethinking history in every generation as a way to mediate, like a translator, between past and present represents the function of a historian, as Peter Burke aptly stated. The current dissertation aimed at finding a way to make sense of a past time such as the interwar period, and especially of the emergence and development of fascism in the Romanian context. By placing the dissertation in the proximity of the “culturalist” approach I have started from a research hypothesis which assesses that fascism is a “coherent body of thought” (Roger Eatwell) a revolutionary political ideology which puts forward as its principal aim the necessity to regenerate a so-called state of decay and decline by bringing about a “new man” and a “new order.” Analyzing fascism from within, and considering it as a solid ideological construct, I wanted to better understand the diverse social support it garnered and the mass appeal that assured its political success in various contexts.

Using archival material and interwar newspapers, journals and publications, I have attempted to understand the mass-appeal enjoyed by fascism in Romania in the 1930s and to explain the elements that attracted so many followers to the Legion, especially from the young generation. The thesis was structured having in mind the chronological aspect, with 1927 as the founding year of the Legion and 1937 being its most successful one. Furthermore the thesis focused on certain topics of interest, such as the “1922 student generation” and its political commitment, the adherence of the *Axa* group of intellectuals to the Iron Guard, the legionary work camp system, the social base of the legion and its political success in the 1937 elections.

What I have tried to show throughout the dissertation was that the Legionary regenerative project aimed at saving the country from a perceived state of decay by creating a “new man” and a “new order” was regarded by many as a viable, albeit radical solution, and also satisfied the need for political activism for a great part of the young generation. Its ultimate failure, together with its violent record and tragic outcome are part of the one of the darkest chapters in twentieth-century Romanian history.



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Throughout the years needed for the preparation and writing of this dissertation I have been helped and guided by many people, and the debts I have incurred were numerous.

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Last but not least, I owe my greatest debt of all to my family. My wife, Loredana, my parents and my brother supported and encouraged me all these years and for that I will be forever grateful to them.

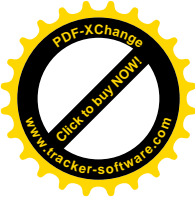
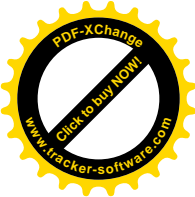


Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Illustrations	vii
Introduction.....	1
1. East-Central Europe after the 'Great War' and Romania's Challenges in the Postwar Context	4
2. Fascism as a Revolutionary, Regenerative Ideology: the Question of the "New Man" and the "New Order" – a Historiographical Appraisal	10
2.1. Developments in Western Historiography on Fascism	11
2.2. Developments in Romanian Historiography on Fascism.....	21
3. Sources, Methodology and Structure.....	30
<u>Chapter I. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the "Prehistory" of the Romanian Legionary Movement (1916 - 1927)</u>	<u>39</u>
I. 1. The Bases of Codreanu's Radicalism: from the War Front to the University Front (1916 - 1922).....	39
I. 2. The 1922 anti-Semitic Student Strikes and the Birth of the "1922 Generation".....	43
I. 3. Old and the New Together: Codreanu's Activity within A.C. Cuza's National-Christian Defense League, from Cooperation to Generational Conflict.....	54
<u>Chapter II: Establishing the Legion: the Founding of the Legion of the Archangel Michael and its Development in the first Years of Existence (1927 - 1932)</u>	<u>63</u>
II. 1. Separating the Boys from the Men – the Founding of the Legion of the Archangel Michael: <i>Pământul Strămoșesc</i> , Generation Conflict and the Structuring of the Movement	63
II. 2. Working the Provinces – the Local Character of the Legion in Its Incipient Years and the First Electoral Breakthroughs.....	92



Chapter III: 1933 as the Year of Great Transformations104

- III. 1. The Axa Group and the Ideological Crystallization of the Legionary Movement: Intellectuals and Politics within the Movement105
- III. 2. The 1933 Electoral Battle: Antidemocratic Views, Violence, and Political Assassination.....129

Chapter IV. The “Silent Work”: How the Legion Put its Political Project into Practice and Became a Mass-Movement133

- IV. 1. Repression, Dissent and Recovery: the Legionary Movement in the Years 1934-1936133
- IV. 2. Working towards Regeneration: the Legionary Work Camp System150
- IV. 3. Social Components of the Legionary Movement - Expansion through Diversification: the Role of the Student Body and of the Workers; Women and the Legion161

Chapter V. 1937 as the Peak of the Legionary Regenerative Project: from the Moța – Marin Burial to the Parliamentary Elections180

- V. 1. Sacralised Politics in Action: the February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin180
- V. 2. Fighting Against the State: the Legion’s Quest for Electoral Success in 1937203

Conclusions221

Bibliography230



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

II. 1: The “Christian Cultural Hostel” from Iași (1927).....	82
II. 2: The leather pouch that contained the samples of soil that were given to every legionary at the November 8, 1927 ceremony.....	90
II. 3: The first group of legionaries saluting the leaders in 1927.....	91
II. 4: Page from the legionary journal <i>Pământul Strămoșesc</i> which described in enthusiastic terms the Nazi congress from Nürnberg, August 1928.....	92
IV.1: Outline of the site of the legionary work camp on Rarău Mountain done by the local police (1934).....	154
IV.2: Group of legionaries in the Rarău work camp (1934).....	156
IV.3: Students marching on the streets of Târgu Mureș in legionary uniforms (1936).....	166
IV. 4: Students doing the legionary salute in front of the Orthodox Cathedral from Târgu Mureș (1936).....	167
IV. 5: Female legionaries from Cernăuți at the student congress in Târgu Mureș (April 1936).....	174
V. 1: The Legionary group of volunteers for the Spanish Civil War in a group photo, before departure (November 1936).....	185
V. 2: The Moța-Marin funeral procession on the North Railway Station platform in Bucharest (February 1937).....	194
V. 3: Thousands of Legionaries perform the Moța-Marin Oath in front of the North Railway Station in Bucharest (February 1937).....	195
V. 4. Legionaries in uniforms, forming a cross with their bodies during the Moța-Marin funeral procession (February 1937).....	197
V. 5: The Moța-Marin mortuary cart during the procession on the streets of Bucharest (February 1937).....	197
V. 6: A group of priests during the Moța-Marin funeral procession (February 1937).....	199



INTRODUCTION

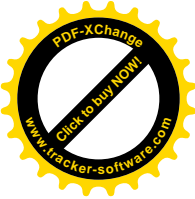
„It is worth asking right at the start whether history needs to be rethought at all. In my view, what makes a good historian is a combination of intelligence, perception (psychological, political or whatever) and the ability to communicate well, qualities that have nothing to do with any division between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern approaches. However, I also feel very strongly that the function of a historian is to mediate, like a translator, between past and present. This function involves rethinking and rewriting history in every generation.”¹

Peter Burke

Despite several decades of intensive research, the study of fascism as a major political phenomenon of the twentieth century is still far from reaching its endpoint.² While the literature on paradigmatic cases such as the Italian or the German one is abundant, the “peripheral” yet salient cases such as Romanian fascism remain under researched. The main theoretical constructs regarding the origins, the evolution and the success of fascism as a political movement were

¹ Peter Burke, “Invitation to historians: An intellectual self-portrait, or the history of a historian”, *Rethinking History*, 13 (2009): 269—81.

² Various research fields have been explored by present-day scholars in the last decade, such as the use of the concept of ‘political religion’ in the study of fascism, the analysis of fascist culture and its relationship with modernism and modernity. For an assessment of these trends one can rely on, among others, the contributions of Roger Griffin “The Reclamation of Fascist Culture”, *European History Quarterly* 31 (2001): 609–20, Paul Betts, “The New Fascination with Fascism: The Case of Nazi Modernism” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002): 541–58, Emilio Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004): 326-375, Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Nazism and the Revival of Political Religion Theory,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004): 376-396, Neil Gregor, “Politics, culture, political culture: recent work on the Third Reich and its aftermath,” in *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006): 643-683 (2006: 643-683), David D. Roberts, “‘Political Religion’ and the Totalitarian Departures of Inter-war Europe: On the Uses and Disadvantages of an Analytical Category,” in *Contemporary European History* 18 (2009): 381-414.



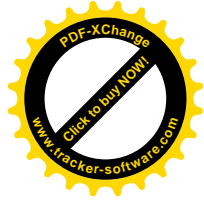
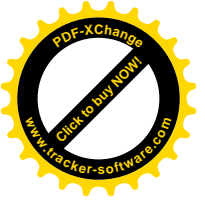
based almost exclusively on the analysis of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, with small additions of the French, Spanish and, sometimes, British cases. Little attention has been paid to manifestations of fascism in regions such as Scandinavia, Eastern Europe or the Balkans.³ The aim of the present dissertation is to partially fill this gap and to investigate the specificities of Romanian fascism in a comparative framework, based on the latest theoretical and methodological developments in the field. The dissertation positions Romanian fascism in the history of regenerative, revolutionary projects that emerged in the interwar period as an alternative to what fascists considered the decaying system of *fin-de-siècle* liberalism.

The starting research hypothesis assesses that fascism is a “coherent body of thought,”⁴ a revolutionary political ideology which puts forward as its principal aim the necessity to regenerate a so-called state of decay and decline⁵ by bringing about a “new man” and a “new order.” Analyzing fascism from within, and considering it as a solid ideological construct, I expect to better understand the diverse social support it garnered and the mass appeal that assured its

³ Some authors attempted to fill this gap as early as the 1960s. See Eugen Weber's seminal works on various types of fascism: *Varieties of Fascism*, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964), *The European Right: a Historical Profile* (co-edited with Hans Rogger), (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1965 or his study on Romanian Fascism: “The Man of the Archangel” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966): 101–26. Several works undertook various case studies from different parts of Europe, the most relevant being Walter Laqueur (ed.) *Fascism: a Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) and Stein U. Larsen et al. (ed.) *Who Were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism*, (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1980).

⁴ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: a History*, (London: Vintage, 1996), xix.

⁵ As mentioned before, this state of decay is identified with the turn of the century modern liberalism. The “agents” of this degenerative tendency are also identified under the guise of ethnic (mainly Jewish) and political enemies.



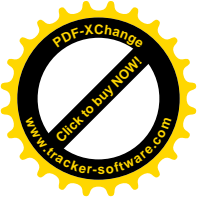
political success in various contexts.⁶ Another salient hypothesis that guides this dissertation considers fascism's "worship of youth as against old age" and "the idealization of 'manliness'" as the dynamic components that were responsible for their regenerative quest for a "new man."⁷ Thus, special attention will be given to an analyzing the role of the youth in fascist movements and to outlining of the emerging generation conflict.

The current dissertation research is placed at the junction between several fields such as intellectual history, history of intellectuals, social history and political history. The study of the Romanian fascist ideology, and of the regenerative project of renewing the nation through a spiritual revolution that would bring about a "new country" and a "new man," is an analysis of the intellectual trends that dominated the political life of the period. More precisely, it is the study of that ideological milieu which produced the motivating force behind a radical, anti-establishment, fascist movement such as the Iron Guard. It is based in a complex context that contained the ideas set forth in opposition to the modern, bourgeois values of the nineteenth century. However, even though this study focuses on intellectual history, on issues such as culture, ideology or regeneration, it is placed in a historical context and does not regard fascism solely as an aesthetic and discursive product.

Thus, elements of political and social history remain indispensable for this research. The social dimension emphasizes the importance of the young

⁶ Now commonsensical, it took a long time for some historians to accept fascism's mass popularity. See Robert Paxton, "The Five Stages of Fascism," *Journal of Modern History* 70 (1998): 2-3.

⁷ George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 6.



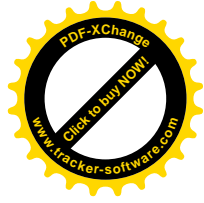
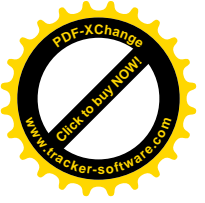
generation after the experience of World War One. A feeling of solidarity and a cult of violence emerged out of the traumatic experience of the Great War that impacted European interwar political life.⁸ Certain social categories such as students and intellectuals came under scrutiny during the research and conveyed a more comprehensive picture of the development of the Iron Guard.⁹ Also, the adherence of categories such as workers, priests and women to the Legion will receive special attention, as this will enable a better understanding of the social underpinnings of Romanian fascism. The national and European political contexts lend greater insight into the emergence and development of Romanian fascism, so constant references to interwar politics will be made throughout the dissertation.

1. East-Central Europe after the 'Great War' and Romania's Challenges in the Postwar Context

The interwar period was regarded by many, and justifiably so, as an age of anxiety, of radical rethinking of the character of national communities in the context of the massive human casualties brought about by the "Great War". If nations went to war in 1914 dreaming about their future greatness and might, the horrific experience of the war marked the end of all illusions, both for the victors and for the defeated. The feelings of revolt against modernity that were brewing

⁸ For different aspects of these issues please see Sergio Luzzatto, "Young Rebels and Revolutionaries, 1789-1917" in Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt eds., *A History of Young People in the West*, vol. 2, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 174.

⁹ "Iron Guard" was another name which designated the Romanian Legionary Movement in its political manifestation. For practical and stylistic reasons I will use both names throughout the thesis.



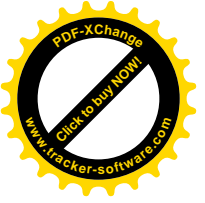
in the intellectual and political circles of many European countries since the turn of the century found the perfect moment to come to the center of the public arena. Some of the main ideological trends of the epoch, such as communism, nationalism and fascism, born in the Western part of the continent, “transplanted easily to Central and Eastern Europe, since the seeds of revolt had fallen onto well-prepared and fertile soil.”¹⁰ The embracing of these ideas in the region coincided with the great debates regarding the failures of the modernization process, and so they started to be regarded as potentially new paths towards modernization.¹¹

This was also the time when anti-rationalist and anti-liberal ideas were mushrooming throughout Europe. Skeptical thinkers, such as Oswald Spengler, who advocated the decline of Western civilization with all its values, found a large audience in Europe, especially after the “Great War”. Western civilization, founded on reason, was considered responsible for the destruction brought by the war. Thus, a retreat in irrational, mystic and occult ideas became more visible among intellectuals, along the lines of figures such as Julius Evola or René Guénon. This trend also influenced young Romanian intellectuals who became attached to fascist ideas and also penetrated the political establishment of the Iron Guard.¹²

¹⁰ Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 49.

¹¹ Ibid., 50.

¹² In 1938 Julius Evola paid a visit to Corneliu Codreanu, whom he admired, and wrote about this encounter: Julius Evola, *Naționalism și asceză. Reflecții asupra fenomenului legionar* (Nationalism and asceticism. Reflections on the legionary phenomenon), (Alba Iulia: Editura Fronde, 1998).



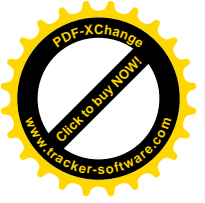
The end of the war also brought extraordinary political turmoil and unprecedented territorial changes to the region, as the three big multinational empires fell apart.¹³ These changes only amplified the already existing nationalistic tensions in Central and Eastern Europe. Some countries, such as Romania, benefited from the drawing of the new, postwar borders, while others, such as Hungary, suffered sizable population and territorial losses. After the 1919-1920 peace treaties which marked the emergence of new states such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia,¹⁴ Romania virtually became another country, as it more than doubled in size and population¹⁵ after what was called the “Great Union” (the addition of the provinces of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina). Faced with these new changes, the Romanian political elite started to implement a series of reforms in order to adjust to the current situation. The agrarian reform and universal suffrage were implemented, while in 1923 a new constitution was adopted. An Italian inspired electoral reform was also carried on in 1926.¹⁶ The liberal part led by Ionel Brătianu dominated the political scene of the 1920s, sharing the spotlight for brief periods of time with Marshal Averescu’s movement.

¹³ Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914-1923*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 157.

¹⁴ R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century – and After*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1997), 31.

¹⁵ Lucian Boia, *Romania Borderland of Europe*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 102.

¹⁶ For this, please see the work of sociologist Mattei Dogan – “Dansul electoral în România interbelică” (The Electoral Dance in Interwar Romania) in Mattei Dogan, *Sociologie politică. Opere alese* (Political Sociology. Selected Works), (Bucharest: Editura Alternative, 1999), 141.



Romanian politicians had to solve the issue of integrating the big percentage of ethnic minorities that were now part of Greater Romania (almost 30%), while also consolidating the new state and its central authorities. The economic crisis of 1929-1933 added more pressure for the decision makers, and favored the feeling of unrest that was growing in the society as a whole. Also, a certain moral and even temporal crisis was added to the mix, with a young generation that did not find a feeling of belonging in the design of the new state, controlled by the older generation. Much like their counterparts in other European countries, they regarded the time they were leaving in as a crossroad, a point from which a new, radically changed beginning had to emerge. This was the context, in which fascist movements such as the Legion of the Archangel Michael emerged and flourished, and also made an impact on the public scene.

The history of the Romanian Legionary Movement was deeply connected to the history of Romania in the interwar period.¹⁷ The first political affirmation of the young generation that would later be at the core of the Legionary Movement was during the 1922 anti-Semitic student strikes.¹⁸ After this event, the young generation joined traditional nationalist and anti-Semitic parties such as The League of National-Christian Defense (LANC) of Alexandru C. Cuza, an ultranationalist and anti-Semitic politician who enjoyed some success in the 1920s. Discontented with the fact that Cuza's doctrine was not based on action and daring exploits, a group of young people formed around Corneliu Zelea

¹⁷ One of the best accounts of interwar Romanian history may be found in Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

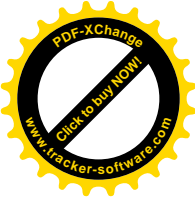
¹⁸ In the Romanian case one can speak of a “generation of 1922” rather than of a “generation of 1914” as identified for Western Europe by Robert Wohl in his *The Generation of 1914*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).



Codreanu seceded from LANC and embraced a more radical platform that advocated action and the primacy of the spiritual values as opposed to economic and material ones. Thus, in the summer of 1927 the Legion of the Archangel Michael was formed.

Located at the periphery of the political system, the Legion capitalized on the growing dissatisfaction of the population with the various governments that did not solve the social and economic crisis of the country. Beginning with the transfer of the movement's leadership to Bucharest in 1933, the Legion formed an incipient mass base. It presented itself as a revolutionary movement, as a school that would train young people to become the “new men” of tomorrow. It promised to rid Romania of the harm done by the politicians after the 1918 unification of the country. Permanently contested by authorities for its radical platform, the Iron Guard acted with both violent and peaceful means in order to make itself heard. After being banned because of its assassination of liberal Prime Minister I.G. Duca in December 1933, the Legion began to emphasize the constructive character of their doctrine, under the guise of the regenerative project of creating a “new man” and a “new country.” The work camp system¹⁹ epitomized this new trend in the politics of the Legion. It was considered the embodiment of the “legionary school,” an example of regeneration that prepared the youth, both physically and spiritually, for becoming the future “new men” of Romania.

¹⁹ The work camp system consisted of work camps or small construction sites founded by the Iron Guard primarily in the countryside in which members of the movement performed voluntary manual labor consisting of repairing churches, footbridges, building houses for the poor or helping out the peasants.

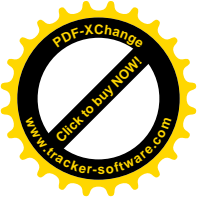


The success enjoyed by the work camp system, along with the displays of mass support among students (e.g. at the 1936 Student Congress from Târgu Mureș) and in fact among the population in general (during the mass funeral of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin in 1937) showed the tremendous growth in popularity of the Iron Guard. In 1937 it was obvious to everyone that the Iron Guard had become a mass-movement and a redoubtable political force. This was confirmed by the result of the December 1937 elections, when the Legion gained 15% of the votes and became the third most important political party in Romania.

In a letter sent on August 30, 1921 to one of the officers he met while doing his military service, Codreanu, discontented with the lack of moral values and the state of decay that he considered symptomatic for the time, wrote the following: “anyway, a huge work of moral regeneration has to be started by all the living forces of this nation.”²⁰ The purpose of this dissertation is to unpack and analyze this regenerative project envisaged by Codreanu as early as 1921. In order to that, I will focus on how did this regenerative project look like, what were the main causes of its initial success and what brought about its final failure.²¹ One will also concentrate on who constituted the social base of the Legion, and towards whom was the legionary regenerative project directed. The role of the students, intellectuals, workers, priests and women will also be of interest for the present research.

²⁰ *Cuvântul*, XVII, No. 49 (December 1, 1940).

²¹ Roger Griffin included Romanian fascism of the Iron Guard in the category of “abortive fascisms” together with the Austrian and Hungarian movements cf. *The Nature of Fascism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 116–145.

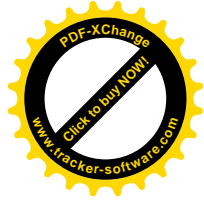
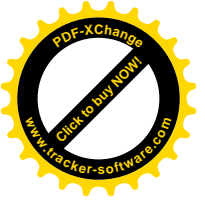


2. Fascism as a Revolutionary, Regenerative Ideology: the Question of the “New Man” and the “New Order” – a Historiographical Appraisal

Studies concerning fascism have been developing for decades, trying to answer several key questions that would help explain the emergence and growth of this historical phenomenon. How should one approach the study of fascism? Can any valid theory on this phenomenon ever be stated? Can one accurately define a “fascist minimum,” or the traits of a “generic fascism” that would provide the theoretical bases for future historical writings? Is a case-by-case, empirical analysis of various fascist movements more intellectually profitable? Should the attempt of defining and theorizing fascism consist of actually writing its history, as the Italian communist Angelo Tasca²² suggested? These are all questions that emerged in the minds of scholars of fascism, and the debate surrounding them is old and still ongoing.

From the communist influenced theories of the interwar period, to the “totalitarian theory” developed during the Cold War and perhaps ending with the present culturalist and liberal quest for a consensus, the study of fascism has undergone a dramatic evolution. The aim of this section of my work is to present the evolution of the historiographical debates surrounding the study of fascism in Western European, mainly Anglophone, historiography and also in communist and post-communist Romania, to map the main topics of discussion and to trace some of the political and ideological influences that marked the history writing process.

²² See Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914 – 1945*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 441 or Roger Griffin (ed.), *International fascism: theories, causes and the new consensus*, (London: Arnold, 1998), 12.



2.1. Developments in Western Historiography on Fascism

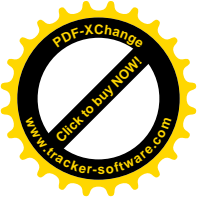
Western historiography on fascism from the end of the Second World War until the end of the 1970s

Since the 1960s, when a cluster of salient studies was published, works on fascism struggled with theorizing this political phenomenon. Indeed, the various monographs published had to begin with the arduous task of defining fascism and explaining its origins and evolution. Thus, the theoretical and conceptual basis of this field of study was intertwined with its actual historiographical development. A comprehensive account of the theoretical and empirical works on fascism is by no means possible due to the huge body of existent literature. Thus, my assessment of the studies on fascism is selective and aims at placing the debates within their historical context.

The various debates concerning fascism legitimately insisted on the causes as well as the nature of this political phenomenon. An influential interpretation was advanced by the communists,²³ who as early as June 1923 described fascism as “a characteristic phenomenon of decay, a reflection of the progressive dissolution of capitalist economy and of the disintegration of the bourgeois State.”²⁴ This simplistic and politically motivated language was soon

²³ For a view on Marxist theories of fascism see Roger Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, (London: Arnold, 1998), 59–97.

²⁴ See the extracts from a resolution of the Communist International regarding fascism in Roger Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 260.



appropriated not only by the Soviet propaganda but also by the communist militants from Western Europe.²⁵

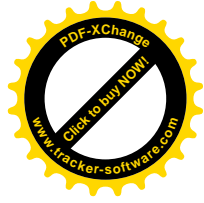
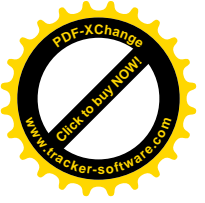
However, far more complex theories of fascism emerged among scholars after the Second World War.²⁶ The beginning of the Cold War in the 1950s favored the development of the theory of totalitarianism. In the context of Stalinist domination over an important part of Europe, the theory of totalitarianism saw fascism not as a totally unique category. It was considered one of the manifestations of a more complex and broad phenomenon of the twentieth century, i.e. totalitarianism. In this respect, the work of Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956) was paradigmatic. They outlined the traits of totalitarianism as being a revolutionary ideology, propelled by a mass party and imposing itself through terror and manipulation. Equally influential was Hannah Arendt's work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (first published in 1951). However, the theory of totalitarianism proved to be much too politically motivated, often functioning as a counterpart to the Marxist vision of fascism. The concept of totalitarianism was criticized because it tended to downplay the differences between fascism and communism and obscured the evolution of fascism as a political phenomenon.²⁷

Fascist studies received a real boost in the 1960s when theories other than the Marxist and totalitarian ones emerged. Noted historian Eugen Weber

²⁵ An example is the conception on the nature of fascism of the Italian member of the Communist International, Palmiro Togliatti. See *Ibid.*, 263–4.

²⁶ An excellent overview of interpretations of fascism may be found in Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 441–61. Another useful work in this sense would be B. Hagtvet and R. Kühnl, “Contemporary Approaches to Fascism: a Survey of Paradigms” in S.U. Larsen *et al.*, (ed.) *op. cit.*, 26–51.

²⁷ Stanley G. Payne, *A history of Fascism*, 448.

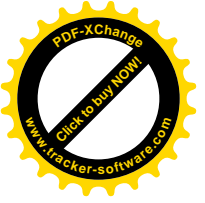


published his work, *Varieties of Fascism*,²⁸ in 1964 and presented numerous case studies focused on fascist movements across Europe suggesting a comparative approach. Weber made an original contribution to the field by providing detailed accounts of fascist movements that emerged in Central and Eastern Europe during the interwar years.

German historian Ernst Nolte also had an important impact on fascist studies in the 1960s. He shifted the debate from the left-right Cold War logic by stressing the obvious differences that existed between fascism and communism. His most known work, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* was published in 1963 and was soon translated into English.²⁹ A student of Heidegger's, Nolte emphasized the complexity of fascist ideology which he considered a unique metapolitical phenomenon. According to the German historian, fascism developed as an ideology aimed at creating a new order: it came as a reaction against – and radically changed – other models of “transcendence,” especially the communist one. Furthermore, Nolte mapped what he considered the “fascist minimum” by narrowing it down to six main traits: anti-liberalism, anti-Marxism, anti-conservatism, the totalitarian will, a militarized structure and the leadership principle (*Fuhrerprinzip*). Although it marked an innovative shift in the study of fascism, Nolte's work came under criticism for its difficult philosophical approach as well as for its restrictive definition of the “fascist minimum.” However, Nolte's

²⁸ Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: doctrines of revolution in the twentieth century*, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964).

²⁹ The book was translated as *Three faces of fascism : Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, transl. by Leila Vennewitz, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).



contribution in theorizing the concept of “generic fascism” is widely acknowledged today.³⁰

In the 1970s, some scholars tried to work within the paradigm of generic fascism, as shown in the collective effort coordinated by Walter Laqueur's, *Fascism: a Reader's Guide*.³¹ It brought together some of the leading experts of fascism such as Juan Linz or Zeev Sternhell, the first providing a long and seminal study on the comparative approach while the latter attempted to map the traits of fascist ideology.³² The book coordinated by Laquer proved to be a strong reference point for many scholars of fascism in the decades to come.

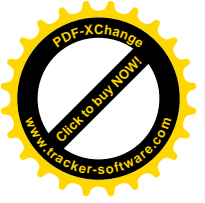
The 1970s closed, however, with the trend established by historians such as Gilbert Allardyce who tended to see fascism as a product of national histories and denied that generic fascism may be accurately defined, due to the differences and particularities it presented in its various manifestations.³³ Allardyce's view had an important echo in the 1980s, when historians did not focus on the study of fascism as a generic phenomenon but tended to focus on country-by-country case studies.

³⁰ Roger Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, 297.

³¹ Walter Laqueur (ed.) *Fascism: a Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

³² Juan Linz, “Some Notes Towards a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective”, 3–121, and Zeev Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology”, 315–75.

³³ Gilbert Allardyce, “What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept,” *American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 367–88.



The Culturalist Turn in Fascist Studies: George L. Mosse

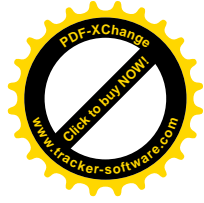
Simultaneous with these theoretical debates on fascism between the 1960s and the 1980s there emerged and developed the work of George L. Mosse. Mosse was no newcomer in the 1970s and 80s, as since the 1960s he emerged as one of the leading contributors in the realm of contemporary history.³⁴ His works on Nazi Germany provided a broader view than many of the studies before him. He sought the source and nature of fascism in other areas than the economy or even politics, suggesting a cultural approach. Mosse acknowledged that fascism was a revolutionary movement that had a project of its own, trying to create a new order and a “new man.” He argued fascism should not be analyzed based only on its negative tenets (only as reactionary or anticommunist) but rather it should be acknowledged that: “for millions it did satisfy a deeply-felt need for activism combined with identification, it seemed to embody their vision of a classless society.”³⁵ Fascism based itself on the sense of revolt against liberalism and positivism, which emerged at the turn of the century. However, the key consisted of the process of taming this revolt, controlling these energies and channeling them towards a mass movement lead by a charismatic leader.³⁶

Mosse also dismissed the oversimplifying Marxist view of fascism, arguing instead that fascism emerged not only as a reactionary movement, but as a

³⁴ He actually co-founded in 1966, together with Walter Laqueur, the prestigious *Journal of Contemporary History*.

³⁵ George L. Mosse, “The Genesis of Fascism,” in Walter Laqueur, George Mosse ed., *International Fascism 1920 – 1945* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1966), 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15–6.



movement with its own program of reshaping and regenerating a world in crisis, in essence, a “cultural revolution.”³⁷ Mosse formulated his views on fascism in a theoretical framework that proved more influential in the long run than at the moment when it was conceived. One of his most cogent contributions remained the 1979 article “Toward a General Theory of Fascism,”³⁸ in which he synthesized his view on fascism:

Fascism was everywhere an ‘attitude toward life,’ based upon a national mystique which might vary from nation to nation. It was also a revolution, attempting to find a ‘third way’ between Marxism and capitalism, but still seeking to escape concrete economic and social change by retreat into ideology – the ‘revolution of the spirit’ of which Mussolini spoke; or Hitler’s ‘German revolution.’”³⁹

This *culturalist* approach, first suggested by Mosse as early as the 1960s, was generously embraced by a significant number of historians only in the 1990s. In the introduction of his book *The Fascist Revolution*, Mosse summed up the gist of his culturalist approach to the study of fascism, an approach that he advocated for decades, even when it stood against prevailing historiographical orthodoxies:

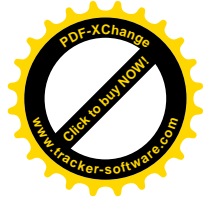
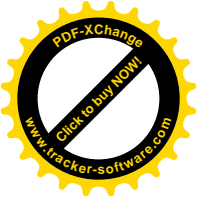
“Fascism considered as a cultural movement means seeing fascism as it saw itself and as its followers saw it, to attempt to understand the movement on its own terms. Only then, when we have grasped fascism from the inside out, can we truly judge its appeal and its power.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Stanley G. Payne, *A history of Fascism*, 450–1.

³⁸ Republished in *Masses and Man*, 159–96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 194–5.

⁴⁰ George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), x.



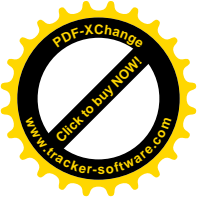
In the same context, Mosse also underlined that this approach began to be favored by some contemporary historians, mentioning the names of scholars such as Stanley G. Payne, Roger Griffin and Roger Eatwell.

Stanley Payne, Roger Griffin and the quest for a “new consensus” in fascist studies

The 1990s provided a resurgence of studies dealing with generic fascism, which sought to re-evaluate and redefine the fascist phenomenon. Building on Mosses's theoretical work, scholars such as Stanley G. Payne, Roger Griffin, Emilio Gentile and others pushed forward a new interpretation of fascism, based on its cultural-ideological components. Due to the academic and institutional strength of these scholars, as well as the growing number of historians embracing the works of Mosse, Payne and Griffin, this new trend was marketed as a “new consensus” in fascist studies.

The work of Stanley Payne is crucial in this respect. A colleague of Mosse at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and a specialist in the history of Spain in the twentieth century, he suggested a three-fold definition of fascism as early as 1980.⁴¹ He reiterated this definition in a more favourable context in the mid-1990s in his now famous synthesis, *A History of Fascism* (1995). The three layers of his theoretical endeavor were ideology and goals, the fascist negations, and style and organization. In so far as ideology and goals were concerned, Payne saw fascism as perpetrating and idealist, vitalist and voluntarist philosophy

⁴¹ In developing this definition, Payne acknowledged the influence of Juan J. Linz, see *A History of Fascism*, 6.

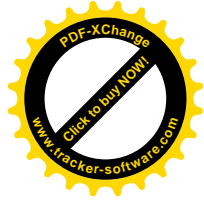
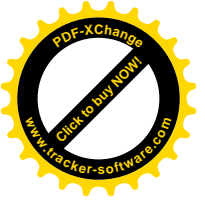


that wished to create a new, modern secular culture and a nationalist authoritarian state. Payne also included in his definition the fascist negations: anti-liberalism, anticommunism and anticonservatism. To complete his depiction of fascism he stressed the particular style and organization of fascism based on the masculinity principle, exaltation of the youth, mass mobilization, as well as the tendency towards “an authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of command.”⁴²

Payne’s undertaking proved to be, by far, the most complex attempt of defining fascism. It marked a departure from the Marxist and even Noltean way of looking at fascism by making its negations only a part of its substance. On the other hand, it added new elements, building on Mosses’s research, stressing the importance of seeing fascism as an ideology, and not as a simple reactionary movement. In this regard, the emphasis was placed on the cultural revolution proposed by fascism, which based itself on youthful, masculine ideas and, most of all, on the desire to create a “new order” and a “new man”. Payne did not dismiss the diversity of the fascist phenomenon, placing its definition under the umbrella of an “ideal type” concept.

A step further down the road of the work on generic fascism has been taken by British historian Roger Griffin. Griffin emerged on the scene of fascist studies in the early 1990s and built on Mosse’s and Payne’s work while managing to provide his own approach to generic fascism. He even ventured to provide what was unthinkable two or three decades ago, a single sentence definition of fascism. In his *The Nature of Fascism* he summed up fascism as

⁴² Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 7.



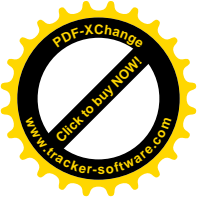
being: "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism."⁴³ He underscored the importance of myth in understanding fascism while emphasizing its regenerative/palingenetic project that focused on creating a new, purified order and a "new man". The fascist project was justified due to what fascists themselves perceived as a deep state of crisis of the old, liberal-bourgeois order. Thus, fascism presented itself as the only alternative to the revolutionary threat coming from the left, i.e. communism.

Griffin's theory synthesized the culturalist approach and offered rendered it mainstream.⁴⁴ Taking this a step forward, Griffin argued, in the preface of his 1998 reader *International fascism: theories, causes and the new consensus*, in favor of the emergence of a growing consensus in the field of fascist studies, based precisely on the "primacy of culture".⁴⁵ It has to be acknowledged that Griffin himself did not consider that the "new consensus" was unanimously embraced by scholars, but it was rather an assumption based on the fact that a growing number of scholars used a similar set of approaches when writing about fascism.

⁴³ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 26 (first published in 1991).

⁴⁴ To show the popularity of Griffin's definition one should mention that it was used in various important encyclopaedias such as *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*, (Blackwell, 1992), *The Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1998), *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 2001) and even in *Encarta 2000 Encyclopedia* (Microsoft Publications CD ROM Encyclopedia, 1999)

⁴⁵ Roger Griffin, "The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies" *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002): 21 – 43.



The idea of a “new consensus” in fascist studies is still debated by historians,⁴⁶ but even scholars who do not necessarily come from the aforementioned trend or embrace the consensus, such as Michael Mann,⁴⁷ have found, for example, Mosse’s inspirational approach useful for constructing their own theories. Although Griffin’s push for a consensus came under severe criticism from scholars of fascism such as R.J. Bosworth, Robert Paxton and A. J. Gregor, it nevertheless offered a basis for new works on fascism in the second half of the 1990s.

These studies focus on heretofore under examined issues such as the role of generational conflict in the emergence of fascism, analysis of fascist culture and the examination of the cult of youth within fascist movements. A remarkable example of how the culturalist approach was put to good use is the collection of essays edited by Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff.⁴⁸ The essays focus on the connection between intellectuals (artists, theorists) and fascism in France and Italy, providing interesting case studies from the two countries.

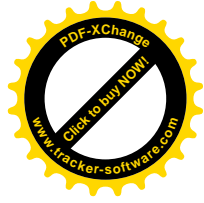
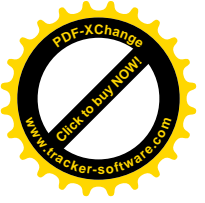
Marla Stone conducted a fruitful study regarding the relationship between politics and culture in fascist Italy.⁴⁹ She emphasized the contribution of culture in

⁴⁶ For a lengthy debate between a sizable number of scholars regarding Roger Griffin’s work on fascism (including the idea of a “new consensus”), please see the issue published by the German journal *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik* 15, 3 (2004). It was later reprinted as a book under the title *Fascism Past and Present, West and East: International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right*, ed. by Roger Griffin, Werner Loh, and Andreas Umland, (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2006).

⁴⁷ Michael Mann, *Fascists*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴⁸ Matthew Affron, Mark Antliff eds., *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).



the legitimization of the fascist regime by creating a sense of national unity, through manifestations such as the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution.

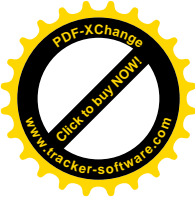
In a highly creative book, Ruth Ben-Ghiat addressed the relationship between fascism and modernity while highlighting the importance of fascist culture. She argued that, in spite of several “reactionary” traits, fascism’s aim was to modernize society by targeting the country’s energies towards Mussolini’s expansionist plans. She devoted a special chapter to fascism’s youth policies, insisting on the importance of the youth cult and generational thinking in the development of fascism. Ben-Ghiat also emphasized that fascism as a “project of national regeneration” appealed to many intellectuals “as a new model of modernity that would resolve both the contemporary European crisis and long-standing problems of the national past”.⁵⁰ Other meaningful works that can inform the study of the Iron Guard focused on the political socialization of the youth, regarded fascism as a political religion or analyzed the relationship between fascist regimes and the historical past.⁵¹

2.2. Developments in the Romanian Historiography on Fascism

The historiography of the Romanian Legionary Movement generally lacks studies conducted in accordance with the recent, culturalist theoretical

⁵⁰ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Emilio, Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Trans. by Keith Botsford, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).



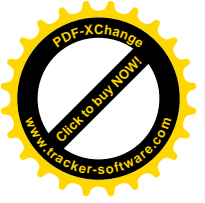
framework. A thorough analysis of Romanian fascism, in the light of current historiographical debates, would help test various theories developed almost exclusively with the use of Western examples. Seeing Romanian fascism as a simple-minded, archaic, mystical, pastiche of Western “core-cases” deprives the analysis of fascism as a generic phenomenon of one of its most significant and revealing examples.

The international debates presented above were not emulated by the Romanian historiography over the decades. Similar to what happened to the entire society, Romanian historiography was also radically transformed by the Soviet-backed communist dictatorship that took control of the country after the Second World War.⁵² Along with all the social sciences and the humanities, history was “subordinated to party interests”⁵³ and was used in order to ascribe historical legitimacy to the Romanian Communist Party (RCP).⁵⁴ As a result, a special brand of historians emerged – *party historians* – those who were associated with the Institute for the History of the Romanian Communist Party. They were the most vocal among the historical profession in maintaining

⁵² Among the few reliable accounts regarding the historiographical developments in Romania after the Second World War one has to acknowledge Keith Hitchins, “Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Romania” in *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1064–83 and Șerban Papacostea, “Captive Clio: Romanian Historiography Under Communist Rule” *European History Quarterly*, 26 (1996): 181 – 208. For post-communist historiography please see Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “Mastering vs. Coming to Terms with the Past. A Critical Analysis of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography” in Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi, Péter Apor eds., *Narratives Unbound. Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 311-408, Bogdan Murgescu, “The Romanian Historiography in the 1990’s” *The Romanian Journal of Political Sciences* 3, 1 (2003): 30-59, and Irina Culic, “Re-Writing the History of Romania after the Fall of Communism”, *History Compass* 3 (2005): 1-21.

⁵³ Keith Hitchins, *op. cit.*, 1081.

⁵⁴ Șerban Papacostea, *op. cit.*, 181.



historiography under party control and building the much needed legitimacy for the communist regime.

This is why the historiography from the communist period could not escape the ideological constraints of the RCP and remained confined to a hardcore communist interpretation of fascism. The study of the Legionary Movement was a prohibited topic, and the archival material that provided the substance for such a study was not open to researchers. Moreover, the communist Romanian secret police, known as the *Securitate*, used the archival material in order to prosecute, often abusively, persons politically unfaithful to the communist regime. The paradigmatic work of the communist historiography interpretation of Romanian fascism was that written by Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu - *Garda de Fier. Organizație teroristă de tip fascist*.⁵⁵ This book also remained the only monograph concerning the Iron Guard published during the communist period and was turned into a canon, as it reflected conceptually the by now well-known and politically biased vision of communists regarding fascist movements. It considered the Iron Guard as a reactionary, terrorist organization manipulated by Nazi Germany, uncharacteristic for Romanian history and with no mass-appeal. The Iron Guard was regarded as being “alien to the nature and spiritual heritage of our nation” and a “brutal betrayal of the most burning aspirations of the Romanian people.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Mihai Fătu, Ion Spălățelu, *Garda de Fier. Organizație teroristă de tip fascist*. (Iron Guard. Terrorist organization of a fascist kind) 2nd edition, (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 385.



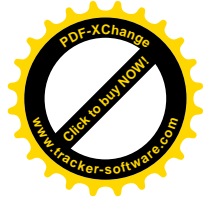
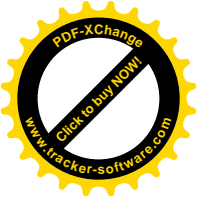
In 1977, historian Stelian Neagoe published an important work that also dealt with aspects of the history of Romanian fascism.⁵⁷ The book sought to analyze university life in the city of Iași in the interwar period and thus Neagoe dedicated a significant part to the radicalization of the students in the 1920s. Although on a promising topic, the book was hampered by the ideological constraints of the time. Neagoe tackled the issue of Codreanu's ethnic origin, emphasizing his foreign ancestry in a tone more characteristic to a pamphleteer rather than a professional historian.⁵⁸ He also described in much the same vein Codreanu's activity at the University of Iași. Such descriptions would make it very difficult for the reader to understand Codreanu's success as a young student leader, the success that actually stood at the foundation of his future political career.

Writing about the political life in Romania in the 1930s, historian Florea Nedelcu described the ascension of fascism after 1933 by using a quote from one of the Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches.⁵⁹ Nedelcu also tried to demonstrate that movements such as the Iron Guard or LANC were "the fifth column" of Nazi Germany, and only enjoyed a great success because of the help received from her. Unlike some of his historiographical counterparts, Nedelcu did acknowledge that the Iron Guard gained "some mass base" among those dissatisfied by the

⁵⁷ Stelian Neagoe, *Triumful rațiunii împotriva violenței: Viața universitară ieșană interbelică* (The Triumph of reason against violence: the interwar university life of Iași), (Iași: Editura Junimea, 1977).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 91-2.

⁵⁹ Florea Nedelcu, *De la Restaurație la Dictatura Regală: din viața politică a României 1930-1938* (From Restoration to the Royal Dictatorship: from the Political Life of Romania 1930-1938), (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1981), 92.

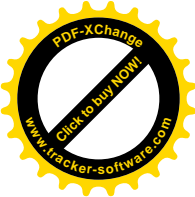


activity of the bourgeois parties.⁶⁰ Another characteristic symptom for the communist historiography on fascism, also present in Nedelcu' work, was the exaggeration of the role of the Romanian Communist Party in the struggle against the Iron Guard. This kind of discursive element was mainly employed in order to confer political and historical legitimacy to a party that had an almost non-existent mass appeal in the interwar period.

One interesting contribution to the literature on Romanian fascism published during the interwar period was the collective volume entitled *Împotriva fascismului* (Against fascism).⁶¹ The volume represented the outcome of a conference organized by the Academy of Social and Political Sciences and Institute for Historical and Social-Political Studies of the Romanian Communist party. This work is worth mentioning in this literature review because it grouped "the usual suspects" such as Mihai Fătu, Ion Spălățelu, Stelian Neagoe and Florea Nedelcu, but also important political and intellectual names such as Valter Roman, Miron Constantinescu, Ion Popescu-Puțuri, Constantin C. Giurescu, Șerban Cioculescu and George Ivașcu, to name just a few. The contributors covered various aspects of the history of Romanian fascism, favoring preferred topics such as the economic and ideological relationship with Nazi Germany, the struggle of the workers movement and of the communist party against the Iron Guard, but also issues that were not that much discussed, such as the relationship between the legionary ideology and literature.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 96-7.

⁶¹ *** *Împotriva fascismului* (Against fascism), (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971).

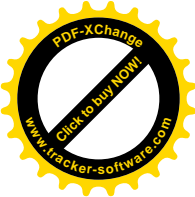


In general, the contributions by Romanian historians during the communist period that touched upon the history of the Iron Guard were written in a biased and non-academic manner that makes them very difficult to use. However, they may be regarded by researchers as good sources for an analysis of communist era historiography.

After 1989, the major change in writing about fascism was the fact that the historical profession benefited from greater access to archival material confined during communism. However, many of contributions published in the last twenty years did not provide a debate on Romanian fascism that was synchronized with the latest developments in the field. Professional historians published works that were overwhelmingly event-oriented, with too little focus on analysis and interpretation in a way that would synchronize them with the international historiography on fascism.⁶² The merit of such works was the immense archival material that was used, and thus made available to fellow historians and also the general public. There were also contributions that integrated issues connected to the history of Romanian fascism with the wider political and ideological context of the time, but also focused on how the Legion evolved at the local level.⁶³

⁶² Constantin Petculescu, *Mișcarea Legionară mit și realitate* (The Legionary Movement: Myth and reality), (Bucharest: Editura Noua Alternativă, 1997); Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail de la mit la realitate* (The Legion of the Archangel Michael from Myth to Reality), (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997).

⁶³ Florin Müller, *Metamorfoze ale politicului românesc* (Metamorphoses of Romanian Politics 1938-1944), (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2006); Puiu Dumitru Bordeiu, *Mișcarea Legionară în Dobrogea între 1933-1941* (The Legionary Movement in Dobrogea), (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 2003).



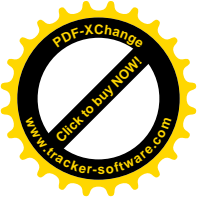
Some post-1989 historians engaged in a useful process of publishing documents concerning the history of Romanian fascism.⁶⁴ The *National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism* published a multi-volume series of documents concerning the Romanian interwar extreme-right. In this series, rather misleadingly entitled *Ideology and Rightwing Formations*, seven volumes have been published so far, and they cover the period between 1919 and 1943. The historical profession would have benefited even more from these and other published documents if they would have been more often accompanied by innovative theoretical or methodological explanatory studies. Nevertheless, they remain very useful working tools for all those interested in the topic in question.

The issue of Romanian fascism did not concern historians alone, as it generated a lot of public interest across the entire Romanian intellectual milieu. The fortunate outcome of this interest came in the shape of several reliable accounts that were published by literary historians, sociologists or political scientists.⁶⁵

The up-to-date international historiographical developments penetrated Romanian historiography on the Iron Guard quite recently, especially through the

⁶⁴ Many of the books published on Romanian fascism also contained documents and relevant texts; see Alexandru Florian *et al.*, *Ideea care ucide: dimensiunile ideologiei legionare* (The Idea that kills: the dimensions of legionary ideology), (Bucharest: Editura Noua Alternativa: 1994).

⁶⁵ Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească*, revised edition, (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1996); Sorin Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul Român* (The Romanian Paradox), (Bucharest, Editura Univers, 1998). Dan Pavel, "Legionarismul" (Legionarism) in Alina Mungiu Pippidi ed., *Doctrină politică: concepte universale și realități românești* (Political doctrines: universal concepts and Romanian realities), (Iași: Editura Polirom, 1998), pp. 213–228; Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1990).



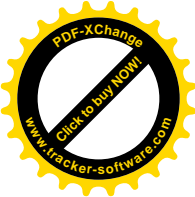
works of several young historians who have written within close proximity to the “new consensus” and debated its application to the Romanian case.⁶⁶ Thus, Constantin Iordachi put to good use Max Weber’s reflections on the role of charisma in politics, producing a seminal approach to the history of the Iron Guard. Another useful contribution was that of Mihai Chioveanu, who accomplished a much needed analytical review of the historical writing on fascism in general and Romanian fascism in particular.⁶⁷ Florin Țurcanu’s salient monograph of Mircea Eliade contains very insightful pages on the history of interwar Romanian fascism, thus allowing the reader to fully grasp the context in which the historian of religions lived and wrote, and also what were the circumstances under which he manifested his support for the Iron Guard.⁶⁸ Mirel Bănică’s book on the relationship between the Legionary Movement and the Orthodox Church opens for debate a very sensitive topic, offering food for thought to those interested in this entangled connection between the two entities.⁶⁹ It is highly likely that innovative and meaningful research on Romanian fascism will emerge from this cluster of young scholars.

⁶⁶ For these recent developments, please see Constantin Iordachi’s work *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the “Archangel Michael” in Inter-war Romania*. Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004, as well as Traian Sandu’s article “De l’antisémitisme au fascisme en Roumanie: naissance du Roumain nouveau régénéré par la révolution de droite” in *Analele Universității București. Seria Științe Politice*, 10 (2008): 31–46.

⁶⁷ Mihai Chioveanu, *Fețele fascismului: Politică, ideologie și scrisul istoric în secolul XX* (The faces of Fascism: Politics, Ideology and Historical Writing in the XX-th century), (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2005).

⁶⁸ Florin Țurcanu, *Mircea Eliade, Le prisonnier de l’histoire*, préface de Jacques Julliard, (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2003).

⁶⁹ Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, stat și societate în anii ’30* (The Orthodox Church, State and Society in the 1930s), (Iași: Polirom, 2007).

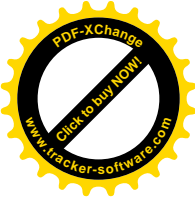


A peculiar and dangerous turn in the post-1989 context, visible mostly in the 1990s, was the editing or republishing of literature that attempts to rehabilitate the Iron Guard as an honorable part of Romania's past.⁷⁰ This tendency was mainly encouraged by groups of legionaries from abroad who financed these publications. Currently, the efforts to rehabilitate the Iron Guard have moved to the internet, where dozens of websites and blogs offer free access to many works written with this purpose, but also to original legionary literature from the 1920s and 1930s.

In reviewing the literature on Romanian fascism, one has to acknowledge that some the most important contributions to the history of the Iron Guard remain those that came from foreign historians. Their monographs, although written with no or scarce access to sources from Romania, provided very useful accounts that were often synchronize with the ongoing international historiographical debates. Eugen Weber is the first historian who contributed substantial pieces on the Iron Guard since the 1960s, treating the movement as a facet of generic fascism while Michael Nagy-Talavera, in a 1970 work, attempted to analyze Hungarian and Romanian fascism in a comparative manner.⁷¹ In the 1980s, historians Armin Heinen and Francisco Veiga published

⁷⁰ To quote one example: Ștefan Palaghiță, *Garda de Fier spre Reînvierea României. Istoria Mișcării Legionare scrisă de un legionar* (The Iron Guard for the Resurrection of Romania. The History of the Legionary Movement Written by a Legionary), (Bucharest: Editura Roza Vânturilor, 1993). The book was first published in Argentina, in 1951.

⁷¹ See Eugen Weber, "Romania" in Eugen Weber, Hans Rogger eds., *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 501–74; Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970).



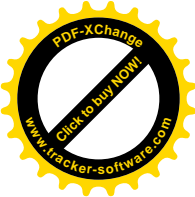
two important works on Romanian fascism.⁷² Although they did not have access to Romanian archives, the two historians compensated this shortcoming with German (Heinen), Spanish and Italian (Veiga) archival material and, most important, with contemporary theoretical and methodological approaches. Armin Heinen managed to place the Romanian case within the larger framework of international fascism, thus adding precious contributions to the study of fascism. Due to the complexity of analysis and the vastness of issues treated, his monograph remains the best and most reliable work on the history of the Iron Guard, and it is yet to be surpassed.

Considering this historiographical snapshot, a fresh analysis of Romanian fascism, based on the most recent theories and methods discussed above, would provide a major contribution to the field of fascist studies. It would contribute to enhancing the academic quality of the Romanian historiographic discourse and would also attempt to provide a starting point for future research in the field.

3. Sources, Methodology and Structure

In order to follow the research hypothesis discussed in the first part of the introduction a wide variety of sources had to be carefully examined with the most

⁷² Armin Heinen, *Die Legion "Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien: soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation: ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1986). Romanian edition: *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail: miscare sociala si organizatie politica*, (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1999); Francisco Veiga, *La Mistica del Ultrantionismo: Historia de la Guardia de Hierro, Romania, 1919 – 1941*, (Barcelona: Eds. de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 1989). Romanian edition: *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919–1941. Mistica ultranaționalismului*, (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1993).



appropriate methodological tools. The primary sources were legionary newspapers, doctrinaire writings, manifestos, songs, photographs, caricatures and posters. Legionary newspapers provided useful data and offered a fresh, “on the spot” perspective on events. They were the most important carriers of the Iron Guard’s message and reveal the continuities and discontinuities in the public discourse of the legionaries: favorite topics, representations of political enemies, political options regarding current events. The dynamic of the legionary regenerative discourse regarding the creation of a “new man” and a “new country” could also be traced by analyzing the content of their newspapers. Although many researchers have treated the legionary and pro-legionary newspapers indistinctively, one may distinguish several categories among them. Local newspapers, effective on regional and local levels, such as *Garda Bucovinei*, *Garda Jiului*, *Vlașca Legionară*, and *Cuvântul Argeșului*; newspapers focused on intellectual and cultural debates, but which reflected the Iron Guard’s point of view, including *Axa*, *Revista Mea*, *Rânduiala*, *Însemnări Sociologice*; and newspapers which addressed specific social and professional categories such as students, for example *Cuvântul Studentesc*.⁷³

Doctrinaire writings of major figures within the Legion, such as, first of all, Corneliu Codreanu, but also Vasile Marin and Ion Moța provided the point of view

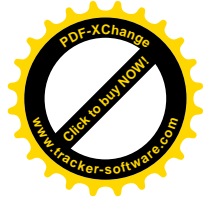
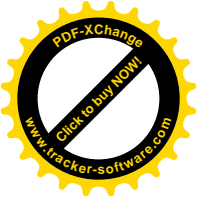
⁷³ For a taxonomy of the legionary press, see Valentin Săndulescu, „Sămânța aruncată de diavol”: Presa legionară și construirea imaginii inamicilor politici (1927 - 1937) („The Seed Thrown by the Devil”: Legionary Press and the Construction of the Image of Political Enemies (1927-1937)) in *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior (Historia)* 7, (2007): 153–74.



of those who shaped the ideology of the movement.⁷⁴ However, a focus on other important characters and their doctrinaire publications, such as Mihail Polihroniade, Ion Banea, Alexandru Constant, Ernest Bernea and others, provided the perspective of young intellectuals belonging to the Iron Guard. Their writings are highly relevant for the study of the generational conflict emerging in interwar Romania as well as for the analysis of the Legion's appeal to young people. They were also testimonies for the dramatic shift in the political discourse of the movement that took place starting with the years 1932 – 1933.

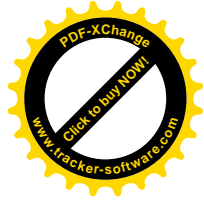
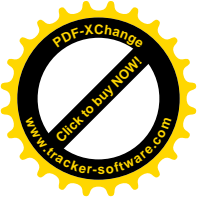
Archival material, abundantly present in Bucharest's National Central Historical Archives, also provided extremely valuable information. Legionary manifestos, photographs and posters, as well as song books and other propaganda materials, confiscated by the authorities in the interwar period, can be found there. These "cultural and intellectual artifacts" were used to disseminate the message of the movement and were avidly collected and filed by the authorities, as they realized they propaganda potential. The archives also offered the perspective of the state, the official power, regarding the legionary movement, its activity and goals. This was of high importance, if one takes into consideration that the main goal of the legionary regenerative project was exactly to radically change the state, perceived as old and corrupt and the source of all evils.

⁷⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's dogmatic works are *Cărticica Șefului de Cuib* (The Nest's leader handbook), (Bucharest, 1933) and *Pentru Legionari* (For the Legionaries), (Sibiu, 1936); also of great importance are the writings of Vasile Marin, *Crez de generație* (Creed of a generation), (Bucharest: Editura Majadahonda, 1997), and Ion I. Moța, *Cranii de lemn. Articole 1922 – 1936* (Wooden skulls. Articles 1922 - 1936), (Sibiu: Editura „Totul pentru Țară,” 1936).



The archival material regarding the Iron Guard and its dynamic deserves a separate study of its own. One can notice how in the beginnings of Codreanu's political affirmation in the 1920s the material is scarce, but grows along with the political importance of Codreanu himself. During its first years of existence, the police reports and analyses are filed together with those concerning other far right organizations and even together with those about the communist movement. The moment the movement takes off, starting with 1932 and especially 1933, one can only find folders especially dedicated to the Legion, with an enormous increase in police reports, surveillance notes and synthetic studies. The language of the police and the secret service is also worthy of analysis. One can detect various registers, from cold, professional reports, to passionate arguments regarding the menace posed the Legion. If in the late 1920s and early 1930s the police regarded the movement solely as a fringe group of fanatics with no ideological consistency, after 1933 they start paying more attention to what the Legion had to say regarding its regenerative program, precisely because the authorities could assess its appeal among legionary militants. In a way, archival documents speak in the same time also about those who have created them, offering us a view into their perspective and way of thinking about the event in question.

This rich variety of sources has been analyzed starting from some basic methodological assumptions. As George L. Mosse argued, considering fascism a cultural movement presupposes seeing it as it saw itself and trying to understand it on its own terms, and "only then, when we have grasped fascism from the



inside out, can we truly judge its appeal and its power.”⁷⁵ The direction of the analysis will not be ‘from the outside in’ but from ‘inside out’ as culture helps achieving a comprehensive image of the inner development of the movement.⁷⁶

Roger Griffin’s recent definition of fascism, alongside Stanley Payne’s tripartite definition, was also helpful in order to differentiate between a fascist movement such as the Iron Guard and other far right, ultra-nationalistic and anti-Semitic movements. In Griffin’s own words, fascism was:

“a revolutionary species of political modernism originating in the early twentieth century whose mission is to combat the allegedly degenerative forces of contemporary history (decadence) by bringing about an alternative modernity and temporality (a ‘new order’ and a ‘new era’) based on the rebirth, or palingenesis of the nation.”⁷⁷

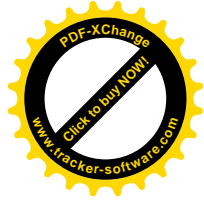
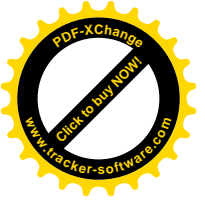
Although within the proximity of the culturalist approach, with its declared interest on ideology, the methodology employed aimed at avoiding the postmodern pitfall of seeing fascism mainly as an ahistoric, depoliticized aesthetic or discursive program without analyzing it in its historical and political context.⁷⁸ The methodological tools employed included textual analysis (for the legionary newspapers), which helped tracing the presence of certain predominant themes in the press. Thus, a more thorough assessment of the prevalence of the theme of regenerating the Romanian state, under its many

⁷⁵ George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*, x.

⁷⁶ Roger Griffin, *The Reclamation of Fascist Culture*, p. 612.

⁷⁷ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: the Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

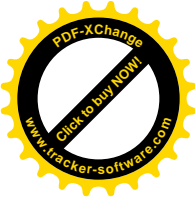
⁷⁸ Roger Griffin warns of this danger in his article “The Primacy of Culture. The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies”, *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 37, No. 3, (2002), p. 29.



permutations, may be established. Also, the study of images was also a rewarding methodological tool. The Legionary Movement was a visual movement, and its use of symbols, uniforms, and rituals was best transmitted through images that were very present in the press, especially in the 1930s. The photographic element helped the Legion in transmitting the image of its followers as prototypes of the “new men” of tomorrow, especially when they were in action in the work camps or at the mass demonstrations. Images help the researcher with revealing the encoded messages transmitted through such means, sometimes by simplifying the message of a written text but in other respects offering more complex symbolic associations.

An analysis of the social composition of the Legionary Movement, as much as the sources allowed, was also an important methodological component, especially for highlighting the existence and the dimensions of the “generation conflict” but also to show the dynamics in the support gathered by the Legion in its first decade of existence. By looking at the writings and official documents issued by several legionary leaders, one could detect the social categories target by the movement at various periods in time. Besides relying on the student youth, at times, the Legion also targeted workers, the military and the clergy, while also focusing on maintaining special organizations for women.

The structural design of the dissertation was done in such a way as to be both chronological and thematical. The dissertation also complements, develops



and enhances some of the topics that I have dealt with in my MA thesis⁷⁹. In focusing on a 'cultualist' approach, one will not offer an event oriented history of the Legion, as there are numerous contributions that already did it, but will focus on the issues that help the analysis of the legionary regenerative project in its first decade of existence.

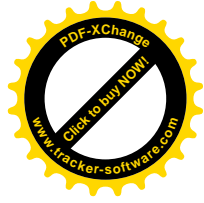
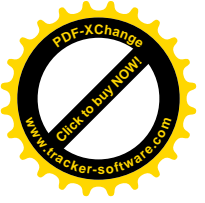
The first chapter deals with the "prehistory" of the Legion, i.e. the period starting with 1916, the year in which Codreanu attempted to take part in the "Great War" and ending before the formation of the movement in 1927.⁸⁰ The main focus will be the analysis of the 1922 student movement and its agenda, especially the idea of generational revolt as the starting point for the need for regeneration.⁸¹ Special attention will also be paid to the relationship between A. C. Cuza and Codreanu, and the reasons for its deterioration.

The second chapter looks at the Legion in its first years of existence, its first structures and its ritualistic foundation. The main source for this period is the first legionary publication, *Pământul Strămoșesc*, where the first attempts to part ways with the former mentor A. C. Cuza take place. Some observations are also made with respect to the regional character of the Legion in its beginnings, and also about the social background of the first followers.

⁷⁹ Valentin Săndulescu, *Young Romanians into Legionaries: the Quest for the 'New Man' in the Ideology of the Romanian Legionary Movement (1927-1937)*, Central European University, 2003.

⁸⁰ The term "prehistory" of the Legionary Movement was also used by Z. Ornea in his book *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească*, 10.

⁸¹ Some scholars have already analyzed the rise of Italian fascism from this point of view: Bruno Wanrooij, "The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism as Generational Revolt," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 22 (1987): 401–18.

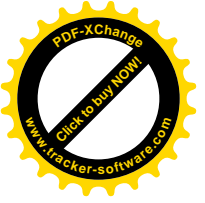


The third chapter describes the impact that the year 1933 had on the movement especially through the adherence to the Legion of the Axa group of intellectuals who greatly enhanced its popularity nationwide and also its ideological thrust. This upsurge was tempered by the reaction of the authorities following the assassination of prime minister I. G. Duca by three legionaries in December 1933.

The fourth chapter focuses on the rebuilding of the movement after December 1933, and looks at the animosities that existed in the Legion after the adherence of the Axa intellectuals who became very close to Codreanu. Perhaps the most concrete attempt at putting the regenerative project into practice was exemplified by the work camp system, considered a “legionary school” aimed at creating a “new man” by transforming the bodies and the minds of its young followers.⁸² The chapter also examines the role of the student movement in the development of the Legion between 1934 and 1936, while also assessing the presence of women in the movement.

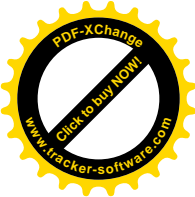
The fifth and final chapter deals with the year 1937, considered the highest point of the Legion’s political success. The main body of the chapter focuses on a very important moment, the death and mass-burial of two legionary leaders (Ion Moța and Vasil Marin) who fought in the Spanish Civil War. The wave of sympathy generated in the public opinion and also among supporters constituted a major boost for the Legion in an electoral year. The December 1937

⁸² The moral and physical transformation of the youth by various means was common for various interwar fascist movements. For a French case-study please see Samuel Kalman’s article “*Faisceau* Visions of Physical and Moral Transformation and the Cult of Youth in Inter-war France,” in *European History Quarterly* 33 (2003): 343–66.



elections marked the greatest electoral success for the Legion, but also the beginning of its downfall, as its project was soon crushed by the authorities under the authoritarian regime instituted in 1938.

The conclusions will assess the development of the Legion's project, its effectiveness in some periods and will also account for its failure.



CHAPTER I

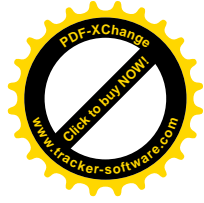
Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the “Prehistory” of the Romanian Legionary Movement (1916 - 1927)

I. 1. The Bases of Codreanu’s Radicalism: from the War Front to the University Front (1916 - 1922).

Romanians were on the winning side of the First World War. The “1918 Great Union” was regarded as the culmination of centuries of struggles and those who contributed directly to its accomplishment were revered as heroes of the nation. The case of General Alexandru Averescu, who became a mythical figure after the war, and served twice as prime minister (1920-1921; 1926-1927), is exemplary in this regard.

However, unlike in other European countries, those who fought during the Great War - the veterans - would not become a distinctive and decisive force in the political and social environment of interwar Romania. Because Romania was on the winning side and “Greater Romania” had been accomplished, they felt as if they had played their historical part and had only to consolidate these gains.

In this context, the most important political challenge that interwar Romania had to face was the so-called the “young generation.” This consisted primarily of those who were teenagers during the war and unable to fight, and those who were in the universities in the early 1920s, benefiting from the recent “democratization” of the university system. The interplay between their status as “victors” or “victims” of the war influenced their political development. Their post-



war social, cultural and economic frustrations soon turned into xenophobic behaviour that targeted minority students, especially Jews.

The Romanian case is not an exceptional one, as similar experiences can be traced if one looks at the age and social composition of those groups who turned to fascism in other countries as well. Thus, Andrew Donson provides an indicative case study on Germans born between 1900 and 1908 who later on became supporters of Nazism.¹ Although they did not take part into the Great War, they were brought up under the influenced of “war pedagogy” in school and in their social milieus, with an utmost admiration for German soldiers and the belief in their country’s superiority. According to Donson, the vast majority of these young boys were characterized by one or more of the following traits:

... a very nationalist family, an education in a military academy or, more likely, from 1914 to 1918 a stint in a military youth company, a great enthusiasm for military victories and war games, or an attempted registration with the army rejected because of age. The early Nazis in this cohort dreaded that the war would end before they could volunteer. Stunned by defeat and denied the opportunity to prove their manhood, they began to believe the legend that the army was not conquered on the battlefield but stabbed in the back by the worker-supported Republican government.²

Donson’s description of young people born between 1900 and 1908 joining the Nazi movement bears a striking similarity to the life trajectory of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu himself.

In the first chapter of his book *Pentru legionari*, entitled “In the Dobrina Forest,” Codreanu narrated his political awakening and his first leadership

¹ Andrew Donson, “Why Did German Youth Become Fascists? Nationalist Males Born 1900 to 1908 in War and Revolution,” *Social History* 31 (2006): 337-58.

² Ibid., 338.



exploit, marked by the fear of a potential Bolshevik takeover in Romania. In 1919, together with a group of around 20 comrades, high school kids whom he summoned to a forest near the Moldavian town of Huși, Codreanu decided to organize and maintain a movement of military resistance against the would-be enemy. The first step was to organize paramilitary training in the forest, with real weapons, and then to found a national-cultural society at the Huși high school. They organized open conferences in the town, but they underwent, in secret, military training in the woods.³

Prior to this moment, Codreanu attended the Military High School at Dealu Monastery, founded in 1912 by Nicolae Filipescu.⁴ In his book, Codreanu testifies about the tremendous influence that the military education acquired there had on his formation:

As a matter of fact, the military education from the Monastery will follow me all my life. Order, discipline and hierarchy, poured down at a young age in my own blood, next to the feelings of military dignity will constitute a red thread throughout my entire future activity.

...

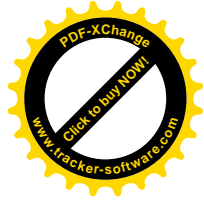
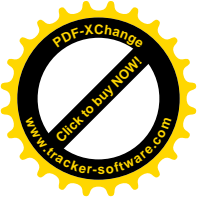
It is here that I have learned to like the trench and despise the salon. Notions of military science that I have acquired now would later make me judge everything through the angle of this science.⁵

The first result of this deeply entrenched military education that Codreanu claimed to have acquired in high school was his desire to take part, in 1916 - when he was only 17 years old - in the battles of the Great War. Although he was too young to fight, Codreanu followed his father to the war front, with the intention

³ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 11.

⁴ C. Nițescu, *Mănăstirea Dealu și Liceul Militar "Nicolae Filipescu"*, (Târgoviște: Tipografia Viitorul, 1932), 59.

⁵ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 12.



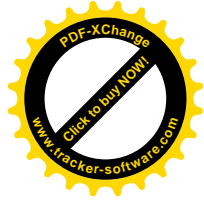
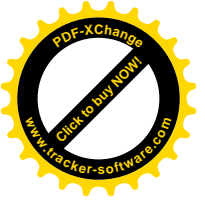
of becoming a volunteer. Not wanting to take responsibility for his participation in the war, Codreanu's father, at the insistence of several officers, sent his son home. A disappointed Corneliu Codreanu went on to complete his military education and enrolled in the Military Infantry School in Botoșani.

In the Fall of 1919, Codreanu became a student at the University of Iași, and described in his book the ideological and intellectual background with which he approached his student years, placing it in contrast with what he considered the "sensationalist literature, which perverts the soul" and which played such an important role in the upbringing of the high school students of that time. Thus, he asserted that: "Besides the usual writings of Romanian classics I had read all articles of N. Iorga and A.C. Cuza from *Semănătorul* and *Neamul Românesc*."⁶ According to Codreanu, reading this literature induced three 'life ideals' for the Romanian people: national unity, the appropriation of land and political rights for the peasantry, and 'solving the Jewish question'.

Going to Iași for his university studies, Codreanu was very much impressed by the nationalistic heritage of the city, and by those few professors who were upholding nationalist ideals: first and foremost A.C. Cuza, but also Ion Găvănescul and Corneliu Șumuleanu. He was also highly interested, from the very beginning, in the student movement, considering it in ruins because of the impressive number of communist students that came from Bessarabia. The only student group he considered of 'Romanian character' was that of students from Transylvania and Bukovina, entitled 'Avram Iancu' and led by Vasile Iașinschi,⁷

⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷ Ibid., 16.



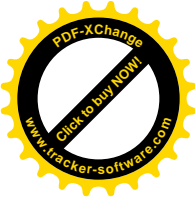
who would later become one of the most important legionary leaders. Codreanu would get involved in the student movement in the early 1920s, and the presence of student leaders such as him can provide an explanation for the virulent anti-Semitic strikes that occurred in 1922.

I. 2. The 1922 anti-Semitic Student Strikes and the Birth of the “1922 Generation”

After an initial enthusiastic stage, Romanian students were not so sure whether they belonged to the ‘victors’ or to the ‘victims’ side. In a 1920 article directed towards the workers who were also war veterans, young student and future fascist leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu wrote: “Each and every one of you is a hero, a bright hero of today’s generation of fighters, of the happiest generation ever seen by this soil that is raising us.”⁸ This high praise to the wartime generation also enclosed Codreanu’s bitterness and frustration that he could not take part in the military campaigns of the Great War. The feeling that they did not actually contribute to Romania’s victory, and that this success was the success of their parents alone, haunted the young generation.

Also, the feeling of actually finding a historical mission of their own, after their parents’ great accomplishment was one of the driving forces behind the actions of the young generation, through their most active body that was the student movement. They were soon to find this mission under the form of anti-

⁸ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, “Un cuvânt către muncitorii români care au trecut sub steagul cel roș al dușmanului” in *Conștiința*, II, No. 17 and 18 (February 9, 1920).



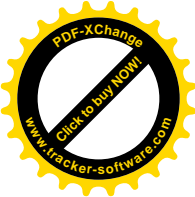
Semitism, ethnocentrism, ethnic homogenization and, finally, fascism as a way to regenerate the nation by creating a “new man” and a “new country.”

Besides these cultural and spiritual aspects, social and economic factors played an important part in igniting the 1922 student protests. Studying conditions in Romanian universities were far from perfect: lack of funding for laboratories, dormitories and canteens made access to education very hard for those coming from families with low or even average income. In the newly acquired provinces, Romanian students also had to face the competition of students from the ethnic minorities, who were mainly based in the urban areas. In the early 1920s, Hungarian, Jewish or German students outnumbered Romanian students in medical schools for example, as it was also the case for Iași and Cluj universities.⁹

It was no a surprise that the 1922 protests started at the University of Cluj, where Romanian students demanded that Jewish bodies should also be used in dissections, given the significant number of Jewish students in the medical school.¹⁰ The issue sparked fierce debates and violent outbursts that spread across the country’s universities, especially in Iași and Cernăuți. The issue of the bodies for medical schools was only a pretext for a broader student agenda that contained ethnocentric and anti-Semitic overtones. On December 10, 1922, a general assembly of Romanian students from all universities gathered in Bucharest and adopted a resolution that made very clear the student demands.

⁹ Maria Someșan, “Mișcarea studențească din 1922” (The 1922 Student Movement) in *Anuarul Institutului Român de Istorie Recentă* 1 (2002): 192.

¹⁰ Ibid.



In spite of the fact that the first point on the resolution stated that “the student movement does not have an anti-Semitic character, that it does not serve the interests of anyone, and that its higher goal is solving several higher cultural, national problems,”¹¹ what followed was a clearly anti-Semitic list of demands.

Thus, the second point of the resolution stated what was later termed as *numerus clausus*, which asked the limitation of minority students according to their proportion in the overall population:¹²

“2 – Due to the lack of opportunities to study and because the foreign element overwhelms the national one, we demand:

a) Restricting the admission in our universities of students who are not Romanian citizens (especially Jews); [...]

b) Admission in university for non-Romanian citizens (especially Jews) according to the proportion that they represent in the population.

c) Encouraging the national element in order to maintain the ethnic character of our culture [...]”¹³

Even the social and economic demands of the students were formulated in order to assure the pre-eminence of the Romanian element in the universities.

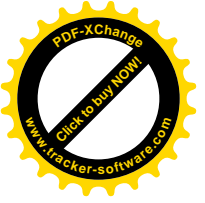
The student movement sparked fierce debates across the Romanian society. Ultranationalist and anti-Semitic politicians such as A. C. Cuza supported the students. In turn, the students joined in great numbers Cuza’s party, The League of National-Christian Defense (LANC), formed in 1923.

Several democratic newspapers criticized the student protests for their violence and anti-Semitism. Journalist Tudor Teodorescu Braniște, argued that

¹¹ *Universul* XL, No. 284 (December 13, 1922).

¹² This issue was also present in other European countries during the interwar period, as it was often employed in various political battles. For a Hungarian example from the 1930s, please see Bernard Klein, “Anti-Jewish Demonstrations in Hungarian Universities, 1932-1936: István Bethlen vs Gyula Gömbös”, in *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring, 1982), pp. 113-124.

¹³ *Universul*, XL, No. 284 (December 13, 1922).



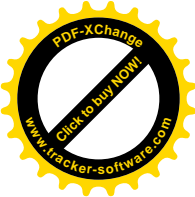
the anti-Semitic demonstrations were at first encouraged by the government, which tried to use them in order to diminish the rights awarded to ethnic minorities by the draft of the new Constitution. The government also wanted to direct the attention away from the economic failures that were quite visible. The government repressed the students strikes only came when the movement became upsetting even for the authorities.¹⁴

However, although the government fulfilled several demands made by the students, it did not support the *numerus clausus*. In a speech in the Chamber of Deputies in January 1923, the Education Minister, Dr. Constantin Angelescu, representing the Liberal government, clearly rejected the *numerus clausus*, considering it foreign, in fact a Hungarian import. He considered it illegal to discriminate between the citizens of the same country.¹⁵

The students did not give up the *numerus clausus*, and carried on the fight against the government by boycotting classes and by publishing virulent articles in their journals *Cuvântul Studentesc* (The Student Word) and *Dacia Nouă* (New Dacia). Student articles attacked intellectuals and politicians that did not support the movement, such as historian Nicolae Iorga and sociologist Dimitrie Gusti. Nicolae Iorga, although acknowledged as the spiritual father of Romanian nationalism, was now considered to have betrayed the cause, because he criticized the violence of the student protests:

¹⁴ Tudor Teodorescu Braniște – “...Dar rezultatele?” (What About the Results?) in *Aurora*, February 4, 1923, quoted from Ioan Scurtu and others, (eds.) *Totalitarismul de dreapta în România: Origini, manifestări, evoluție* (Rightwing Totalitarianism in Romania: Origins, Manifestations, Evolution), (Bucharest: INST, 1996), 309 – 311.

¹⁵ The Debates of the Chamber of Deputies, January 31, 1923, in Ioan Scurtu and others, (eds.), *Totalitarismul de dreapta în România*, 290 – 291.



“The man who woke us up to the danger of phanariot politicking and Jewish invasion, this man, as a General deserted his troops, and as a parent he scattered his children; ...”¹⁶

The sociologist Dimitrie Gusti was attacked for criticizing the student movements and considering them the disintegration of the Universities. Gusti was warned to prove that a Jewish problem does not exist in Romania or, as the students put it: “is it ‘sociologically’ possible for a body to breathe with another’s lungs?”¹⁷

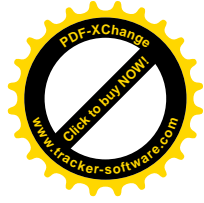
Another article aimed to compare the demands for *numerus clausus* by Romanian students with the wider European context.¹⁸ The students refuted the accusations brought against them by the government claiming that their request would lead Romania to a war with Hungary, Russia and even Bulgaria. The Ministry of Education also claimed that he would enforce a *numerus clausus* law when a similar law would be in effect in other civilized European countries. The students argued that such a law already functioned at the Vienna Polytechnic in Austria, and also in the Hungarian education system. They also argue that the proportionality law was passed in Poland, by senators and not as a result to street protests.

It soon became clear that the movement was not only a social conflict but also one with a political and generational stake. An active and fanatic group of ultranationalist students took over the protests enforcing the anti-Semitic points

¹⁶ “Vălenii de Munte,” in *Cuvântul Studentesc* I, 23 (July 17, 1923):1.

¹⁷ “‘Argumentele’ ‘distinsului’ sociolog Gusti” (The Arguments of “Distinguished” Sociologist Gusti) in *Cuvântul Studentesc* I, 23 (July 17, 1923): p.1.

¹⁸ I. Simionescu, “Nu strigă Europa?” (Doesn’t Europe Shout?) in *Cuvântul Studentesc* I, 31 (September 11, 1923): 1.



on the agenda. Although the government did not accept the *numerus clausus* demand, the strike continued, and in places such as Iași, the academic year was annulled. The movement became a training ground for future fascist politicians. Ion I. Moța, a law student in Cluj and future fascist leader, who died in the Spanish Civil War fighting on Franco's side, was an obvious example. In an article published in *Dacia Nouă*, Moța unveiled the rampant anti-Semitism that fed the student movement. It disclosed anti-Semitism as one of the driving forces behind the strikes. Moța asserted:

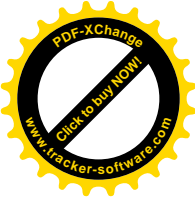
“In judging the Jews we start from a basic truth: the Jews from all over the world represent a compact body, a unitary and foreign nation having the same program, emerging from the same Talmud. Their program is mastered by savage selfishness, advocated in their own religion even, and basing on it they have one aim: to rule the world, enslaving the Christians who are unworthy of becoming God's chosen people, that is, the masters of the world.”¹⁹

Moța placed the student movement in this clearly anti-Semitic context and argued that the time to “turn the other cheek” has passed and the time to take the whip and rive the Jews out has arrived. Thus he concluded: “Our *numerus clausus* is moral and it serves the progress of Romanian society.”²⁰

The anti-Semitism and ultra nationalism of the student movement soon turned to fascism as one of the political solutions for the country's crisis. The recent Italian example of Benito Mussolini was embraced by many of the student leaders, who appreciated the special attention fascists placed on the youth.

¹⁹ Ion I. Moța, “Cauza noastră e justă în ordinea morală și servește progresului social,” (Our Cause is Just in Moral Order and Serves Social Progress) in *Dacia Nouă*, December 22, 1922, in I. Scurtu and others (eds.), *Totalitarismul de dreapta în România*, 264–7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*



Napoleon N. Crețu, the president of the Letters and Philosophy Students Society, wrote an article entitled *Cultural Fascism* in which he designed a fascist mission for the student generation. He argued that the assimilation of Jews and Hungarians was a “heresy” and stated that the students do not believe in it anymore. The author called for a united front against the internal and external threats, arguing that the political and economical sides of this front is the duty of the mature generation, while the cultural front is primarily the duty of the young, student generation. The reformation of the “souls and minds” would bring along reformation of all other aspects.

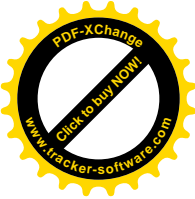
“We shall bare the flag of a cultural fascism under which the students will constitute the avant-garde. [...] Fascism means gathering all the energies that serve the great aim. Our fascism means methodical fighting, perfect discipline and well driven impetus.”

“The aim of our fascism is to awaken the national consciousness where it is asleep or lost, and to strengthen it where it is still alive.”

“... our aim is: *an energetic campaign of national regeneration*. The soul and the reason point out only at the rescuing cultural fascism.”²¹

At this stage, although the turn to fascism was only declarative, the ideological background was set and in the 1920s and especially in the 1930s, it became a reality.

²¹ N. N. Cretu, “Fascism cultural” (Cultural Fascism) in *Cuvantul Studentesc* I, 3 (January 19, 1923): p. 1.



*The 1922 Student Movement as a Legitimizing Starting Point for Romanian Fascism: the Role of the Youth and Anti-Semitism*²²

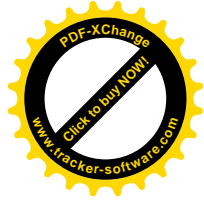
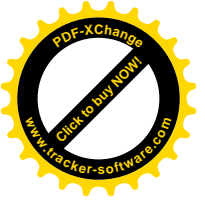
The generational conflict between what the young generation considered Old Romania (corrupt and democrat) and the New Romania (just and “holy as the sun in the sky”) was the starting point for their need of more radical political action under the guise of what historian Roger Griffin has called “palingenetic ultra nationalism”²³ Also, according to George L. Mosse, fascism based itself on a sense of revolt against liberalism and positivism, which emerged at the turn of the century. However, the key consisted of the process of taming this revolt, controlling these energies and channeling them towards a mass movement lead by a charismatic leader.²⁴ This was exactly what Codreanu accomplished with the “fascist potential” of the 1922 generation that I have described before. Although Codreanu was not at the forefront of the student movement since the very beginning, he later on managed to embody its spirit and to appear to his generation as the legitimate heir. In his major doctrinaire work, *Pentru Legionari*, Codreanu described December 10, 1922:

It is a great day because of the miracle of the awakening of this generation to the light it saw in its soul. It is marked as a day of determination. Determination to act, to declare the holy war, which would require so much strength in its soul

²² The ideological connection between the ‘1922 student generation’ and the birth of Romanian fascism has also been underlined by historian Irina Livezeanu in her work, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1995).

²³ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 26.

²⁴ George L. Mosse, “Introduction: The Genesis of Fascism,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966): 15 – 16.



from this youth, so much heroism, so much maturity, so much known and unknown sacrifices, so much graves!²⁵

Codreanu offered a complex political framework, which emphasized the importance of educating a “new man” able to save the decaying nation from its internal and external enemies. The development of the nation was hampered, according to the Iron Guard ideology, by the ethnic minorities, especially the Jews, and also by the politicians who supported the democratic system. Democracy was seen as the supreme evil because it divided the nation with its political pluralism and it also awarded equal rights to citizens no matter their ethnicity.

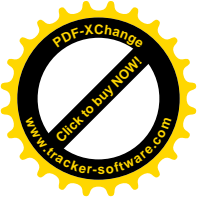
For Codreanu, *numerus clausus* was only a useful tool in addressing the Jewish problem, but not a solution for this. It was not a solution because it maintained rather than reduced the Jewish proportions and consequently it could not solve the problem.²⁶ Thus, anti-Semitism remained one of the constant talking points of the Iron Guard.

The issue of racism within fascist movements was heavily debated among historians. The cruel biological racism proposed by German Nazis, which found its horrific endpoint in the Holocaust, influenced this debate. However, after intense research, some historians of fascism have argued that “fascist ideology was not necessarily racist in the Nazi sense.”²⁷ Fascist movements did foster ultranationalist and ethnocentric visions regarding cultures and societies that emphasized the superiority of some against the others.

²⁵ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 64

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁷ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 11.



A similar claim can be made about the Legionary movement as well. The ideological apparatus of the legionaries lacked a Nazi inspired racial theory.²⁸ Although the main topic of the legionary discourse was the regeneration of the country, this process was seen in a spiritual, non-rational guise, often connected with religion. As Romanian historian Maria Bucur has argued, this contrasted sharply with the presumably “rational” and scientific arguments of racist theorists and eugenicists who sought to explain “objectively” the need for “biological self-control.”²⁹

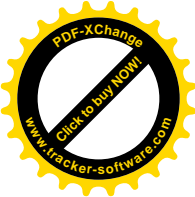
Nevertheless, the Legion did employ the language and the tropes of biological racism when it expressed its anti-Semitic views through violent remarks that regarded the Jews as a menacing “other”, a foreign, parasitical body that harmed the “health” of the Romanian nation. The Jewish population was often turned into scapegoats in order to explain the deep crisis Romania was in. The legionary leaders disseminated anti-Semitic ideas and wanted to put them into practice. On his way to Spain to take part in the Civil War, going through Poland, Vasile Marin hatefully commented on the presence of “Galitian Jews, international viper, the pathogenic microbe of the nations.”³⁰ In fact, as early as 1924 Marin quoted several Western thinkers (H. Chamberlain, R. Wagner, and F. Nietzsche among others) in his articles in order to substantiate his anti-Semitic stance.³¹

²⁸ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 126.

²⁹ Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2002), 113.

³⁰ Vasile Marin, *Crez de generație*, 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 101 – 104.



One of the most acute forms of anti-Semitism can be documented in Codreanu's writings and was based on a conspiracy theory. Codreanu developed a complicated theory in this regard. He started by saying that the number of the Jews in Romania was higher than officially stated³² and claimed that the real figure was around 2 – 2.5 million.³³ The real figure was kept secret by the conspiracy, Codreanu said, in order not to alarm the Romanian majority. The Jews acted towards inflicting death against the Romanian people, a “metaphoric” death envisaged by Codreanu as “the reduction of several million Romanian peasants to the life status of slaves.”³⁴ However, the “conspiracy” did not stop here. After the subjection of the Romanian people followed the final aim of the conspiracy:

“the creation of a new Palestine, on a land strip starting from the Baltic Sea, encompassing parts of Poland and Czechoslovakia and half of Romania towards the Black Sea, from where it could easily be connected by sea to the other Palestine.”³⁵

This type of anti-Semitism was perpetrated in order to legitimate the legionaries' violent actions against the Jews, and their self-proclaimed position of “saviors of the nation from the Jewish threat.” The Legion's anti-Semitism found a fertile ground among students in the universities, continuing the tradition initiated by the 1922 generation. The legionaries were the main advocates of the *numerus clausus* principle that aimed at limiting the number of Jewish students.³⁶

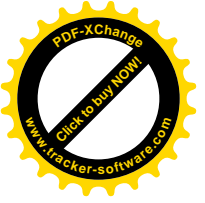
³² The 1930 census counted a little over 728. 000 Jews inside Greater Romania.

³³ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 71 – 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁶ Ion I. Moța, *Cranii de lemn*, 218– 25.

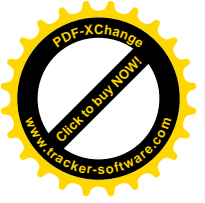


Codreanu often praised the 1922 student strike as the moment of political awakening for his generation. Born out of the troubled times following the Great War, the 1922 student protests represented everything that went wrong with interwar Romania. Although Romanians were among the victors in the war, the young generation also considered itself as a victim of the newly implemented democratic system and of what they perceived as the growing assault of ethnic minorities in every field. This state of affairs fueled anti-Semitic and antidemocratic feelings on behalf of the young generation that eventually turned to fascism as a political form of representation. The emergence of Romanian fascism is thus, strictly related to the post-war student movements.

Benefiting from this trend, Codreanu managed to channel the political energies of the youth into a fully-fledged fascist movement, i.e. the Iron Guard, which aimed at accomplishing a regenerative project by creating a 'new man' and a 'new country'. By joining Codreanu's movement, the youth thought that it was fulfilling its historical mission, that they were making history for the nation, just as their parents did during the Great War. However, the violent failure of the Iron Guard regenerative project also brought the destructive end of the 1922 generation.

I. 3. Old and New Together: Codreanu's Activity within A.C. Cuza's National-Christian Defense League, from Cooperation to Generational Conflict

The founding of LANC in March 1923 brought together Cuza's prestige and Codreanu's energy. Codreanu got involved in organizing the movement in various regions, an experience that would prove highly useful for him in the



future. One of the goals of Cuza was to use the student movement in order to influence the ongoing debates regarding the new constitution.³⁷ Nevertheless, the constitution was adopted and it conferred civil rights for the Jewish minority, much to the dislike of Codreanu. As a consequence, he staged a plot together with some of his closest militants in order to avenge the alleged injustices included in the constitution as well as the general state of the country. When plotting in the Autumn of 1923 to shoot several personalities whom he and his followers considered being responsible for the aforementioned deeds, Codreanu argued that the most important thing was to first take down the Romanian traitors and only after that the other enemies. In his own words: "If I had a single bullet, and in front of me an enemy and a traitor, I would shoot the traitor"³⁸

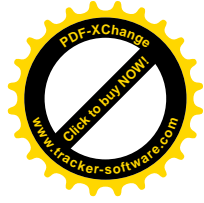
The plot, however, was planned in a sloppy manner, and those who took part in it were easily arrested and sent to the *Văcărești* prison. Although it failed, the plot managed to bring together and create a feeling of solidarity within a group that would later on be the core of the Legionary Movement: Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion I. Moța, Ilie Gârneață, Tudose Popescu, Corneliu Georgescu, and Radu Mironovici – the *Văcăreșteni*. By his own account, it was during this experience that Codreanu came up with the idea of forming a movement named after the Archangel Michael, whose icon from the prison church deeply impressed him.³⁹

Codreanu was eventually acquitted and returned to Iași. Fully aware of his violent potential, the authorities sent a new prefect of the police to the city of Iași,

³⁷ Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 74.

³⁸ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 130.

³⁹ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 138.



Constantin Manciu. Several violent encounters between the students and the police occurred, as tension reigned over the city. Following the trial of a student, Codreanu got into a fight with Manciu, shooting and killing him.⁴⁰ The ensuing trial was moved to Focșani and then Turnu-Severin, because of public pressure. With many of his partisans coming to support him, Codreanu was finally acquitted in May 1925, and decided to go to France, with the declared purpose of continuing his studies in Grenoble.

After this initial stage of good political cooperation the views of A. C. Cuza and his younger disciple began to diverge. Thus, a gradual process of ideological separation developed between Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and his mentor, AC Cuza. German historian Armin Heinen rightfully mentioned that there were differences among the leadership of LANC since its establishment, particularly with respect to the ways of conducting political actions.⁴¹

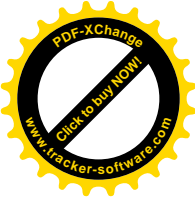
Some historians placed the emergence of the conflict between Codreanu and Cuza around 1925-1926,⁴² while others saw the departure of Moța and Codreanu to France, with the declared intention of continuing their studies, as a sign that they became undesirable for the more conservative policy of LANC, because of their radicalism.⁴³ On this precise episode which is very important for the ideological clarification of the Romanian far right, one would like to make two additions that will help enrich the area of interpretation: a typological one and a documentary one.

⁴⁰ Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail de la mit la realitate*, 148.

⁴¹ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 119.

⁴² Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail dela mit la realitate*, 154.

⁴³ Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 86.



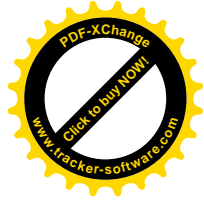
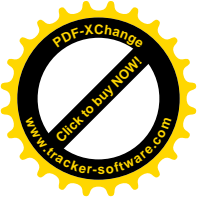
American historian Stanley G. Payne, in his valuable work *A History of Fascism 1914 - 1945*, insisted on the differentiation to be made between what he called the “three faces of authoritarian nationalism.”⁴⁴ The interwar period witnessed the coexistence of these three types of authoritarian nationalisms (conservative right, radical right and fascism), and this generates some confusion in their analysis. According to Payne, a clear separation should be made between fascist movements and the non-fascist authoritarian right.⁴⁵ In addition to the common elements shared by these currents (aesthetic and symbolic), especially in the mid-30s, authoritarian and conservative right was clearly more moderate than the fascists, with a more traditionalist approach, seeking “to avoid major social changes and any cultural revolution.”⁴⁶

Payne's typology, based mostly on references drawn from the evolution of Western extreme right, has an equivalent in the Romanian case. With a clearly weakened conservative right in the interwar period, the fight on the field of extreme authoritarian nationalism was between a radical right such as that represented by A. C. Cuza and fascist project proposed by Codreanu since 1927. The elements separating these two projects are connected with political practice (more violently radical in the case of Codreanu's movement) but also with a fascist political scaffold which proposed the fundamental change of the existing order through a would-be regenerative project (but visibly destructive in its consequences) of creating the “new man”. To all of this, a dynamic generational

⁴⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 14 – 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15; for the Romanian case, Payne mentions the Iron Guard as representative for fascism and the national-Christians as embodying the radical right.

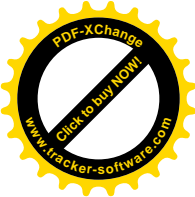
⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.



conflict must be added, with a younger generation who felt entitled to exercise its violent radical program because it strongly believed that the generation which preceded it had betrayed its mission to guide them towards the future.

In order to provide a more complete image and to give documentary consistency to the doctrinal and political practice clarifications among the Romanian interwar extreme right, we resort to an epistolary interlude. In the A. C. Cuza personal archival fund, located at the Central National Historical Archives in Bucharest, there are two letters sent by Codreanu to Cuza, in less than one year. The first letter was dated November 30, 1924 and sent from the Galata prison in Iași, while the second was dispatched on November 3, 1925 from Grenoble (France).

The letter dated November 30, 1924 was sent by Codreanu from the Galata prison where he was jailed following the assassination of Constantin Manciu, police prefect, and reveals the future legionary leader in a position of complete deference towards Cuza as a political leader and as teacher. Codreanu asked Cuza for forgiveness for having left the political struggle, but it assured him “that my mind lives in the light of the bright truth that you have preached for a lifetime and from which I could also taste. The Truth of the Nationality.” The letter, reproduced below, ended with Codreanu’s request towards his professor to receive the books necessary for the preparation of the political economy classes for the first year of doctoral studies.



“Galata prison,
November 30, 1924

Esteemed Mr. Professor,

I have returned to my own things. Mine are those that are given to me from the heavens, from God. Being like that, I am healthy and I feel all right.

Forgive me for deserting you. For deserting my fiancé ... friends ‘Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas’ –

Rest assure, however, that my mind is not set on deserting you, that my mind lives in the light of the bright truth that you have preached for a lifetime and from which I could also taste. The Truth of the Nationality. And if faith pulled me out of the ranks of those who are fighting for it, I am still trying to contribute, through my prayers. In the insipid light of the candle I pray to God each evening, for your health and triumph, and of all the fighters, and of my nation.

This truth shall triumph. And let the triumph be brighter than the light of the sun.

Then, the empire of darkness, of Satan, will be shaking from the ground. And all those ruled by Satan will be frightened.

And all those suffering for the truth shall rejoice, and those who rejoice in untruth, shall suffer.

*

Now, before ending and sending you my salute from the hill of Galata, I would like to ask you something. I would need here the books necessary for preparing the first doctoral year in economics. My multiple requests for a tome on Roman law (Girard) have been in vain.

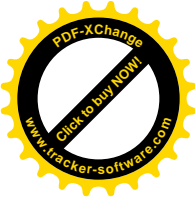
That is why I have decided to start with the study of political economy, required for first year.

I respectfully ask you to recommend all that I have to prepare and also to intervene so that I can borrow these tomes from the faculty library.

Please receive my respectful regards, also to the Madam and to Dodo.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Central National Historical Archives - Bucharest (hereafter ANIC), Fond A. C. Cuza, Dosar 47 / 1924, p. 1.

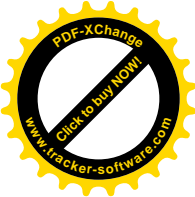


The trial that followed after the assassination of C. Manciu turned Codreanu into a public figure, recognized nationwide. On the way back from Turnu Severin, where the trial took place, Codreanu and Cuza spoke in front of enthusiastic crowds. Codreanu regarded this as a crucial moment, which could have taken L.A.N.C. to power, an opportunity that had been missed because of A Cuza, who did not know “to put to good use a great tactical advantage that political movements encounter so seldom.”⁴⁸ With this bitter taste, and feeling isolated (as he later confessed),⁴⁹ in the fall of 1925 Codreanu chose to go to France to study as his relationship with Cuza deteriorated visibly.

This state of affairs was confirmed by the letter sent by Codreanu to Cuza on November 3, 1925, from Grenoble. The offer to enter the central committee of the LANC, which A. C. Cuza made to Codreanu through the agency of Moța, was met with a refusal that included in it, even if slightly toned down, all the discontents accumulated during the last year. This refusal letter is a valuable document for bringing to light the differences of vision, doctrine and political practice already emerging between the two generations of the Romanian far right. Codreanu stressed the misunderstandings that took place inside LANC over the years and emphasized the desire of the youth to preserve their freedom of action, which can be understood as the desire for radicalization of their political struggle. The letter, which is reproduced below, ended with a paragraph meant to reassure Cuza of the loyalty of its younger political partners, but subsequent events have shown that differences between the two were irreconcilable.

⁴⁸ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 195.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.



“Grenoble 3 Novembre 1925
19, rue Joseph Chaurion

Esteemed Mr. Professor,

Several days ago Moța also arrived here. We want you to know that we are all right and that we have enrolled at the University in order to complete our studies.

At his arrival, Moța brought me the news that you have ordered my inclusion in the central committee of L.A.N.C., so that the youth would be represented in this committee by a member of its own.

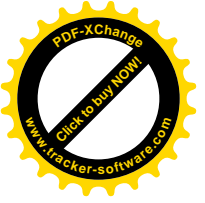
Hearing this news, I hasten to write you my opinion: I think it would be better not to take part in this committee, for many reasons. Among them would be, first of all, the fact that we, the youth, hold somehow different views than the LANC committee with respect to the ways of action. From this point of view – and I think it is better to tell the truth – we prefer the freedom of action. Because we don't want our actions, which at a certain moment might not be in the spirit of the committee, to engage this committee and even the entire organization of the League, creating who knows what inconveniences for the League, for the members of the committee, or for me in relation to the committee.

As a matter of fact, You might know that I have already been part of a committee, the Iași regional one, as secretary of Dr. Șumuleanu. For the reason expounded above I had to leave the committee in September 1924. On the other hand, I don't know if you are aware of the situation of Moța who in 1923, while having been on the committee of the “Romanian Action,” has since been eliminated from that committee for the action that we carried out against a government that betrayed its nation.

Then, besides all this, there is the fact that I will be out of the country for more than I have expected. I need, for the sake of my health, a longer period of rest, in which time I hope to take the doctoral exam as well. Therefore, it is an absence of almost a year.

All this time I don't think I could contribute anything to the activity of the committee, and I would occupy a place that another person could occupy with much more use.

As a matter of fact, You know better that we, the youth, do not have the need to instantly be a part of the committee. We are always ready to defend with our own lives the honour and the life of the national defence movement, the honour and the life of its leader



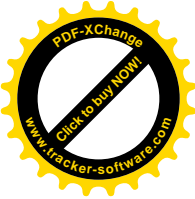
and of the eternal truth that he embodies and for which we swore allegiance until our death.

Please accept once again the assurance of my devotion.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.”⁵⁰

The differences of vision regarding the manner of political action revealed by the reading of the two letters above acquired a doctrinal stake immediately after the establishment of the Legionary Movement in 1927. The legionary discourse about the partisans of A. C. Cuza would be part of creating for the Legionary Movement its own identity by rejecting key elements of the doctrine of former comrades. This process was not easy, but it gradually evolved into a distinct regenerative project that would place the Legionary Movement on the political map of interwar Romania.

⁵⁰ ANIC, Fond A. C. Cuza, Dosar 48/ 1925, pp. 1 – 2.



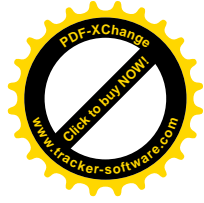
CHAPTER II

Establishing the Legion: the Founding of the Legion of the Archangel Michael and its Development in the First Years of Existence (1927 - 1932)

II. 1. Separating the Boys from the Men – the Founding of the Legion of the Archangel Michael: *Pământul Strămoșesc*, Generational Conflict and the Structuring of the Movement

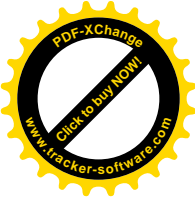
The founding of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in June 1927 was marked by Codreanu's decision to break up with the traditional and rigid way of doing politics that was characteristic of LANC and was based also on his abilities to energize a core group of ardent followers who saw in him the leader of the young generation that would regenerate and rejuvenate the country. In addition to that, and in no way less important, the genesis of the Legion was also connected with everyday politics, and stemmed from the string of inner struggles that had harmed LANC. The occurrence of political factions and dissident parties was something typical for the interwar Romanian political milieu. In this recent tradition, the emergence of the Legion can also be regarded as an example of “politics as usual”, with a group of dissenting political activists that decided to break away from a mainstream party and form a rival movement.

This early stage in the existence of the movement is marked by the formation of certain group solidarities between Codreanu and his closest followers. Left without the support of an important party such as A. C. Cuza's LANC, Codreanu found himself in a position where he had to build something



anew, and used this group of young followers as the hardcore for this project. These solidarities, forged throughout the 1920s in the student movement, would prove essential for the beginnings of the movement and would go on unchallenged until 1933 – 1934. An interesting and original way of assessing the genesis of the movement is to look at its actions during the first six months of its existence as they were reflected by the Legion's newspaper, *Pământul Strămoșesc*. This choice has a plurality of motivations. First of all, the archival material existent from the founding year of the Legion is not abundant, as Codreanu, although under surveillance, was regarded only as a local political agitator. Also, not many of those who took part in the founding of the Legion left writings about that period, and even Codreanu himself used the party newspaper to reminisce about this episode in his work, *Pentru Legionari*. Furthermore, besides the articles written by important figures such as Codreanu and Moța, and which have been used by a number of historians of Romanian fascism, the current chapter investigates the contributions of then emerging militants who would later become important leaders of the Legion. Special emphasis will be placed on the following issues: generational conflict and the need for regeneration, anti-Semitism as a salient ideological trait, the structuring of the Legion, the ritual component, daily life and gender roles, and the social and geographical components in the early days of the movement.

Codreanu founded the Legion at a moment when his status within LANC was diminished and the attention and popularity gained in 1924 – 1925 was slowly but steadily fading away. In addition to that, his father became a



dissenting voice against Cuza's handling of the LANC's leadership. He described the founding moment in austere terms, admitting that he was surrounded just by the *Văcăreșteni*, and a few students. In the evening of June 24, 1927, at 10 o'clock a meeting that lasted only one minute took place. The only event of the meeting was the reading of a short order by Codreanu himself:

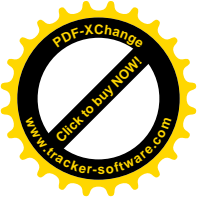
Today, on Friday June 24, 1927 (Saint John the Baptist), ten o'clock in the evening, the "LEGION OF THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL" is founded under my leadership. Those who believe unboundedly may come in these ranks. Those who have doubts should remain outside. I nominate Radu Mironovici as the chief of the icon's guard. Corneliu Z. Codreanu¹

This act of birth was followed the next day by the symbolic unraveling of the ties the young legionaries had to A. C. Cuza, and this was accomplished after a group visit to his home. Codreanu narrated this episode with an obvious emotional tone, emphasizing that the meeting took place in the same room where Cuza baptized him 28 years ago. The small group read a letter to Cuza in which they asked him to undo the oaths they took when they joined his party, stating that they do not believe anymore in the political path he was pursuing at the moment. Cuza accepted their departure advising them not to make the kind of political mistakes that would come at a very high price.²

The aftermath of the break-up was described by Codreanu in decisive terms, with feelings of loneliness and despair intertwining with the sense that he and his followers have been entrusted with a historical mission to reshape the country and its inhabitants. It is at this point in his *Pentru legionari* where Codreanu articulated his contempt towards political programs while showcasing

¹ Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 229.

² Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 230.



his bid to create a “new man” with hero-like qualities, a maker of history that would be able to maximize “all the potential of human magnification sown by God in the blood of our people.”³

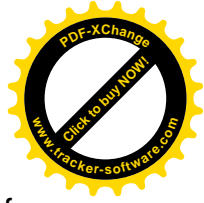
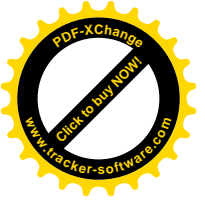
On the pragmatic end of his newly founded political movement, Codreanu “felt the need” to have a newspaper that could be used in order “to broaden our area of influence, to formulate our life norms and to conduct our actions.”⁴ The name, *Pământul Strămoșesc* (Land of our Forefathers) was meant to symbolize the connection with the soil of the country, in which the ancestors rest, a permanent call for struggle and bravery, and the awakening of “the warrior qualities of our race.”⁵

For Codreanu and his followers, the paper became the most emblematic outlet in terms of disseminating their political ideas and their world view. The leading article in the first issue had the same title as the paper, and it was signed by all the founders of the Legion. The article justified the political undertaking of Cuza’s followers. They argued that the national movement was on the brink of a disaster and stated that their efforts to save it had been going on for two years, alluding to Codreanu’s own actions within LANC. Their point of view, presented in a rhetoric that emphasized generational discrepancies was very revealing:

³ Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 239. The question of the ‘new man’ in the ideology of the Legionary Movement was a crucial one, a thread that connected the various stages of its development. I have tackled this topic in my MA thesis *Young Romanians into Legionaries: The Quest for the "New Man" in the Ideology of the Romanian Legionary Movement (1927-1937)* (Central European University, 2003), and have also published an article entitled “Fascism and its Quest for the 'New Man:' The Case of the Romanian Legionary Movement,” in *Studia Hebraica*, 4 (2004): 349 - 61.

⁴ Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 244.

⁵ Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 244.



"If the elders did not understand the need to unite in front of the enemy in this difficult moment, no matter the personal or other issues that disrupted them, they do not deserve our encouragement nor the one of the nation. So we didn't take part in the elections, we didn't vote, we didn't propagandize but we sat in the church praying for the forgiveness of everyone's sins."⁶

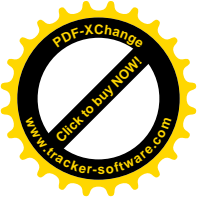
Faced with this perceived state of disunity that threatened, according to their vision, the future of the youth and their nationalist and anti-Jewish fight, the five leaders decide to break away and form a legion of their own, under the slogan "Face the enemy!" The first issue contained articles written by all five founding members of the Legion, in a backward and forward looking attempt to justify the departure from LANC and also showcase their emerging project.

Codreanu's first article outlined the main principles of the newly born movement, stating "we shall create an idealistic, youthful and voluntary movement, organized on the principle of the hierarchy."⁷ The regenerative discourse was highly visible, as Codreanu saw the birth of his movement as a purifying act that presupposed a process of self-cleansing and cutting away of the perceived putrid and weak parts of the national movement. The sense one gets after reading the first issue of *Pământul Strămoșesc* is that of a group solidarity born out of the shared political experiences that spanned a period of five years, starting with the 1922 student strikes. A process of reconstructing the recent past as a legitimizing substantiation took place.

The role of second in command inside the Legion is symbolically occupied by Ion I. Moța, who stood by Codreanu's side during the political struggles of the

⁶ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 1 (August 1, 1927): 3.

⁷ Codreanu, "E ceasul vostru: Veniți!" (It is your time: Come!), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 1 (August 1, 1927): 3.

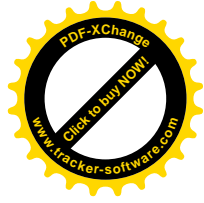
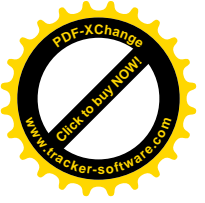


1920s gaining the legitimacy to be one of the main spokespersons for the movement. His article in the inaugural issue also outlined a regenerative message, discussing “this new fertilization of the lost soul of a nation” and elaborating in mystical language a synthesis between God’s will and the saving of the Romanian nation.⁸ According to Moța, the legionaries would act as recipients of the divine saving force. Nevertheless, he argued that this force needed to be organized, and their movement was doing just that, under Codreanu’s leadership. A leader that was not elected, but acquiesced by those who, attracted by a mysterious force constituted the discipline cells of the movement.

The other founding members of the movement also contributed with articles to the first issue of the Legion’s paper, in a bid to show the unity of ideas that were characteristic of the group. Even if coming after the articles of Codreanu and Moța, their contributions are also interesting to analyze, as they give the reader a sense of what went on beyond the ideas of the two aforementioned leaders in the first days of the Legion. Thus, Corneliu Georgescu argued that the political parties were sold to foreign interests and tried to “envelop the process of decay of the national body” with concepts such as humanity and eternal peace but the atmosphere “started to have the smell of a cadaver”.⁹ According to Georgescu, the awakening was determined by the student movement of 1922, the constant reference point for the legionaries in

⁸ Ion I. Moța, “La Icoană” (At the Icon), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 1 (August 1, 1927): 9-10.

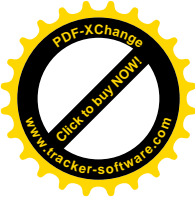
⁹ Corneliu Georgescu, “Nădejdi sfărâmate” (Broken Hopes), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 1 (August 1, 1927): 11-12.



these early days of their movement. Out of that moment emerged the admiration for A. C. Cuza, followed by the massive joining of his party. In time, however, that generation felt betrayed by LANC because the organization showed signs of disunity and inner bickering, thus leading to its weakening and giving the impression that it was similar to the other political parties.

The other two founding members of the Legion wrote their articles likewise focusing on the relationship with A. C. Cuza's LANC, but in a different key. Not hiding their disappointment with the current state of events, Radu Mironovici and Ilie Gârneață decried the lack of unity within the nationalist movement and also stated the sheer joy that their perceived enemy had while witnessing this political situation. Mironovici wrote his piece under the form of a letter addressed to a fellow from the countryside and he likened the disturbances that had occurred within LANC to the burning of one's house. In his words, "today, like a painful remainder, only some dark and smoked walls of the old house have remained." His solution was to "slowly *rebuild a new house* that should twice as beautiful: Here it is, the *Legion* to which we have just laid a first corner stone."¹⁰ Along the same lines, Gârneață expressed his dissatisfaction with the "satanic joy" that could be read in the "poisoned prose of the Jewish newspapers" because of the inner struggles that went on in LANC, while vituperating that "the enemy is rejoicing and triumphant for he knows that discord is the vanguard of defeat and

¹⁰ Radu Mironovici, "Către un frate de la sat" (To a brother from the village), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 1 (August 1, 1927): 12.



defeat is the prologue of eternal death.”¹¹ Just to strengthen the determination of the Legion, Gârneață used a threatening anti-Semitic language that would become predominant in these first years of the movement:

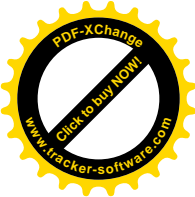
So, the Jews that are joyous today and who, like ravens, hover about the sacred altars believing that the time for their rule has come, - let them know that in this country there is a corner where at any time, day and night, there is a guard that is watching with its face towards the enemy!¹²

Other contributions to the paper give us the opportunity to assess how the newly emerged movement managed to attract its leadership, and what the ideological background was of those who joined. The case of Gheorghe Clime is illustrative in this regard. Clime was a sympathizer of Cuza and a local leader of LANC who decided to join the Legion at its inception. As a personal manifesto for his actions, Clime wrote an introspective article for the first issue of *Pământul Strămoșesc* presenting his political upbringing and hopes for the future. In this article, entitled “Dreams – Hopes - Reality”, Clime talked about his political coming of age in the fall of 1905 when he was only 16 but already aware of the main issues on the public agenda such as the Jewish and the peasant question. By his own account, his main readings were those of Vasile Conta.¹³ His first political hopes were elevated when Nicolae Iorga and A. C. Cuza founded their Nationalist-Democratic party in 1910. He and his politically minded entourage helped with the propaganda for the new party and were happy to see the two

¹¹ Ilie Gârneață, “Neînțelegera dintre frați – bucuria dușmanului” (Discord among brothers – the joy of the enemy), *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 1, (August 1, 1927): 12-13.

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Gh. Clime, “Visuri. – Nădejdi. – Realitate” (Dreams – Hopes - Reality), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 1 (August 1, 1927): 13.



leaders entering the parliament. After the war and the discord between Cuza and Iorga, a new glimmer of hope emerged when A. C. Cuza founded LANC, the movement everybody believed in and which was now in great trouble. It was this point when Clime turned to what he considered the current reality, *i. e.* the fact that the nationalist movement was scattered and demoralized and he, although of an older age, called for a regrouping around the young Codreanu and Moța with a clear goal: "Saving the movement and defeating the Jews".¹⁴

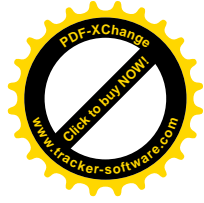
The launching of the movement and its paper coincided with the time when the Romanian monarch, King Ferdinand, passed away. In the obituary written after the king's death, the Romanian monarchy was praised and Ferdinand's patriotism was highlighted. The king was appropriated as a symbol for the movement, as he was regarded as "an Archangel Michael" who fiercely fought against the enemies of the country and as an example for the legionaries:

Enemies from within and from without, (...) should know that if our King Ferdinand himself was an Archangel Michael, who with the sword in his hand sought the happiness of his people and country, hitting and scattering the enemies, then under the eyes of this archangel many have grown on Romanian soil that would do the same. From the heavens, he would regard us with happiness.¹⁵

As a conclusion to the first issue, a small note regarding its content and the obvious similarities of the contributions was published. The editors felt the need to justify these striking resemblances and argued that, although the articles were thematically unitary, the contributors were not in the same place when they were asked to write their articles. Instead, the editors said, this demonstrated the unity

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵ "A murit Regele nostru" (Our King Died), *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 1, (August 1, 1927): 7.

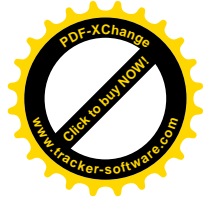
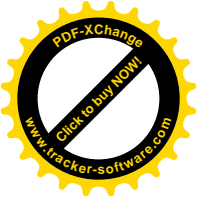


in thought and feelings among those entering the Legion, and that such an army is destined to win, not to fail.

The slow birth of the movement as well as its first efforts to organize itself in a coherent manner are best reflected in the articles published in *Pământul Strămoșesc*. One of such articles published in mid-August 1927 was the first attempt to explain the organization of the Legion and to describe its main principles and the projected structure. Thus the Legion of the Archangel Michael was defined as “a national, voluntary, independent and youthful organization”. The “youthfulness of the soul, meaning purity in life” was considered its core component, while the main principles of action were faith, work, order, hierarchy and discipline. By fighting according to these principles against its enemies, the Legion pictured itself as a “School of Justice”. The Legion intended to unite the youth in order to do away with the old system, and to act as a school at whose end “a new Romania rests, awaited by every Romanian.”¹⁶

The Legion was divided into four sections: the Youth section (aimed at including every young Romanian that would obey the principles of the Legion) with a subsection called “Cross Brotherhoods” designed for those who were not yet 19 years old. The Legion’s Safeguard section contained mature militants “that want to support, encourage and protect the effort of the Legion’s youth for a new, Christian, Romanian, and disciplined life.” The third section, entitled the Helping section, had the same objective as the previous one. The International section was the fourth one and was intended to group the Romanians from abroad in

¹⁶ Legiunea “Arhanghelul Mihail” (The Legion of the “Archangel Michael”), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 2 (August 15, 1927): 3-4.



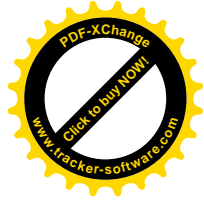
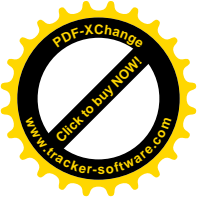
order to “propagate the truth about the invasion of the Romanian fatherland by the Jews, through a journal to be published in Paris under the name *L’Archange Michel*”.¹⁷

The Legion was led by a committee and was advised by a council comprised of former student leaders as well as members from other social categories. The Senate of the Legion was instituted as an advisory body of persons aged 50 or older and was regarded as the highest authority of the Legion. In this programmatic document, a special paragraph at the end was dedicated to the relationship with LANC, described as “very close, because the Legion was established because of the disunity within the League and precisely with the aim of saving the national movement from total defeat.”¹⁸

At a closer look, this rather ambiguous and sloppy ideological and organizational construct has revealed the initial state of confusion that marked the young legionaries. As one can perceive also by looking at the first issue of their newspaper, the only two constant topics were fierce anti-Semitism and the need to clarify the relationship with LANC. One can also identify, as historian Constantin Iordachi did, a “charismatic genesis” of the Legion, with a strong salvational bent that “shared most of the features of a millenarian salvation, but reinterpreted them in view of Romanian national symbols and a specific socio-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.



political context.”¹⁹ Or, to put in Roger Griffin’s conceptual framework, the Legion resembled, at a micro level, a certain type of “palingenetic political community”.²⁰

The discourse of the first legionary militants shifted easily between victimization and vengefulness, describing a movement in crisis, under constant siege from various enemies but which also threatened to solve these issues through violent means. An example of this type of discourse is an article by Corneliu Georgescu in which he described the actions of the legionaries as a process of winning by suffering and self-sacrifice:

We are in deep crisis. Numerous and strong enemies are chasing and battering us; still too weak to crush them, we abide and suffer. We abide because it is our duty to expiate the sins of our parents. And we suffer because the sufferings are the thorns spread on the path to victory.²¹

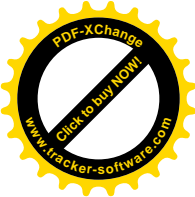
A change in tone could be noticed after reading the poem “Vom înălța spânzurători” written by Iustin Ilieșu, one of the first and most prolific poets of the Legion. This was a rudimentary xenophobic poem, in which the foreigners are blamed for exploiting the country, and Romanians are summoned to bring the guilty ones to the ladder.²² Poetry would become one of the genres heavily employed by the Legion in its discourse, and although it clearly differed in quality and format, it served as an important mobilizing factor, especially when used as texts for the legionary marching songs.

¹⁹ Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics, and Violence*, 45, 51.

²⁰ Roger Griffin, “The Palingenetic Political Community: Rethinking the Legitimation of Totalitarian Regimes in Inter-War Europe,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 3, 3 (Winter 2002): 24 – 43.

²¹ Corneliu Georgescu, “Aprindeți făclia credinței!” (Light the Torch of Hope!), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 2 (August 15, 1927): 5-6.

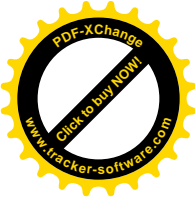
²² Iustin Ilieșu, “Vom înălța spânzurători” (We Shall Build Gallows), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 2 (August 15, 1927): 10.



The issue of financing the movement and its publications, as well as the Legion's attitude towards money was highly visible in the first issues of *Pământul Strămoșesc*. The publishers complained about the permanent lack of money that affected even basic needs such as buying stamps for answering the letters received by the journal. Occasional donors and those who arranged multiple subscriptions to the journal were mentioned and thanked in special columns. These columns, sources that have not been sufficiently explored by scholars, give us details about the first strongholds of the Legion, and allow some reflections regarding the social component of the movement in its incipient stage. Thus, donations were given in small amounts, ranging between 200 and 500 lei. The first donors come from future strongholds of the movement: southern Moldova (Putna, Tecuci), Bukovina, but also places such as Sibiu and Hunedoara. As well, the page dedicated to the supposedly numerous "fan mail" received by the Legion gave a sense of the places where the journal, and implicitly the Legion, had an impact, and the strongholds were the same: Bukovina, Putna, Hunedoara (Orăștie). These are letters from people who expressed their joy for the emergence of this movement. The penetration of the journal, which is connected to the scarce presence of Codreanu's "first hour" followers, is much more difficult in places such as Bucharest. A bitter, short article stated that the journal was rejected for distribution by the central office of distributors who was led by a Jew.²³

Moța and Codreanu remained the main message carriers for the Legion, with the former introducing topics that came from his Transylvanian background.

²³ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 3 (September 1, 1927): 13.



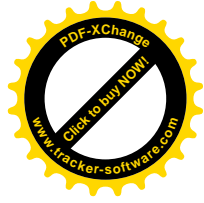
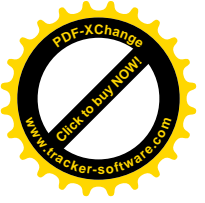
Moța talked about the double threat - Hungarian and Jewish - over Transylvania, and concluded one of his vicious anti-Semitic and anti-Hungarian rants with a warning towards the Jews that their attempt to disunite “the Christian brotherhood” would not succeed. Moța considered that first the Jews have to be brought to an end, and after that, the divergences between countries like Hungary and Romania would be tackled.²⁴

Codreanu focused on the means to forge a new work-ethic for the Legion, in a bid to discipline his young followers. He launched a call to work for all those who wanted to be in the Legion, stressing that one of the main rules within the movement was work as a way of lifting the nation from servitude. Work was to be accompanied by order and discipline, as Codreanu sought to ensure a leadership principle among his militants. As a first objective of this common work endeavor, Codreanu aimed at assuring the sustainability of the journal by reaching a target of 3000 subscribers. The short article about this issue also gives us an idea about the initial number of members, because he counted 300 persons as “all our friends that want to enlist in the ‘Legion of work and battle.’”²⁵

The bond between the two legionary leaders also transgressed the realm of politics, as on August 18, 1927 Moța wedding with Iredenta Codreanu, the sister of the legionary leader, took place. Information regarding the ceremony,

²⁴ Ion I. Moța, “O vorbă ardelenească pentru ‘lordul’ Rothermere” (A Transylvanian Word for “Lord” Rothermere, *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 3 (September 1, 1927): 6-7.

²⁵ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, “Activitatea Legiunii. Pentru cei cari sunt în Legiune și pentru cei cari doresc să fie” (The Activity of the Legion. For Those Who Are in the Legion and for Those Who Want to Be) *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 3 (September 1, 1927): 7.



held in a “Christian and nationalist spirit” and with the participation of numerous priests and the founders of the Legion was inserted in the Legion’s newspaper.²⁶

Structuring the Movement

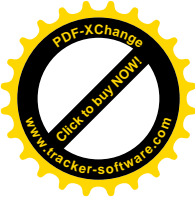
The organizational aspect was a key one for Codreanu at the beginnings of the movement. He attempted to structure it according to his own will in an effort to avoid what he considered the mistakes of ordinary political movement. In the pages of *Pământul Strămoșesc*, Codreanu explained in great detail to his sympathizers the desired organizational structure of the movement, which he divided into four sections.

Section I, *the Youth section*, had as requirements for enrolment the bringing of five subscriptions to the journal. According to Codreanu, those five subscriptions demonstrated “both the moral warranty and the work potential” for one to enter the Legion. After enrolment, members were asked to dedicate a quarter of an hour of daily work for the Legion, and to convert five individuals that should be “baptized in the faith of the Legion within a maximum of 5 months”.²⁷ The application had to be written on a postcard and sent to the Legion’s headquarter in Iași. Also, the “Cross Brotherhoods”, which was an elite subsection of the youth division, aimed to create the “good soldiers of tomorrow’s Romania”, in order to be up to the struggles that would require them to have a “quick-witted mind, a great soul and a fist of steal.”²⁸

²⁶ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 3 (September 1, 1927): 14-15.

²⁷ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 4 (September 15, 1927): 3.

²⁸ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 6 (October 15, 1927): 3.



Section II, entitled the *Protection section*, contained all the adult members who wanted to “support, encourage and protect the efforts towards a new, Christian, Romanian and disciplined life of the Legion’s youth.” The organizational unit was the nucleus (later called “the nest”), which grouped a minimum of three and maximum of 13 members. From this section the Legion wanted to create the moral elite of the nation.²⁹

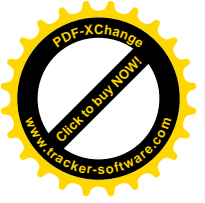
The third section of the movement was entitled *the Romanian Women’s Help Section* and the leaders of the Legion claimed that “the rise and fall of nations is directly related to the moral strength of the woman, the mother, because she can create either heroes or villains.”³⁰ Four principles guided the mothers from the Legion: to raise their children as Christians who would later on in life reject atheism not to let their children fall victims to the fashions made up by the “Jews from Paris” to oppose the immoral and unhealthy dances and to fight in order to prevent Romanian country girls from becoming servants for the Jews. The organizational equivalent for the women’s sections was also the nucleus that, just like the nest, consisted of at least three and maximum of 13 members. The meetings of these groups were aimed at preparing the three models designed by the Legion for its female followers: the woman of faith, the woman of work, and the woman of action.³¹

The fourth section of the Legion was the international one, and it targeted Romanians from abroad and wanted to use them for anti-Semitic propaganda by publishing a newspaper in Paris, monitoring the media for alleged calumnies

²⁹ *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 4, (September 15, 1927): 4.

³⁰ *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 5, (October 1, 1927): 3.

³¹ *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 5, (October 1, 1927): 4.



perpetrated by the Jews and establishing close contacts with international organizations with similar goals. One can perceive this last section of the Legion as a classic case of organizational wishful thinking, taking into account the limited means Codreanu's movement had at its disposal in its early days. Needless to say, this section was never effective, and the proposed newspaper was never published. This, however, did not mean that the movement did not try to export its message abroad in the following years. Ionel Moța was one of the leaders who acted as a representative of the Legion in some international contexts, and was also in close contact with important leaders such as the French politician Charles Marras.³²

Nevertheless, still aware of the limited power of the newly founded Legion, Codreanu limited the number of members to 3000, first of all because he emphasized quality over quantity, and secondly because he realized that a higher number would be difficult to achieve. Designed as a movement and not as a political party, the Legion was not meant to take part in elections and also did not allow any dissident views within its ranks, as that was seen as disruptive to its unity.

³² Moța took part in the CAUR meeting from December 1934 in Montreux, where he was briefly investigated by the Swiss authorities for his political activity and involvement in I. G. Duca's assassination, as he would claim in a vicious letter sent to the minister of foreign affairs, Nicolae Titulescu (ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 324). For Moța's 1925 correspondence with Charles Maurras, please see the letters published by Florin Țurcanu in "Aux origines de la Garde de Fer: deux lettres de Ion Moța à Charles Maurras," in Idem, *Intellectuels, histoire et mémoire en Roumanie de l'entre-deux-guerres à l'après communisme*, (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei Române): 70 – 83.



Elite formation, communal life and local struggles

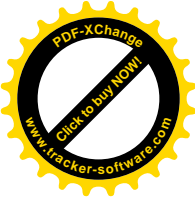
A closer look at the young militants who come into close contact with *Pământul Strămoșesc* in its early days revealed the fact that the journal often served as the breeding ground for the future elites of the Legion. The case of Ion Banea, who started publishing vitriolic articles in *Pământul Strămoșesc* as early as 1927 is revealing.³³ The articles served as battle cries and mobilizing attempts launched by one of the future leaders of the Legion who was at the beginnings of his political career alongside Codreanu. Ionel Banea was to become one of the most important legionary leaders. He helped the Legion penetrate a very important region, Sibiu, providing one of the first strongholds for the movement in Transylvania. He was also an important doctrinaire for the movement, writing the hagiographical bibliography of Codreanu, entitled *Căpitanul* (The Captain), as well as a propaganda pamphlet that proved very useful in the 1937 electoral campaign, *Ce este și ce vrea Mișcarea Legionară* (What is the Legionary Movement and What it Wants).³⁴

Another relevant example from the first months of the Legion is to be found in a short message published by the paper and sent by a young student, Iuliu Stănescu. His welcoming remarks towards the Legion read as followed:

It is my duty as a “hooligan” and Christian student to salute you on my behalf and on the behalf of my friends from the Jiu plain for the determination and energy that you demonstrate in the

³³ Among some of his articles, one may quote “La luptă!” (Let’s Fight!), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 5 (October 1, 1927): 12; “Mișcare nouă” (New Movement), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 6 (October 15, 1927): 10-11.

³⁴ Ion Banea, *Căpitanul* (The Captain), (Sibiu: 1936); Idem, *Ce este și ce vrea Mișcarea Legionară* (What is the Legionary Movement and What it Wants), (Sibiu: 1937).



commenced battled as well as to thank and praise you for your perseverance not to the disappointments we've encountered thus far into total dispiritedness.³⁵

It was on this kind of voluntary enthusiasm that the Legion built its first core group of followers. Iuliu Stănescu would to become one of the future leaders of the Iron Guard in the province of Oltenia. In December 1932 he became the administrator and editor in chief of the legionary publication *Garda Jiului* (The Jiu Guard), based in the city of Craiova, and which enjoyed an important success across Oltenia.

Going beyond the views of present and future leaders, the paper also accounted for the daily life of the legionaries, showcasing current activities such as singing, sword practice and boxing, as well as the establishing of a reading room containing “nationalist and Christian journals from allover the country and the world.”³⁶ These were the first steps initiated by Codreanu on his way to instituting a parallel educational system that would leave its mark on the development of its members.

One of the first pictures published in *Pământul Strămoșesc* was that of the “Cultural Christian Hostel”, a building designed to be the headquarters of the Legion. The building was still under construction but a group of legionaries in folk costumes enjoyed a photo opportunity on top of it, performing the salute near the recently erected cross. In many ways it symbolized the state of the movement itself: unfinished and patchy work with enthusiasm acting as the main driving force behind its development. Here is how the newspaper described the picture:

³⁵ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 4 (September 15, 1927): 13.

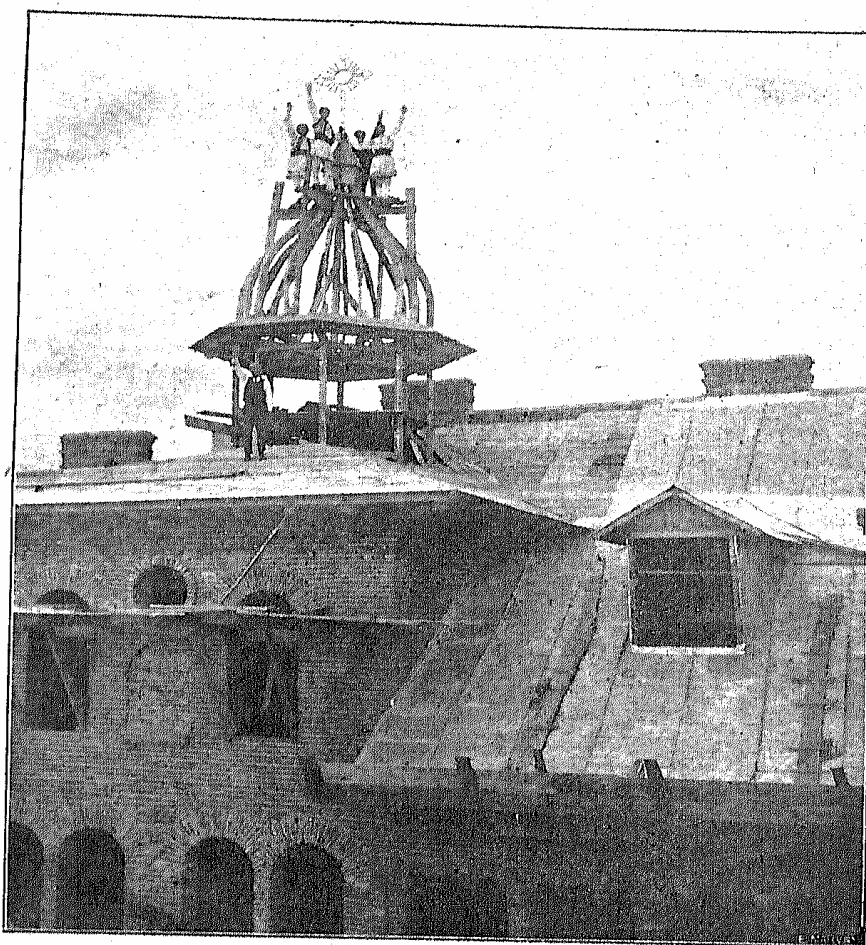
³⁶ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 4 (September 15, 1927): 14.

“When they have put in the Holy Cross, four of the aspirers for the erection of this Hostel hold a cross in one hand while joyfully raising the other arm towards the shy, the spring of their hopes and aspirations; down on the roof, the head of the construction does the same thing. Those of you who grasp the meaning of such an undertaking please send in your contributions, for the construction still needs plenty of expenditures.”³⁷

Nr. 5.

„Pământul Strămoșesc”

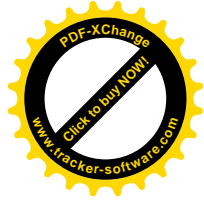
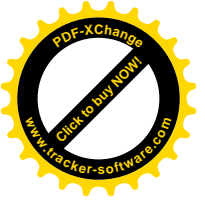
Pag. 9.



„Căminul Cultural Creștin” din Iași, ajuns cu zidirea până la înălțarea sfintei cruci, pe turnul Capelei sale.

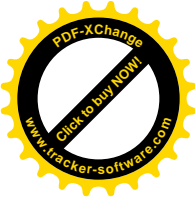
- II. 1: The “Christian Cultural Hostel” from Iași in 1927 (*Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 5 (September 15, 1927))

³⁷ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 5 (September 15, 1927): 15.



The constant preoccupation with money and with finding the means to support the movement dominated its inception. In November 1927 an article entitled “The Legion’s Work” announced the number of subscribers, which reached 2586, and cited those who helped launch the movement, starting with Father Ion Moța from Orăștie and others. Among them one can recognize future legionary leaders and supporters: Victor Silaghi, Radu Mironovici, Hristache Solomon, Gh. Clime, Ionel Banea, Neculai Totu, Ilie Gârneață, Traian Cotigă, Iuliu Stănescu, and Corneliu Georgescu. Due to the fact that each name was accompanied by the city of residence, one can partially reconstruct the early political geography of Codreanu’s sympathizers. Thus, the vast majority of the supporters came, as expected, from Moldavia, and especially from regions such as Vrancea, Bukovina, and around Iași, with some additions from the Bessarabia. One Transylvanian stronghold was Hunedoara, due to the influence of Father Ioan Moța, a Romanian Orthodox priest who was an old nationalist militant and whose son, Ionel Moța, was one of the founders of the Legion and Codreanu’s closest collaborator. Sibiu was another Transylvanian area where the Legion established some connections, with Corneliu Georgescu and Ion Banea being the most active militants. It was also quite obvious that the Legion could not penetrate vast areas of the country such as Walachia and especially Bucharest. The example of the young student Iuliu Stănescu in Oltenia was therefore an isolated one.³⁸

³⁸ “Munca Legiunii” (The Legion’s Work), *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 7, (November 1, 1927): 12-13.

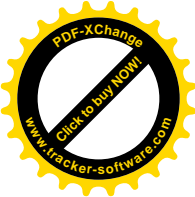


In terms of the social component, the Legion attracted many students while also appealing to priests and retired army officers, who often offered their support through financial donations, subscriptions for the newspaper and dissemination of the Legion's political ideas. Young theology students were particularly attracted to the movement, as the same issue of the journal included an article entitled "From the Students of the Theology Academy in Sibiu" signed by Nicolae Bolca which considered the Jewish menace as the most important issue confronting the country, with the Jews being branded "jackals with sideburns", "importers of poisons", and "agents of infection".³⁹

The Legion's quest towards various social strata also briefly touched upon the issue of intellectuals and their involvement with politics. The most likely person in the Legion's leadership to open this debate was Ionel Moța, who did so in an article entitled "Towards Young at Heart Intellectuals", signed only with the letter "M". Aware of its lack of brainpower, the Legion, nevertheless, sought to attract young intellectuals to its cause. Moța's article also contained a revealing fragment with respect to the self-image of the young legionaries who, like him, were graduate students:

"Well, we think that our strength lies precisely in the fact that we are not inflated with the wisdom of the time, we do not have vast, fashionable works, rich business experience (and, as a consequence, in the so called "politics") and we also do not have solid, important positions in today's science and literary system. Except for the studies for a career, a faithful and Jesus loving soul, a heart entirely devoted to the Motherland, we have nothing. We don't have special distinctions, authority in the clubs or "political fiefdoms"; we don't have extended relations with influential people, free passes in the ministries, our names are mentioned in the big press only to be mocked and derided; we are not presumptuous, we

³⁹ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 7 (November 1, 1927): 6-7.



don't have a refined profile, we worship our icons and we make the sign of the cross when we sit down for our meals; there's no sign of automobiles and fortunes, the skin of our hands is damaged, and our soul – a ridiculous, Medieval old thing: believes in God and Archangels, believes in the so-called wonders, and even believes that they can happen today ...”⁴⁰

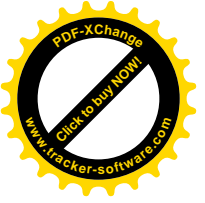
He approached the intellectuals with an obvious sense of self irony, intentionally expressing an inferiority complex that depicted some of the core values of the young legionaries as archaic, old-fashioned and even medieval, and emphasized their religious beliefs. This was a rhetorical device aimed at preparing his plea for attracting young intellectuals to the cause of the Legion. Moța emphasized that the ideas that informed the Legion stemmed from Jesus himself, and that the word of Jesus was overridden by “the rule of the satanic spirit over us through the domination of the Jews, the true armies of the Antichrist.”⁴¹ This article, devoid of any political ideas yet filled with delirious anti-Semitism did not have an impact on the targeted group, i. e. young Romanians intellectuals. For the next half decade, the Legion did not manage to attract any significant number of intellectuals, and its development rested on the shoulders of its core members.

Ritualistic Foundation

As historian Simonetta Falasca – Zamponi has pointed out, one may take “the power of discourse, including its nonlinguistic forms (rituals, myths, and

⁴⁰ “Către intelectualii tineri la suflet” (Towards Young at Heart Intellectuals), *Pământul Strămoșesc*, I, 6, (October 15, 1927): 5-7.

⁴¹ Ibid.



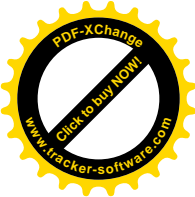
images), as an essential element in the formation of the fascist regime's self-identity, the construction of its goals and definition of ends, the making of its power.”⁴² Examining elements such as symbols, discourses and rituals, one may also get an idea of „the process through which fascism shaped its contours, delineated its purposes, negotiated its meanings, and built its authority.”⁴³ Also, the *sacralisation of politics*, which is so important for fascist movements, presupposed an acute ‘aestheticisation of politics’, which is often done with the help of theatrical elements, as Emilio Gentile argued, “weather in the form of performances of political theatre or mass spectacles.”⁴⁴

The aforementioned assertion belonging to two important historians of fascism retain their validity in the case of Romanian fascism as well. The ritualistic foundation of the Legion took place in Iași on November 8th 1927, the day of Saint Michael, the patron saint of the movement. The five founders of the movement were in the center of the ceremony, and they were regarded as those who “carried on their shoulders the heavy load of the national movement in the last five years.” The narration of this moment in the Legion’s newspaper was very indicative for the self-image of the organization, its attempt to act as a movement that was a natural and organic endpoint for centuries of Romanian history.

⁴² Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: the Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

⁴³ Ibid., 3-4.

⁴⁴ Emilio Gentile, “The Theatre of Politics in Fascist Italy” in Idem, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism*, foreword by Stanley G. Payne, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 110.

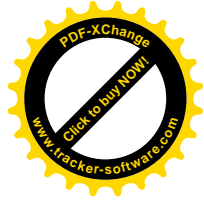
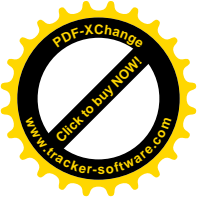


The beginning of the meeting had many of the ingredients that would be a part of the legionary political discourse and practice in the years to come: prayers, marches, symbols, songs, and appeal to history, to name just a few:

At 10 o'clock we all left for the *St. Spiridon Church*, dressed in national costumes, caps and with a big swastika near our hearts. There, a prayer was officiated, for the souls of Stephen - Ruler of Moldavia, Michael the Brave, Mircea, Ion Vodă, Horia, Cloșca and Crișan, Avram Iancu, Tudor, King Ferdinand and for 'the eternal memory of all the rulers and soldiers who fell on the battlefields in order to defend the Romanian soil against enemy invasions. (...) Marching and singing the anthem of the Legion, we returned to the hostel. There, the touching ceremony of the pledge of the first legionaries took place.⁴⁵

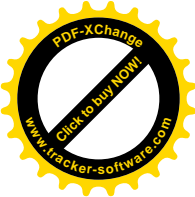
The ceremony combined traditional symbols and rituals with new ones, either borrowed from A. C. Cuza's movement (the use of the swastika, for example) or specially designed by the legionaries in order to solidify the bond between Codreanu's "first hour" faithful followers. The most important moment was the oath taken by the first official members of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. In a display of organic nationalism, rooted in the historical and heroic past of the country, the ceremony of the oath started with the mixing of the soil brought from Michael the Brave's tomb in Turda with the one brought from Războieni, a place where Stephan the Great fought one of his most important battles. The packages containing the soil were accompanied by letters written by those who collected the samples, a high school professor from Turda and Corneliu Georgescu, lawyer and co-founder of the Legion. Samples of soil were also brought from other symbolic places. Ion Moța and Corneliu Georgescu collected soil from Sarmisegetuza, the ancient fortress of Decebal, the king of

⁴⁵ "Ziua Legiunii la Iași" (The Legion's Day in Iași), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 8 (November 15, 1927): 1.



Dacia. The letter signed by the two leaders emphasized the fact that the sample of soil was collected from a place that was burned during the siege conducted by the Romans, and its red nuance symbolized the blood of the ancestors. Thus, blood and soil were coming together as elements that constituted the building blocks of the recently founded Legion. The ceremony went on with soil being brought from other important Romanian historical sites such as Călugăreni, Podul Înalt, Suceava, Hotin, Mărașești, Oituz, Turtucaia, and the tomb of Avram Iancu. Each sample came with a confirmation letter regarding its authenticity, and in the journal article short paragraphs of heroic history were inserted in order to underline the salience of the chosen places. The choices were revealing for the Legion's view of history, with great victory sites standing next to places where Romanian armies were defeated, all of them, however, having as common denominator the idea of self-sacrifice and blood tribute paid for a higher cause. From the point of view of the leadership of the movement, it is interesting to note that some of those who carried on the task of bringing the sample of soil to the ceremony would become local leaders and would play a very important part in the first years of the Legion. This was the case of people such as Ștefan Anastasescu, Hristache Solomon and Iuliu Stănescu.

The ceremony concluded with yet another ritual. The soil gathered from all over the country's most important sites was mixed and a number of leather pouches were filled with it and given to each legionary to wear. The first symbolic exchange was between Ion Moța and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, and was accompanied by a pledge specially designed for this moment. The pledge



contained five questions which underlined the creed of the newly founded Legion:

Do you vow, for the Justice of the Motherland, to restrain all your longings and personal interests? - The answer: Yes!

Admitting that the rule of the Jews over ourselves brings spiritual destruction, do you, brother, vow to fight with us for the defense, cleansing and liberation of our ancestral land? - The answer: Yes!

In this fight, will you obey the Legion of the Archangel Michael? - The answer: Yes!

Will you piously wear this pouch? - The answer: Yes!

And you will not leave us? - The answer: I will not leave!⁴⁶

The entire ceremony solidified the feeling of belonging that was so crucial for this young generation. Accompanying in writing the procession, Ionel Banea summarized the crucial importance of the ceremony and how it succeeded in strengthening the bond between those that constituted the hardcore of the Legion:

Today we are no longer divided and lost in the middle of a mass without any aim, purpose or goal other than to party – but we form a core that is stronger than iron, the ‘avant-garde’ of the Legion, which on November 8 took its first step forward. In its march, it will never go out of its way and will never back off.⁴⁷

Far from this romanticized view, the secret service who kept the ceremony under surveillance noted that only 40 people, mainly students, attended the event, which took place in a peaceful manner and that all those present had been identified.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁷ Ionel Banea, *Legământul primilor Legionari* (The Pledge of the First Legionaries), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 8 (November 15, 1927): 8.

⁴⁸ The note has been published in and others, (eds). *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România 25 iunie 1927 – 2 ianuarie 1931*, (Ideology and Rightwing

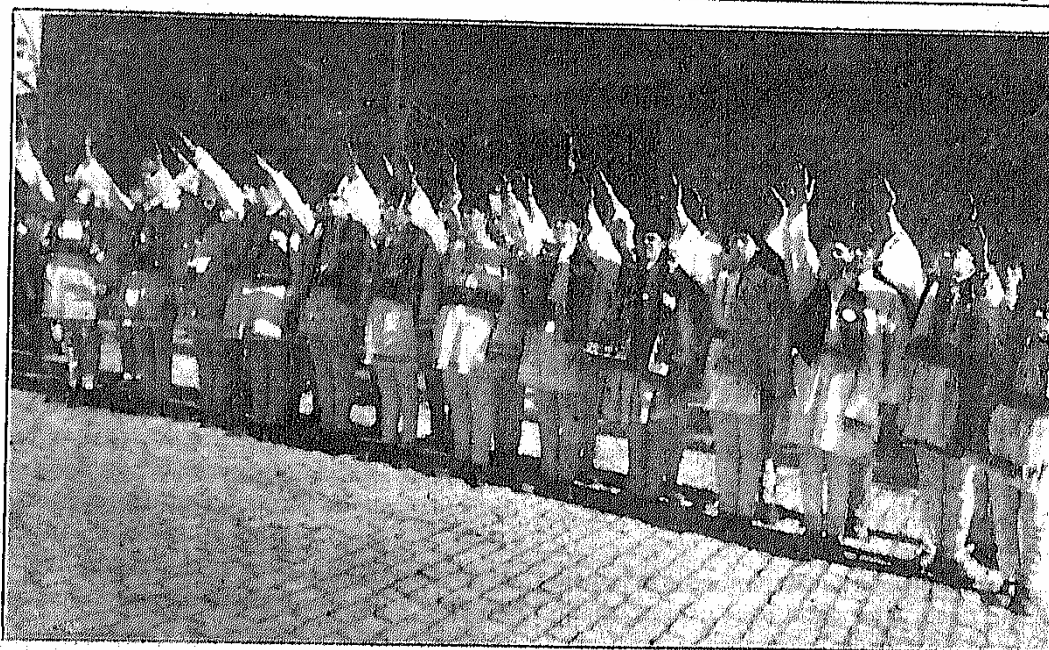
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Two photos were published in connection with the ceremony of the pledge of the first legionaries. The first one showed the leather pouch that contained the samples of soil given at the meeting, while the second one pictured the first group of legionaries, dressed in folk costumes and saluting. The rather confusing mixture of folk costumes and the fascist salute point to a hybridized display of attachment to core peasant values and the desire to construct a movement with a different form of political appeal and practice.



II. 2: The leather pouch that contained the samples of soil that were given to every legionary at the November 8, 1927 ceremony. (*Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 9 (December 1, 1927))

Formations in Romania June 25, 1927 – January 2, 1931) vol. II, (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000), p. 79.



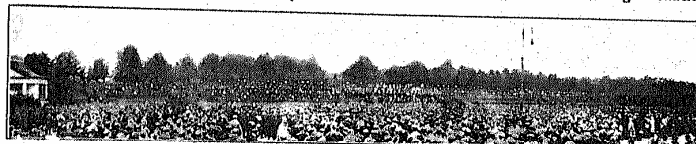
Grupul Nr. 1 de Legionari ai „Arhanghelului Mihail“.

II. 3: The first group of legionaries saluting the leaders. (*Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 9 (December 1, 1927))

In the same issue, a full page was dedicated to Adolf Hitler and his party, under the headline “The Anti-Semite Movement in Germany”. It presented pictures from the August 1927 congress of the NSDAP, outlining that Hitler “energetically reorganized” the scattered fighters who under his leadership constituted a German anti-Semitic movement that was “stronger than ever.” This early reference to Hitler and his party is important because Germany becomes the prevailing model for fascists especially from 1933, after the Nazis gained full political control. Anti-Semitism was, once again, the feature that attracted the attention of the legionaries.

Mișcarea antisemită din Germania.

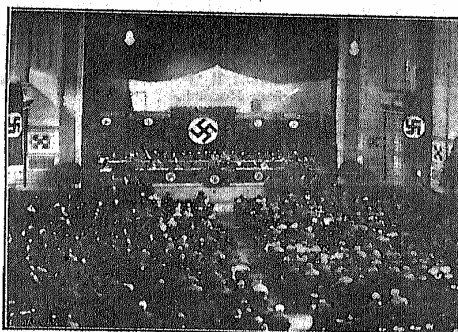
După desorganizarea partidului antisemit german în urma conflictului din 1924 dintre conducătorii săi Ludendorff și Hitler, —acesta din urmă a reorganizat cu energie rândurile



risipite ale luptătorilor, ajungând azi a avea o organizație extraordinar de puternică. Congresul din August, dela Nürnberg, de unde arătam aci a-caste vederi, a dovedit cu imbelugare că mișcarea antisemită germană e azi, după refacere, mai puternică decât oricând.

Cliseele noastre arată:

Sus: Vederea unei părți a uriașei întruniri antisemite din August dela Nürnberg a „Partidului Muncitoresc German Național-Social”, condus de *Adolf Hitler*, la care au luat parte 127 mii de oameni.



Mijloc: Sala Congresului Delegațiilor.

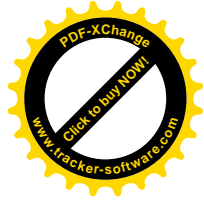
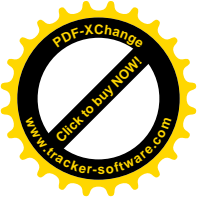
Jos: Vedere dela defilarea organizațiilor în fața conducătorului Hitler: secția muncitorilor dela minele din Ruhr. (In No. viitor vom reveni cu alte detalii și clișee luate din revista „Illustrierter Beobachter” a acestei organizații).



- II. 4: The page from the legionary paper *Pământul Strămoșesc* which describes in enthusiastic terms the Nazi congress from Nürnberg, August 1928. (*Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 9 (December 1, 1927)

II. 2. Working the Provinces – the Local Character of the Legion in Its Incipient Years and the First Electoral Breakthroughs

The Legion managed to grow by focusing on those regions where it had incipient strongholds of determined sympathizers. Some of these strongholds were captured from LANC with the help of local leaders who deserted A. C. Cuza or were loyal to the Codreanu family. Based on a close reading of the first six months of the movement, as analyzed from the party journal, one can identify several local legionary fiefdoms such as southern Moldova (especially the

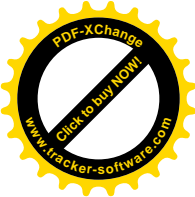


counties of Putna and Covurlui), and Bukovina, with a significant presence in a couple of Transylvanian regions (Sibiu and Hunedoara). Other pockets of sympathizers were scattered across Moldova, while regions such as Wallachia and the vast majority of Transylvania remained uncharted territory for Codreanu's followers.

The political geography of the first five years of existence of the Legion can be deduced by looking at those LANC leaders who chose to side with the Codreanu and not Cuza when their disagreements became public. LANC leaders from Iași, Galați and Cluj almost immediately sided with Codreanu, whereas old supporters of his such as General Macridesu from Focșani also followed suit and helped the movement politically, logistically and financially. Other strongholds were established through zealous militants such as Ion Banea for Sibiu, or prestigious local leaders such as the elder Ion Moța in Hunedoara.

This geographical-ideological nexus came into existence in different ways. One example is that of the Cluj professor I. C. Cătuneanu, a prominent LANC member. Under the banner of the reception of the first issue of the Legion's journal, they republish the article written by I. C. Cătuneanu, who was the LANC president of the Cluj region, for the journal *Acțiunea Românească* in which he praised the endeavor of the founding members of the Legion.⁴⁹ Although not explicit, this was also a way to suggest the growing appeal of Codreanu's newborn movement among some of the most prominent members of LANC. These are some of the first symptoms of a competition for predominance on the extreme rightwing side of interwar Romanian politics.

⁴⁹ *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 2 (August 15, 1927): 12 – 13.

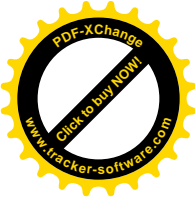


Another interesting case is that of lawyer M. I. Lefter, president of the Galați LANC organization who sent a letter to the Legion's paper in which he criticized in rabid anti-Semitic terms the Jewish invasion, deplored the misunderstandings from within A. C. Cuza's movement, and expressed his decision to fight together with the Legion "towards victory day, when we shall stick the 'Swastika' flag on the top of all Romanian institutions."⁵⁰

Concomitantly with this competition with LANC for local strongholds in various regions, Codreanu's movement was still struggling to find its own ideological and political voice, a state that would dominate the 1927 – 1932 period. An article that attempted to describe the state of the relations between Romanians and Jews was signed by all the "founding fathers" of the Legion, thus acquiring the importance of a manifesto that underlined the attitude of the movement with respect to the Jewish minority. Expressing deeply anti-Semitic beliefs, the article presented the Romanian and the Jews as being irreconcilably opposed, with the former standing as hardworking and courageous while the latter were regarded as invaders who aimed at transforming Romania into Palestine and acquired political rights only because of a decision "imposed on President Wilson by the international Jewish alliance through the agency of American Jews."⁵¹ The very organic vision of the Legion with respect to national territory contributed to the process of constructing the Jewish minority as an evil

⁵⁰ M. I. Lefter, "După mare 'ngrijorare, - mare bucurie" (After a Big Worry – Great Joy), *Pământul Strămoșesc* I, 4 (September 15, 1927): 7.

⁵¹ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion I. Moța, Iliea Gârneață, Corneliu Georgescu, Radu Mironovici, "Memoriu informativ asupra raporturilor dintre Românii și Jidanii din România (Memorandum Regarding the Relationship between Romanians and Jews)", *Pământul Strămoșesc* II, 2 (January 15, 1928).

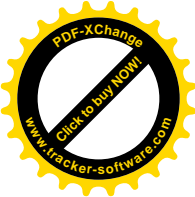


“other”, hampering the existence of the Romanian nation. The Legion’s founders considered the national territory as the cornerstone for the development of all nations, the space where people have worked for centuries and which was defended by its inhabitants. Living parasitically on territories that belong to other nations, and exploiting them in an inhumane manner, the Jews supposedly broke this organic law, prompting the emergence of movements such as the Legion of the Archangel Michael.

This type of discourse showcased just how much the young legionaries still owed to A. C. Cuza and how difficult it was for them politically and ideologically to break away from their former mentor. The kind of anti-Semitism exhibited in the abovementioned text was deeply influenced by the one Cuza had been expressing for decades. Their solution for the “Jewish problem” was also inspired from A. C. Cuza namely that the Jews should be given a territory of their own and be forced to work and defend it, thus “the Jewish delinquents would enter the natural legality and the natural order of the lives of the nations.”⁵² This kind of anti-Semitic discourse was supported by other legionaries, as one article written by the aforementioned Ionel Banea clearly showed. Writing about the Jews in Bukovina, Banea uttered a self-definition of the Legion in a violently anti-Semitic tone, employing a language filled with morbid metaphors in order to emphasize the idea that the Jews were the cancer of Bukovina while Codreanu’s movement was the surgeon most suitable to remove it.⁵³

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Ionel T. Banea, “Bucovina și Jidani” (Bukovina and the Jews), *Pământul Strămoșesc* II, 2 (January 15, 1928).



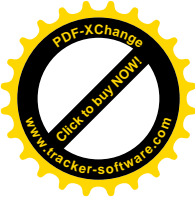
It is telling that the first year of the movement was marked by increased anti-Semitism as a discursive level which sought to make the movement more popular with the masses while also holding the group together in terms of ideological cohesion.

The first timid signs of ideological dissent towards Cuza were visible in the fall of 1928 with an article signed by Ion I. Moța entitled “Da, sunt nelămurit!” (Yes, *I am not clear!*). That this was a daring act, one could assess from the cautious and deferential tone employed by Moța in the beginning of the article, where he carefully stated that: “we ensure everybody that it was not easy for us to decide to touch the doctrinaire system of our former professor.”⁵⁴ Moța’s main point of contention with Cuza’s predicaments came from the professor’s concept of culture. As Moța summed it up, Cuza stated that religion was the foundation of culture, while culture was the product of nationality and rooted in the national economy, thus making religion also a product of nationality and national economy. For Moța, this was a highly materialistic view, which praised the economical factors over the moral ones, concluding that “we clearly understood why he does not grant any importance to the *moral element* from our endeavors for national salvation.”⁵⁵ Towards the end of the article, Moța’s deference turned into an offensive polemic with the statement: “yes, I am not clear how a genial mind such as the one of Mr. Cuza’s could degrade itself to such a hideous outlook on culture.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ion I. Moța, “Da, sunt nelămurit!” (Yes, I am not clear!), *Pământul Strămoșesc* II, (September 15, 1928).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.



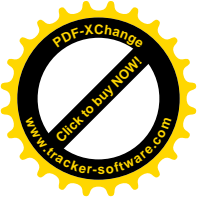
Moța's virulent critique was yet another sign of the Legion's strivings to outline its moral and spiritual side of their regenerative project and to differentiate itself from the movement of their former mentor. If Codreanu emphasized the "ideology of the deed" as the main differentiating trait, with the Legion taking a more radical approach to political practice, Moța tried to innovate on the realm of ideas as well. The article was a snapshot of the conflicting world views between an "old-school" type of nationalism professed by A. C. Cuza and the post-war anxieties of the new generation who longed for a spiritual, although also with nationalist and chauvinistic overtones, solution to solve a perceived state of total decay.

In terms of political practice, this was translated through the growing number of critical statements made by Codreanu with respect to the LANC and A. C. Cuza, especially in the context of the November 1928 elections. With the Legion not having its own candidates, Codreanu questioned Cuza's decision to place his son as a candidate while limiting the support for LANC's candidates.⁵⁷ LANC's electoral result of 1,14 percent of the votes was disappointing for the movement.⁵⁸

If for the first months of the movement archival sources are quite scarce, starting with 1928 – 1929 and the establishment of a core of active militants, the Legion came under the scrutiny of the police and the secret service. This allows the researcher a reconstruction of the slow but steady regional expansion of the

⁵⁷ November 19, 1928 circular letter signed by Codreanu, published in Ioan Scurtu and others (eds.), *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta*, vol. II, 171.

⁵⁸ The results were published in *Monitorul Oficial* on December 19, 1928, see loc. cit. p. 173. These elections witnessed the biggest win in an election during the interwar period, with the National Peasant Party gathering 77.76% of the votes.



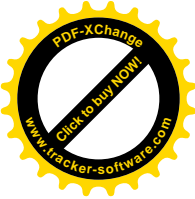
Legion, while also observing its development in terms of ideology and political practice. Some of the police reports reinforced the fact that anti-Semitic and xenophobic ideas expounded in the far-right press were also disseminated among the population through other means. Thus, a police report sent from Dorohoi, in northern Moldova, mentioned the fact that on January 23, 1928 some postcards entitled “The horrible Jewish crime from Tisza Eszlar, Hungary, 1882” were disseminated in trains.⁵⁹ The famous Tisza Eszlar affair, which included accusations of ritual murder set towards the Jewish community, was used for anti-Semitic propaganda in order to impress the common people.⁶⁰ A manifesto confiscated by the police department of Galați was distributed by the Legion of the Archangel Michael in order to show its support for Palestinian Arabs. The bizarre manifesto ended with the words “Long live the brave Arabs” after asking “justice for Arabs” from “Christian England”. The manifesto was signed by the Legion’s ad-hoc committee for pro-Arab propaganda.⁶¹

These rather naïve and outdated means of propaganda should not be mistaken for the entire activity of the Legion, but rather regarded as isolated political militancy that filled the files of the law enforcement agencies that were eager to report to Bucharest a job well done.

⁵⁹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, Dosar 9/1927, f. 53.

⁶⁰ The topic of accusation of ritual murders against the Jewish communities, including the Tisza Eszlar affair, has been tackled by Hillel J. Kieval in two of his articles: “Antisémitisme ou savoir social? Sur la genèse du procès moderne pour meurtre rituel”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 49, 5 (Sep. - Oct., 1994): 1091-1105, and “Representation and Knowledge in Medieval and Modern Accounts of Jewish Ritual Murder”, *Jewish Social Studies* 1, 1 (Fall 1994): 52-72.

⁶¹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, Dosar 4/1929, pp. 11 -12.



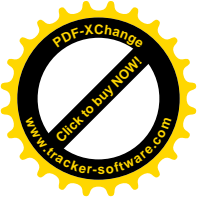
Between 1929 and 1932 the activity of the Legion suffered from the chronic lack of resources, and this situation was compensated only by the energy and enthusiasm generated by Codreanu among his core group of fanatical followers. In this period of time Codreanu consolidated some of the regions where he already had a good presence, while in the same time tried to penetrate new areas such as Bucharest, Bessarabia and Maramureș. This struggle did not always pay off, but some electoral successes have been registered.

A police note dated January 19, 1929 stated that Codreanu decided to organized a series of anti-Semitic conferences in the counties that had legionary organization. The note also mentioned the fact that the journal of the movement, *Pământul Strămoșesc*, was about to be suspended because the 60 000 lei necessary for paying the printing costs could not be paid.⁶²

The first conference in the announced series was held in Bucharest, in front of an audience of 400, where Codreanu spoke about the new generation, as a note from the intelligence services revealed.⁶³ After the usual anti-Semitic rant, Codreanu focused on the history of the old generation, starting with Vasile Conta and ending with A. C. Cuza. Codreanu outlined the differences between the old and the new generation by arguing that the former was focused on writing “goal inspiring thinking”, while the latter, starting with 1922, had as its gospel the deed. The main characteristic of the new generation was a “disciplined offensive to reconquer the cities”, starting with the Capital. In order to do that Codreanu announced the reopening of the student movements for the “holy war” that was

⁶² ANIC, Fond MI Diverse, Dosar 1 / 1923, p. 280.

⁶³ ANIC, Fond MI Diverse, Dosar 1 / 1923, p. 281.



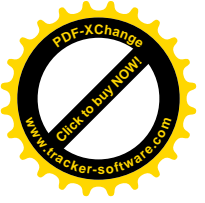
abandoned several years ago.⁶⁴ This was, perhaps, Codreanu's first attempt to address the Bucharest public, being well aware that the political success of the Legion depended also on its impact in urban areas. However, the Legion had to wait several years in order to enjoy real political awareness in Bucharest, as it continued to remain a regional movement until 1933.

A police report sent in December 19, 1929 by the Iași regional police to the main headquarter in Bucharest, regarded Codreanu's intention to jumpstart the Legion's political activity. This was to be achieved through a "much more intense propaganda in the counties of Covurlui, Putna, Dorohoi, Câmpulung and Turda, which represent the centers where he feels stronger and which he seeks to thoroughly organize by going there in person."⁶⁵ The first planned stage of this tour was a public conference to be held in Berești (Covurlui) where he wanted to talk about the personality of Stephen the Great with strong references to the present-day political situation. The report confirmed the initial strongholds of the Legion, but also warned the Bucharest police decision makers about Codreanu's other plans, i.e. the intention to add Bessarabia as region of interest and also to reissue the journal *Pământul Strămoșesc*. Codreanu's own account of the tour was later on presented under the title "Hotărârea de a păși în mase" (The decision to step into the masses), thus highlighting its importance.⁶⁶ The events in Covurlui, the first stage of the tour, were arranged with the help of M. I. Lefter, the former LANC leader who joined the Legion in 1927. However, as the aforementioned report foresaw, the police took action. Codreanu wrote how he

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ ANIC, Fond MI Diverse, Dosar 1 / 1923, p. 297.

⁶⁶ Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 285.



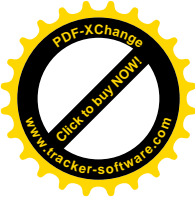
was prevented by the local authorities to hold his meeting, and how he decided to do a tour of several villages instead, riding a horse, talking to people and managing, in his own words, “to penetrate those indefinable depths of the soul, where politicians, with their borrowed programs, could not descend.”⁶⁷ As a conclusion, Codreanu proclaimed Covurlui as the “second pillar” of the Legion after Focșani, thus establishing southern Moldova as his most important regional stronghold.

It was actions such as these that boosted Codreanu’s self-confidence and contributed to his march towards making the Legion a mass-base organization. The romantic image of horse riders who descended among the people like *haiduci*, against the will of the authorities, may be considered a cliché and not characteristic for the movement in its entirety. Nevertheless, the solidarities created among the legionaries, as well as the impact among the public opinion contributed to the development of the movement.

The projected offensive to gain more support in Bessarabia was attempted in July 1930, when Codreanu planned a march between the Prut and Dniester rivers. Realizing the violent potential of this endeavor, the authorities banned the march on the day when it was supposed to begin, much to Codreanu’s annoyance.⁶⁸ As a result, the Legion’s influence in Bessarabia had to suffer, as the Legion would gain a certain degree of support in some parts it, but was unable penetrate into others.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 288.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 299.



Another interesting attempt to expand into new territories was in the case of Maramureș. Codreanu tried to exploit a series of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred in the town of Borșa in 1930, with two priests as protagonists: Ion Dumitrescu (Orthodox) and Andrei Berinde (Greek Catholic). After the incidents, the two priests decided to go on a trip to Iași in order to meet with Cuza and Codreanu and to let them know about the situation in Maramureș. They met with Codreanu who explained to them the goals of the Legion and promised to send a squad to Maramureș in order to make propaganda and organize a section there.⁶⁹ Inspired by the two priests, Ion Banea wrote a book describing the causes of the Maramureș unrests, arguing that the Jews managed, with Hungarian support, to invade the region and buy all of its riches.⁷⁰ Although the Legion never built one of its strongholds in Maramureș, Codreanu did gain a very useful militant in priest Ion Dumitrescu who joined the movement and even became his personal secretary in the mid-1930s.

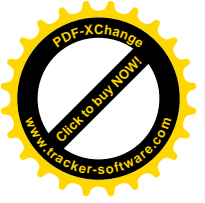
The Legion tried to also capitalize in electoral terms from its political actions. At the 1931 elections they had candidates in 17 counties but only gained 1.05% of the votes, and did not enter the Parliament.⁷¹ In August 1931 partial elections took place in the Neamț County and the Iron Guard managed to win,⁷² thus sending Codreanu in the Parliament after a struggle in which he could, by

⁶⁹ Ion Dumitrescu–Borșa, *Cal troian intra muros. Memorii Legionare* (Trojan Horse Inside. Legionary Memoirs), (Bucharest: Editura Lucman, 2002), 26-27.

⁷⁰ Ion Banea, *Cauzele mișcării din Maramureș* (The Causes of the Movement in Maramureș), (Iași: 1930).

⁷¹ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 476.

⁷² Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail de la mit la realitate*, 170.



his own account, only rely on 100 militants for his campaign.⁷³ Another partial election was held in 1932, this time in Tutova County, where the Legion also managed to mobilize its followers and win. Due to the political instability existent in the country, new general elections were held in 1932. The Iron Guard had a large presence this time, with candidates running for office in 36 counties, but its presence was still harmed by the conspicuous lack of resources.⁷⁴ With 2, 37% of the votes⁷⁵ the Legion managed to enter the Parliament thus showing that it had become a significant movement that was ready to become a political contender with a nationwide outreach. This is what was at stake for the movement at the beginning of 1933, and the Legion sought to benefit from its recently gained momentum.

⁷³ Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 317.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 341-342.

⁷⁵ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 477.



Chapter III

1933 as the Year of Great Transformations

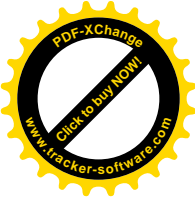
During the year 1933 the Iron Guard did everything in its power to remain at the forefront of Romanian politics. The focus of the movement now shifted towards Bucharest, Codreanu being well aware of the fact that the country's capital will provide the much needed exposure for the Legion's political project. On January 24 the Iron Guard organized a demonstration in order to place a cross at the Monument for the Unknown Soldier, causing violent clashes with the police.¹ Even though the authorities reacted against this initiative, it did garner a sizable degree of public support, with the newspaper *Universul* and the Patriarch Miron Cristea among its backers. The second attempt to place the cross gathered a crowd of 7-8000, a big increase from the 1000 demonstrators who were at the initial action.² The main organizer of the demonstrations was Mihail Stelescu, one of the most active legionary leaders of the time.

Codreanu also supported the February worker strikes from the *Grivița* factory in Bucharest, talking about "the hunger of the worker and his thirst for justice."³ Other legionary leader would write articles in defense of the workers as well, marking some of the first attempts to attract this category to the ranks of the Legion. With the Iron Guard in expansion, Codreanu published *Cărticica șefului*

¹ *Cuvântul*, IX, No. 2787 (January 27, 1933).

² Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 211.

³ *Învierea I*, 1 (April 15, 1933).



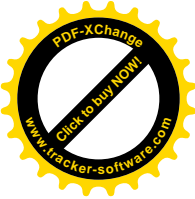
de cuib (The Nest's Leader Booklet) in which he codified the new organizational structure of the movement, mentioning the exact number of members that a nest had to have, how the meetings had to take place, the objectives of the movement and the tenets of its political activism.

To all this, something truly essential for the Iron Guard would be added, the adherence of a strong group of intellectuals from the journal *Axa* (The Axis), an event that would change the political and ideological outlook of the movement for the years to come.

III. 1. The *Axa* Group and the Ideological Crystallization of the Legionary Movement: Intellectuals and Politics within the Movement

Starting with 1933, the Iron Guard attracted a sizable number of intellectuals from the young generation that sympathized with, and in some cases even formally joined the Iron Guard and had a genuine impact on its development. An inventory of these intellectuals would include historians (Vasile Christescu, Vladimir Dumitrescu, Petre P. Panaitescu), sociologists (Traian Brăileanu, Traian Herseni, Ernest Bernea, Leon Țopa), philosophers (Dumitru C. Amzăr), men of letters (Dragoș Protopopescu, Haig Acterian, Radu Gyr,) or lawyers (Alexandru Cantacuzino, Alexandru Constant, Mihail Polihroniade).

Among these intellectuals, a special part was played by the *Axa* group, who joined the movement in 1932-1933 and enhanced its ideological strength by deeply influencing its political project. Thus, a look at the formation and activity of this group would be of great interest, especially given the fact that it has been



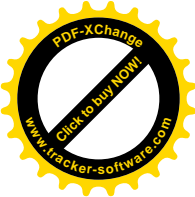
understudied in Romanian historiography with respects to its political convictions and activities. Another useful goal would be to look at their radical response to the temporal crisis that interwar Romania had to face, how that time horizon shaped their political views, and their ideas for an alternative extreme right-wing revolutionary way towards modernity.

The Axa Group and the Intellectual Foundations of the Iron Guard

Intellectuals in this group had close ties with “the young generation” whose leading figure was Mircea Eliade.⁴ Until 1933, “the young generation” had no clear political stand, their debates contained representatives of pro-fascist, pro-communist and democratic trends. From 1933, however, many young intellectuals moved to the right, in varying degrees, including leading figures such as Emil Cioran and later Mircea Eliade.⁵

⁴ Some of the most prodigious contributions available in English regarding “the young generation” of Romanian interwar intellectuals and its adherence to the Iron Guard are those of professor Matei Călinescu, see: “The 1927 Generation in Romania: Friendships and Ideological Choices (Mihail Sebastian, Mircea Eliade, Nae Ionescu, Eugène Ionescu, E. M. Cioran)” in *East European Politics & Societies* 15 (2001): 649–77. Another salient contribution on this topic is Philip Vanhaelemeersch, *A Generation ‘Without Beliefs’ and the Idea of Experience in Romania (1927 - 1934)*, (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006).

⁵ During his 1933 visit to Germany, Cioran was deeply impressed by the Nazi regime and praised Hitler in series of articles in the journal *Vremea* entitled “Scrisori din Germania” (Letters from Germany). For this episode of Cioran’s life, please see Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci*, 189 -192 and also Marta Petreu, *An infamous past: E.M. Cioran and the rise of fascism in Romania*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005). Eliade wrote newspaper articles that openly supported the “spiritual revolution” of the Iron Guard, reaching his climax in 1937 by showing his admiration for the two leaders of the Iron Guard (Ion I. Moța and Vasile Marin) who died in the Spanish Civil War while fighting on Franco’s side. For more on Eliade’s life, please see the well documented monograph of Florin Țurcanu, *Mircea Eliade, Le prisonnier de l’histoire*, préface de Jacques Julliard, (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2003).



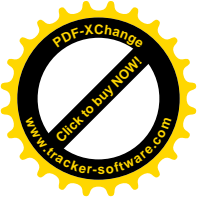
Founded in October 1932, the journal *Axa* was lead by Mihail Polihroniade and Ioan Victor Vojen, and enjoyed, in its early stage, the moral patronage of Nichifor Crainic, an influential Orthodoxist intellectual who became close to Codreanu earlier that year. Crainic previously launched his own newspaper in 1932, *Calendarul*, and decided to support Codreanu's movement, which he regarded as displaying a constructive nationalism that was rooted in the Orthodox faith.⁶ *Calendarul* also served as a training ground for some of the young intellectuals that would later on found *Axa*. Soon after its publication, *Axa* turned into the voice of a group of intellectuals who became supporters of Codreanu's movement and provided the brainpower for the Iron Guard. Young intellectuals such as Mihail Polihroniade, Ioan Victor Vojen, Dragoș Protopopescu, Alexandru Constant, Vasile Christescu, Vladimir Dumitrescu and poet Radu Gyr⁷, although not officially members of the movement helped build its ideological scaffold.⁸ Crainic claimed in his memoirs, written after his connection with Codreanu was severed, that he spent months trying to convince the young intellectuals from the *Axa* group to join the Iron Guard.⁹ However, the readiness

⁶ Nichifor Crainic, *Zile albe – Zile negre. Memorii*, vol. I, (Bucharest: Casa editorială Gândirea, 1991), 230-1.

⁷ Codreanu refers to these intellectuals as being not enlisted in the Legion but with duties to it. Cf. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste 1927 - 1938* (Circulars and manifestos 1927 - 1938), 5th edition, (Munich: Colectia "Europa," 1981), 30.

⁸ The importance of the *Axa* group for the ideological development of the Iron Guard was highlighted by many authors, but did not yet enjoy an extensive treatment: Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919 – 1941*, 159-61; Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci*, 295; Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence*, 63-6; Valentin Săndulescu, „Fascism and its Quest for the 'New Man:' The Case of the Romanian Legionary Movement,” *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004): 355-6.

⁹ Nichifor Crainic, *op. cit.*, 237.



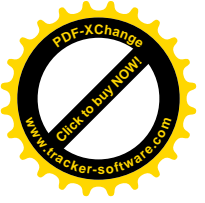
with which this group embraced Codreanu's movement indicates quite the contrary.

The young intellectuals of the *Axa* group refined and reaffirmed some of the concepts and themes set forth in a coarse manner by the students who initiated the 1922 strikes. The questions of "generation" and "regeneration" as factors that shaped the identity of a certain group or nation acquired new meanings and were developed in a more complex fashion. The temporal panic felt by the "1922" generation was amplified a decade later, and took the form of a temporal crisis that could only be resolved by creating a new order. This state of temporal crisis, when the articulations between past, present, and future became very loose, marked a new "regime of historicity", to use François Hartog's concept.¹⁰ It was a new relationship with time: for these radicals, the past had not lead to an improvement of the present, and so an extraordinary transformation was needed in order to satisfy the longings of the youth for a better future.

The same way the 1922 movement tapped into the rise of Italian fascism, the *Axa* journal and the ensuing movement regarded German Nazism as a reconfirmation that a new revolutionary wave, one antithetical to communism, was developing in Europe. That the relationship with time was crucial for both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany is something historians have begun to uncover in the recent literature available. According to Roger Griffin, the Third Reich envisioned a "temporal revolution"¹¹ for its followers, while scholars such as Rik

¹⁰ François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003), 27.

¹¹ Roger Griffin, "Party Time: the Temporal Revolution of the Third Reich", in *History Today* 49, 4 (1999), 43-49.



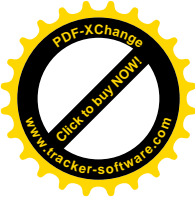
Peters and Claudio Fogu have explored Italian fascism through the lens of *presentism* as a core ideological component.¹² Also, the problem of integrating the historical past in their vision for a new world was a salient component of fascist ideology. As Claudio Fogu has argued, fascism had its own vision of history, philosophically formulated by Giovanni Gentile under the banner of “actualism”, that considered history as belonging to the present. Furthermore, according to Fogu, fascism’s ability to transform “actualism” into a historic imaginary, to pose as a maker of history and to make it “present to mass consciousness” lay at the core of its appeal. Fogu terms this type of vision “modernist” rather than “romantic”, especially because it was grounded not in the distant past but in the recent and terrifying experience of the Great War.¹³

In this manner, Fogu continues the work of one of the first historians to analyze the connection between modernism and fascism, Walter L. Adamson. Adamson defined modernism as “the central project of the intellectual generation entering the European cultural scene between 1900 and 1914: that of a ‘cultural regeneration’ through the secular-religious quest for ‘new values’.” Adamson saw modernism as an “other modernity” that challenged the ‘modernizing’ forces of science, commerce and industry, usually in the name of a more ‘spiritual’ alternative.”¹⁴

¹² Rik Peters, “*Actes de Présence: Presence in Fascist Political Culture*”, in *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 362-74; Claudio Fogu, “Actualism and the Fascist Historic Imaginary,” *History and Theory* 42 (2003): 196–221.

¹³ For more on Fogu’s conceptualization of the relationship between fascism and historical time, please see his monograph Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7.



The first issue of *Axa* made it clear that the dissatisfaction with the present and a looming temporal crisis were on the minds of intellectuals such as Mihail Polihroniade:

Starving and disappointed crowds, disoriented elites, capitalism on its way to being liquidated, new social and economic patterns yet to prove efficient, social revolution and world war as possibilities, these are, in brief, today's burdens and tomorrow's perspectives.¹⁵

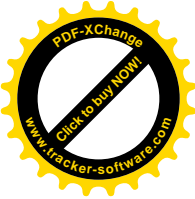
This concern with the perceived state of decay experienced in the present was shared by Polihroniade's colleague, Ioan Victor Vojen. In the name of their generation, Vojen deplored the lack of an ideal, of a higher goal that would regenerate the country. The search for this ideal was the main mission for the young intellectuals:

"Old beliefs are declining and new ones are not rising. This is our tragedy, the tragedy of the youth: the absence of a great thought that would surpass us, enliven us – the crisis of lacking an ideal. We do not believe in the happiness brought about by money, in the demagoguery of democracy, nor in elevating the human being through machines. We need 'something else', and in searching for this, in searching for a new creed, the differences between us emerge and our straying commences."¹⁶

After this plea for a political ideal, Vojen also stated his suggested solution, arguing for the creation of a new Romanian ethnic state, based on the primacy of Romanian culture and family. But one of the most salient contributions to the first issue of *Axa* belonged to the then mentor of the group, Nichifor Crainic. In his article, "Spre stânga sau spre dreapta?" (To the left, or to the right?) Crainic argued for a revolution as the young generation's only way out from the current crisis:

¹⁵ Mihail Polihroniade, "Moțuri, mofturi și pampoane" in *Axa* I, 1, (October 20, 1932).

¹⁶ Ioan Victor Vojen, "Predoslovie" in *Axa* I, 1 (October 20, 1932).



Let's face it: this generation, should it not accept to die of starvation, has only one way: *revolution*. It is what will come; it is what is inevitably coming. It is in the general spirit of the time: it is in the hungry bodies and heated brains of the young generation. But it also finds itself somewhere else: in the bankruptcy of the state, caused by the ruling democracy.¹⁷

Once the solution was identified as residing in a revolution of the youth, Crainic went on to define its character, because this was, according to him, the most important element. Thus, he pleaded for an antidemocratic, anticommunist revolution, based on corporatist principles as the only way to assure the regeneration of the country and to avoid its degeneration:

In order to live, Romania needs an antidemocratic revolution. This revolution, however, could mean regeneration or degeneration. Regeneration, if it will correspond with the spirit of the Romanian people and the state of government; degeneration if it will be a negation of the Romanian people and the state of government.¹⁸

Focusing on the Legionary palingenetic and regenerative project, one must also take into account the historical evolution of these kinds of projects in Romania. Such a discussion recalls the revolutionary projects of the nineteenth century, especially those that developed by the 1848 revolutionaries. A clear palingenetic, utopian project is visible in the 1848 revolutionary moment, with an optimistic tone that proclaimed confidence in changing the world and “awakening” the nation.¹⁹ Much of this optimistic project – which was oriented

¹⁷ Nichifor Crainic, “Spre stânga sau spre dreapta?” in *Axa I*, 1 (October 20, 1932).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

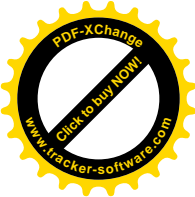
¹⁹ I am indebted to Sorin Antohi for the insights regarding the historical meaning of palingenetic projects in the Romanian context. For more on this, see, among others, his works: *Civitas Imaginalis: istorie și utopie în cultura română* (Civitas Imaginalis: History and Utopia in Romanian Culture), 2nd edition (Iași: Polirom, 1999); see also



towards and inspired by West European models –was pursued in the second half of the nineteenth century and resulted in the building of the modern Romanian nation-state. However, the end of the nineteenth century and the experience of First World War brought this project to a state of crisis. After 1918, distrust in democratic and liberal values increased. It was in this crucial moment that the legionary palingenetic project appeared as an alternative.

The legionary regenerative project is therefore a dark reversal of the liberal, romantic national project of the generation of 1848. Whereas both projects suggest a national rebirth, the legionary one comes as a result of a deep state of crisis, which the legionaries believed threatened the very survival of Romania. The project was reversed and it had pessimistic and apocalyptic overtone, similar to that used by other fascist movements in interwar Europe but calibrated to fit the Romanian context. However, inspiration for the movement did not always come from the outside, as there was an important autochthonous component. Internal and external enemies were seen as obstacles for the organic development of the Romanian nation. That was how anti-Semitism, xenophobia, anti-communism and anti-liberalism became part of the legionary ideology.

its French version, *Imaginaire culturel et réalité politique dans la Roumanie moderne. Le stigmat et l'utopie* (Paris-Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1999) and the foreword to his edited volume *Modernism și antimodernism: noi perspective interdisciplinare* (Modernism and Antimodernism: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives), (Bucharest: Ed. Cuvântul, 2008), 7-15, his “*Argumentum biologicum*. Despre ‘stadiul cel mai înalt și ultim’ al specificului național”, now the preface to Marius Turda, *Eugenism și antropologie rasială în România, 1874-1944* (Eugenicism and Racial Anthropology in Romania, 1874-1944), (Bucharest: Ed. Cuvântul, 2008), pp. 5-12, as well as his remarks in Virgil Nemoianu, Sorin Antohi, *România noastră. Conversații berlineze* (Our Romania. Berlin Conversations), second edition, (Iași: Institutul European, 2009), 36-8.



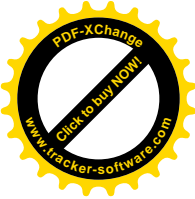
An example of this kind of thought in the legionary establishment was provided by Vasile Marin, with respect to the deeply flawed, in his view, historical origins of the Romanian state. Vasile Marin attacked the “foreign” and “imported” character of the Romanian state, going back to the beginning of its modern nation-building projects:

“The imported State, today’s state was invented by the political and economic interests of the European powers, with the paid or honest support of the Romantic *cărvunari* from 1821, the *bonjuriști*, the 1848 revolutionaries fooled by the emphatic revolutionary phrases, but most of all with the boundless help of the generation of the so-called war for independence. And it so happened that this state, premature and pernicious, was never a technical reality of the real Romanian nation, for the simple reason that this nation was not yet able to acquire a state, an event that has to take place now, in our time, as a natural conclusion of the war for national unification.

The invented state remained their state, the protective foreigners – Germans until the Great War, French afterwards – and the state of the tools that were in the hands of these foreigners, Romanian politicians from C. A. Rosetti, Freemason and half-learned, to the Jesuit tintured democrat of a certain Blaj extraction, Iuliu Maniu.

Against this state without any organic adherences with the nation, artificial and parasitical, European, parliamentary and constitutional, created by the freemason international of the nineteenth century, now the entire nation stands as a unique wave, the nation of those who work and produce, the nation as a whole, and not a certain class. Because fortunately and in spite of those who are mimicking Marxism in Romania, the Romanian nation did not experience in its building process the development of classes with antagonistic interests.”²⁰

²⁰ Vasile Marin, “Națiunea împotriva Statului de import” (The Nation Against the Imported State), in *Axa*, II, No. 6 (February 5, 1933).



The Axa group and its view on democracy, conservatism, Cuzism and communism

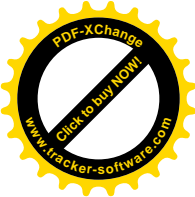
In defining the political-revolutionary mission for the young generation of intellectuals, Crainic and the Axa group did not regard the democratic system as a true competitor, as they considered it obsolete and part of the decayed and dying world that was about to end. Communism was regarded as the main threat, the other revolutionary competitor that sought to impose its project for managing the present and the future. Considering communism as a negation of the spirit of the Romanian people, Crainic alarmed the young generation to the perils of a communist revolution:

„But what would be the perspective for the young generation of intellectuals in a communist revolution where one knows who is meant to dictate? This generation would unleash this revolution only to be buried alive in its ruins”.²¹

Ironically enough, this last phrase would prove tragically prophetic. However, it was the fascist revolution that would “devour its children”, meaning that many of the young intellectuals whom Crainic summoned to rebel against the old temporal order paid the ultimate price for their acts.

What has to be underlined in the light of the topic of the present work is the groundbreaking, for the Romanian ideological environment of the time, character of these articulated visions in contrast to those already existing at the time. The temporal crisis experienced by the young generation had to find its regenerative solution though revolutionary means. This revolution, in its antidemocratic and anticommunist character, would bring about an ethnocentric state, more concerned with the masses than with individuals and their liberties.

²¹ Nichifor Crainic, “Spre stânga sau spre dreapta?” in Axa I, 1 (October 20, 1932).



The result would be the formation of a new identity for the nation and the country.

The ideas of “generation” and “regeneration” sketched by the “1922 student generation” during their strikes gained a more complex and refined expression.

In order to articulate this ideological project, the young intellectuals from the *Axa* group emphasized their differences from the traditional democratic, right - and left-wing movements. Thus, the generational element was exacerbated and the idea of a generational conflict became pivotal. A young intellectual like Radu Dragnea questioned the historical merits of the generation that accomplished the “Great Union”, accusing it of being just the generation that created and united a nation, but failed to generate a cult of the state, which now had to be the mission of the youth:

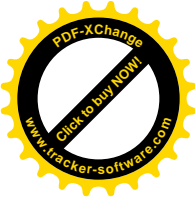
“No matter which way the elders would like to represent themselves in our recent political history: ‘the Generation of the Union’ from Iași-Chișinău- Alba-Iulia; no matter from which party would we pick them, one more national than the other, and on top of it all mister Nicolae Iorga would be placed – they all could enter history with the glory and the flaw of being the generation of the nation. They were never acquainted with the cult of the State.”²²

Again, Nicolae Iorga was a target for the young generation, being regarded as the representative of a generation that ended its historical mission and could no longer follow the imperatives of the time.

Iorga also came under heavy attack from the left wing, Marxist young intellectuals such as Petre Pandrea who relished in the professor’s demise in popularity among the students.

As long as the main problems were posed in our country in a national and imperialist way, a historian brilliantly epitomized the

²² Radu Dragnea, “Generația neamului și generația statului” (The Generation of the Nation and the Generation of the State) in *Axa* I, 2 (November 10, 1932).



aspirations of all those who were on the same line. With the national idea entering ideological twilight, N. Iorga became anachronistic. In the cultural realm, now there is the primacy of the social...²³

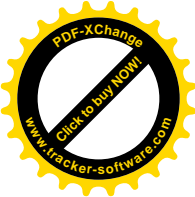
The generational conflict would prove to be an enduring topic for the intellectuals of the *Axa* group. In an article published in April 1933, historian Vasile Christescu underlined the existence of a very powerful generational conflict between the young generation and the “generation of the trenches” that accomplished the “Great Union”. According to Christescu, the meaning of a generation in power was to offer proper moral and spiritual guiding to the upcoming generation. This was where the “trench generation” failed, in Christescu’s opinion, mainly because they repeated the same mistakes as those who had run the country before them. Christescu concluded that there was currently a gap between the two generations, and no way for solving this issue other than through fighting:

The same way those who have prepared the war - people of small Romania - were not able to understand the meaning of Greater Romania, so those who have accomplished our national unity, now concerned with narrow, selfish interests, are not able to provide the spiritual guiding for the future.²⁴

Continuing with the demarcation between the old and the new generation, Mihail Polihroniade mapped the characteristics of what he labeled the “modern right,” which he defined as being in opposition with conservatism, “the ever dwindling clique of the partisans of the status-quo at any cost”, and *Cuzism*, the

²³ Petre Pandrea, “N. Iorga și studenții” (N. Iorga and the Students) in *Stănga I*, 6 (December 18, 1932): 3.

²⁴ Vasile Christescu, “Prăpastia între generații” (The Gap Between Generations), in *Axa II*, 10 (April 9, 1933).



doctrine of A. C. Cuza.²⁵ The attitude towards *Cuzism* is of particular relevancy for this research, as it delimited the “traditional” extreme-right, anti-Semitic parties, considered as potential competitors. Polihroniade criticized the politics of *Cuzism* for its tactical and doctrinaire primitivism and for its reliance on the parliamentary system to solve the problems of the country, including the Jewish question. For Polihroniade, as for some of his fellows, the question of *statism*²⁶ was more important than the Jewish question. Only a young, rightwing movement could transform and reform the state - not a democratic one - stated Polihroniade, citing fascism as a relevant example. A democratic party could not accomplish that “because nowhere and never did a democratic party accomplish a radical reform of the state – the democratic regime is the most conformist of all political regimes – and because in our case, without a reform of the state all the best intentions and the most admirable programs are totally illusory.”²⁷

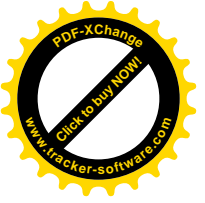
While Polihroniade struggled to prove the superiority of the “modern right” in relation with democratic, conservative, or *Cuzist* projects, others focused on the Legion’s relationship with communism. Mihail Stelescu, an Iron Guard leader and Member of Parliament, was one of the first (along with Ioan Victor Vojen²⁸) to highlight the symbolic, revolutionary competition with communism. In a time when

²⁵ Mihail Polihroniade, “Dreapta românească” (The Romanian Right) in *Axa I*, 2 (November 10, 1932).

²⁶ This term is employed by Michael Mann in order to describe the worship of state power that characterized many fascist movements. For more, please see Michael Mann, *Fascists*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13-4.

²⁷ Mihail Polihroniade, “Dreapta românească” (The Romanian Right) in *Axa I*, (November 10, 1932). For another critique of *cuzism*, please see Polihroniade’s article “Naționalism și cuzism” (Nationalism and Cuzism) in *Axa I*, 5 (January 22, 1933).

²⁸ Ioan Victor-Vojen, “Problema comunistă în Vechiul Regat” (The Communist Question in the Old Kingdom), in *Axa I*, 4 (December 22, 1932).



worker unrest was quite common and the working movement was not that well developed or overwhelmingly controlled by the communist party, Stelescu thought that workers could be attracted to rightwing movements. Accordingly, that could happen so long as the political action was “revolutionary, anti-bourgeois and aims at demolishing the current ruling system and replace it with an authoritarian one that would destroy the minority ruling capitalist strata.”²⁹ In order to prove that, he quoted concrete examples from the establishment of the Iron Guard organization in Galați by young workers, and how it managed to attract a large part of the workers in the city.

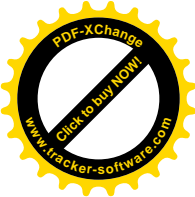
When analyzing texts such as those of Stelescu³⁰ and Voien, one can notice, besides the usual visceral anticommunism, a sense of respect and even fear, because they considered communism as the only real competitor for regeneration through revolution and for an alternative, non-democratic future. That was why the USSR was often placed on the same level with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the category of revolutionary states. The vast literature on the Iron Guard typically fails to point out this striking feature.

The French Connection: Charles Maurras

The issue of the intellectual and ideological positioning of this young generation in relation to “competitors” such as communism and conservatism can

²⁹ Mihail Stelescu, “Dreapta românească și proletariatul” (The Romanian Rightwing and the Proletariat) in *Axa* I, 4 (December 22, 1932).

³⁰ Stelescu wrote another virulent text regarding the faith of the workers immediately after the big strikes from *Grivița* factory in February 1933 - Mihail Stelescu, “Cine apără muncitorii?” (Who Is Defending the Workers?) in *Axa* II, 8, (March 5, 1933).



also be grasped by looking comparatively at the some of the similar developments from abroad. The intellectuals from the *Axa* group were, of course, heavily influenced by Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's Nazism, but there is also another major and somewhat paradoxical source of inspiration: the French radical right, especially Charles Maurras and his *Action Française*. It is well-known that leaders of the Iron Guard such as Ion Moța and Vasile Marin³¹ wrote eulogistic letters to Charles Maurras, whom they considered the representative of the "real France," monarchist, nationalistic and anti-Semitic. Maurras was also one of the most quoted doctrinaires by the intellectuals from the *Axa* group. Historian Vladimir Dumitrescu called him a genius³² while lawyer Alexandru Constant selected a quote from Maurras to serve as a motto for one of his articles, which stated: "the order of societies, any way you would accomplish it, is more important than the freedom of the individuals, because order is the fundament of freedom."³³

One of the most important ideological meeting points between the legionaries and Maurras was his fierce anti-Semitism. Maurras once said:

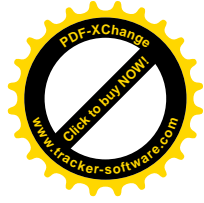
Everything seems impossible or terribly difficult without the providential appearance of anti-Semitism. It enables everything to be arranged, smoothed over, and simplified. If one were not an anti-Semite through patriotism, one would become one through a simple sense of opportunity.³⁴

³¹ One of Marin's letters to Maurras, written after the assassination of I. G. Duca has been published in Vasile Marin, *Crez de generație*, (București: Ed. Majadahonda, 1997), pp. 91–7.

³² Vladimir Dumitrescu, "Linia generală a vremii" in *Axa*, An. II, No. 8, March 5, 1933.

³³ Alexandru Constant, "Economia dirijată și statul viitor" in *Axa*, An. II, No. 7, February 19, 1933.

³⁴ *Apud* Zeev Sternhell (with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri), *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: from Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 85.



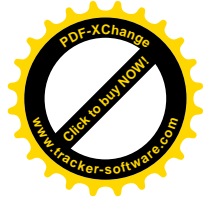
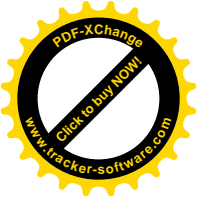
Views such as those expressed by Stelescu especially when it came to care for the workers are also to be found, paradoxically enough, in the thought of Maurras himself. As Eugene Weber pointed out, “where Charles Maurras differed from the socialists was not in matters of social *concern*, but in matters of social *order* – denouncing their equalitarian myths and their belief that authority stems from the mass”.³⁵ Or, as Maurras put it, “... a socialism that has been freed of democratic and cosmopolitan elements can fit nationalism like a well-made glove fits a beautiful hand.”³⁶ This sort of concern for the workers in order to assure the organic unity of the nation’s body was exactly the kind of agenda pursued by legionaries such as Stelescu and Voien, without, however, designing some sort of leftwing fascism. In fact, after he seceded from the Legion, Stelescu’s political activity with his group *Cruciada Românilor* (The Crusade of Romanianism) had very little to do with leftwing activism and focused on the usual themes of the extreme right such as ultra nationalism and anti-Semitism.

Similarities with French rightwing politics were also present when it comes to the clear rupture between old style conservative traditionalists and revolutionary fascism. The separation of Georges Valois from Charles Maurras and the founding of France’s first fascist party in 1925³⁷ are described by French historian Robert Belot as the first from two generations of contesters of the

³⁵ Eugen Weber, “Nationalism, Socialism, and National-Socialism in France”, in *French Historical Studies* 2, 3 (1962), 277.

³⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*

³⁷ Allen Douglas, *From Fascism to Libertarian Communism George Valois Against the Third Republic*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), xiii.



traditional Maurrassian line of reactionary and anti-republican ideology.³⁸ In much the same the legionaries thought about A. C. Cuza's movement in the mid 1920s, Valois considered that Maurras was not courageous enough and was captive in its own counterrevolutionary rhetoric.

To be certain, Maurras and the principles of *Action Française* appealed to the young legionaries who found inspiration in them.³⁹ As historian Traian Sandu argued, the attempts of I. Moța and V. Marin to get into closer contact with their French counterparts in the 1920s and 1930s, respectively, were also linked to a desire to strategically rebalance their international position and to ensure the sympathy of France.⁴⁰ This entangled relationship contributed to the complex emergence and development of the ideological core of the Romanian Legionary Movement, and added to the already known Italian and German influences.

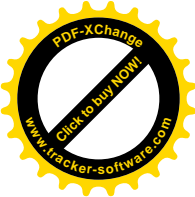
Social Aspects of the Young Generation: Right and Left in Comparison

To be sure, the young generation of intellectuals was not homogenous, as there were heated polemics among its various groups. *Axa* was no exception. Besides criticizing the intellectuals of the old generation, such as Nicolae Iorga or Dimitrie Gusti, the members of the *Axa* group also criticized those within their own generation, especially if they were associated with the intellectual establishment. Thus, young followers of Dimitrie Gusti, who were part of his sociological school, were constant targets, notably Henri H. Stahl, Anton

³⁸ Robert Belot, "Critique fasciste de la raison réactionnaire: Lucien Rebatet contre Charles Maurras", *Mil neuf cent* 9, 1 (1991): 49 – 67.

³⁹ Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence*, 34–5.

⁴⁰ Traian Sandu, "Droite française, fascisme italien: influences croisées sur la Garde de Fer," *Analele Universității București - Științe Politice* (2004): 77.

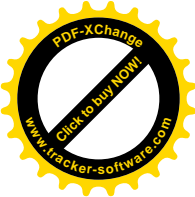


Golopenția, Petru Comarnescu, Mircea Vulcănescu and Traian Herseni.⁴¹ They were accused of careerism, but ironically enough, some of them, such as Herseni and Vulcănescu, will later on become close to the intellectuals of the Axa group. Herseni even become an important doctrinaire of the Iron Guard, writing booklets showcasing the appeal of Codreanu's movement to workers and peasants. Regarding Vulcănescu, he was severely criticized by Mihail Polihroniade following one of his articles in the national-peasantist newspaper *Dreptatea* for his alleged praise for the rural character of the Romanian state. In turn, Polihroniade suggested that a deeply urbanized culture could sustain a modern state, while also arguing for a Romanianization of the cities that had a strong minority component.⁴²

An interesting yet under researched issue regarding the intellectual dynamics of the young generation of interwar Romanian intellectuals is the emergence, in November 1932, almost simultaneously with the Axa journal, of the review *Stânga*. During its short-lived existence, *Stânga* became the most important ideological competitor for young rightwing intellectuals, as it gathered leftwing intellectuals such as Petru Comarnescu, Petre Pandrea, Mihail Ralea and even future fellow traveler of the Iron Guard, Traian Herseni, who was still under the political influence of his professor, Dimitrie Gusti. The polemics between the two journals were fierce. They often crossed the line of civility and hosted personal attacks, as the two groups differed on virtually every major

⁴¹ For an example, please see the short note titled "Gusti și gustismul" (Gusti and Gustism), in Axa I, 4 (December 22, 1932).

⁴² Mihail Polihroniade, "O anumită stângă ... dar și o anumită dreaptă" (A Certain Left ... but also a Certain Right), in Axa, I, 4 (December 22, 1932).



political and cultural issue. One such issue dealt with the social condition of the young generation of intellectuals. In an article entitled “Șomajul tinerei generații” (The Unemployment of the Young Generation), Petru Comarnescu talked discussed the existing social injustice that led to a big number of unemployed yet highly qualified young intellectuals

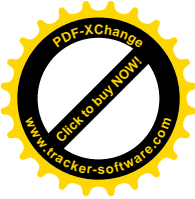
The almost general unemployment of our young generation will very soon become a good lesson for everybody. It is the only gift that could be brought by these holy days that are poor because of people's incapability and idiocy to cooperate in an honest, equitable and creative way.⁴³

High unemployment among intellectuals was a somber reality. The polemic answer from the *Axa* side was given, as usual, by Mihail Polihroniade who did not dispute the facts but launched a personal attack against those who were the editors of *Stângă*, accusing them of having well-paid, bourgeois jobs and stating that to deplore the high unemployment rate caused by capitalism while enjoying capitalist scholarships, parliamentary seats and diplomatic positions was a “shameless hypocrisy.”⁴⁴

When *Stângă* was shot down by the government in March 1933, an anonymous small article was published in *Axa*, which resembled the polemic style of Polihroniade. *Axa* took pleasure in the closing down of *Stângă*, arguing that a legionary state would likewise terminate a journal like that, and would send its editors to prison, the same way a would-be communist government would deal with the legionaries. To make their eliminationist stance even clearer, the article

⁴³ Petru Comarnescu, “Șomajul tinerei generații” (The Unemployment of the Young Generation), in *Stângă*, I, No. 7, (December 25, 1932).

⁴⁴ Mihail Polihroniade, “Tablou marxist pentru ‘Stângă’” (Marxist Painting for “The Left”), in *Axa* II 6 (February 5, 1933).



adds, “we shall, therefore be consistent with ourselves and we shall brutally wipe out our enemies.”⁴⁵

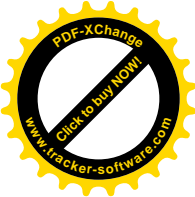
By the year 1932-1933, some of the most important components of the “1927 generation”, be they members of the *Axa* group, journalists at *Stânga* like Petru Comarnescu or at *Cuvântul* like Mircea Eliade and Mihail Sebastian, expressed their pessimism with respect to the outcome of the generational conflict and even to the future of their own generation.⁴⁶ The political developments over the next half decade will prove them right in a somber way.

Intellectuals, Identity and Politics within the Iron Guard

One interesting polemic within the *Axa* group, however, proved revealing with respect to the discourses of identity that were proposed by the young intellectuals. In a response to Radu Dragnea’s aforementioned article and which focused on the importance of the state, Dragoș Protopopescu launched a devastating critique. Protopopescu considered that there was no difference between their generation and Nicolae Iorga’s on the grounds of the symbolic competition between the state and the nation, because both state and nation amounted to nothing. For Protopopescu, of real importance was the search for what would be the foundation of a new order, something that he labeled *etnicul*

⁴⁵ “A dispărut ”Stânga” (“The Left” Disappeared), in *Axa* II, 10 (April 9, 1933).

⁴⁶ For this discussion please see these relevant contributions of Petru Comarnescu, “Raporturile dintre generații” (The Relationships Between the Generations), in *Stânga* II, 8 (January 1, 1933); Mircea Eliade, “Problema tineretului în Italia” (The Question of the Youth in Italy), in *Cuvântul*, IX, No. 2783 (January 23, 1933); Mihail Sebastian, “O generație încă tânără” (A Generation Still Young), in *Cuvântul*, IX, No. 2767 (January 6, 1933).



nostru (“our ethnicity”).⁴⁷ The text, both lyrical and delirious, and thus, quite difficult to translate, posed the question of the founding element of Romanian identity, which should be reformed well before one should talk about the nation as a whole, or a new state. He considered that *etnicul nostru* could only be acquired from Transylvanian Romanians, and would form the basis for the revolution that would bring about the state and the nation. Here is an extensive, relevant excerpt:

Is the Transylvanian a Romanian? By Romanian I understand the multiform monster, flacid and jelly-like, that we are accustomed to in the Old Kingdom. What, then, is the Transylvanian? It is Romanian autochthonism. It is not the Romanian nation, but the Romanian ethnic. That is to say, it is a formation that lacks the shallowness that diluted us into the shape of Roman ambiguity and suspect Latinity. Transylvanians – no matter how much Roman-like rigidity is to be found among them – are the barbarians of Romanianism. Their nationality is a tracianism, which I think is nowhere else to be found as brave and as clean. It is the only thing for which I salute our people.

From these – so civilized – barbarians of our nation (...) from these Scythians of our race we cannot expect the Romanian state or the Romanian nation. (...) From them we can expect the plasma of our being, the earnestness of our existence, our identity.

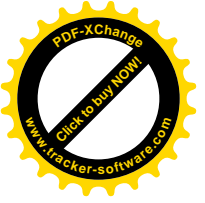
After we obtain this identity, we can talk about state and nation.

For the moment, both need to be revolutionized; destroyed if possible, in their sheer nothingness, in their immense parody.⁴⁸

This blend of philo-barbarianism, self-hatred, and an extreme revolutionary drive testifies to the sort of radical identity crisis that was being experienced by this generation at this particular moment in time, as well as for its need for regeneration that would make it so sensitive to the political discourse of

⁴⁷ Dragoș Protopopescu, “Între etnic și național” (Between the Ethnic and the National), in *Axa I*, 3 (November 27, 1932).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



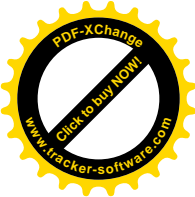
Romanian fascism. A synergy between the young Axa intellectuals and the Iron Guard politicians and doctrinaires was soon to follow.

In an article published in January 1933, Vasile Marin talked about the new generation as a force that would abolish the old world through a regenerative revolution. In his words, “rebirth through revolution cannot frighten anyone. Peoples without revolutions remove themselves from world history, the same way individuals who do not experience profound spiritual crisis in their lives bury themselves in the grey clay of anonymity.”⁴⁹ Also, according to Marin, the generation that assumed the revolutionary goal “confiscates the leadership,” making the next generation either its partner or its slave. This model was to be found in Fascist Italy and in Soviet Russia. This, however, was not the case in Romania, where the generation in control was slowly dying because of its physical and moral impotence. For Marin, its end should be accelerated by the next generation, “our generation”; and that should be done quickly, because the situation was propitious.⁵⁰ The feeling of a temporal crisis heralding a revolutionary moment was also echoed by Ioan Victor Vojen in one of his articles. The notion of time is rethought under the guise of a panicking “pre-Revolutionary moment” that announces the decisive the struggle between the old order and the new one that is about to emerge:

Each and everyone of us is feeling today that he is living a provisional, transitional life, that the entire existing social setting is about to collapse, that the old frameworks have become to constraining for the lively forces that imperatively demand a new

⁴⁹ Vasile Marin, “O singură ideologie: FAPTA” (A Single Ideology: The DEED) in *Axa*, I, 5 (January 22, 1933).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*



life: everyone realizes that they are living through a moment of panic that predicts a storm.

In times like these, the new forces, considered up to now revolutionary and destructive – are called upon to impose a different order, one different from the old and powerless discipline, one born out of necessities and organically grown from realities.

And today, each and every one of us realizes that the struggle between the new, creative order and the old, agonizing one has begun.⁵¹

Articles such as those of Marin and Voien highlight a dynamic in the discourse of the young intellectuals from the *Axa* group. When they first emerged as a group in late 1932, the focus was predominantly on the power of the state, a stable and totalizing state as in Fascist Italy, which served as a model. However, starting with February-March 1933, the emphasis fell on the revolutionary character of the Iron Guard, under the influence of Hitler's seizure of power that was regarded as the most recent example of a "national revolution." For this group of intellectuals, Hitler's way of achieving power in Germany became the new model for political action. To mention just one example, one can refer to a note included by Mihail Polihroniade in his foreign policy column, in which he praised Hitler's swiftness in accomplishing the totalitarian state in Germany and how he managed to compress time, by accomplishing in only three months what Italian fascism realized in two years.⁵²

Nevertheless, intellectual members of the Iron Guard such as Vasile Marin gave a political shape to the thoughts expressed in different ways by the young

⁵¹ Ioan Victor-Vojen, "Moment pre-revoluționar" (Pre-revolutionary Moment), in *Axa*, II, No. 6 (February 5, 1933).

⁵² Mihail Polihroniade, "Lichidarea conservatorismului și a marxismului în Germania" (The Termination of Conservatism and Marxism in Germany), in *Axa* II, 12 (May 14, 1933).



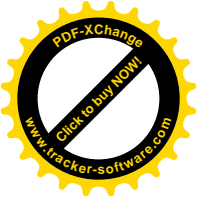
Axa intellectuals. Marin's emergence as a columnist for the journal, together with Ion Moța and Mihail Stelescu, signified the ideological enrolment of this young group of intellectuals into the political sphere of the Iron Guard. If the Axa journal hosted some of the most important intellectual members of the Iron Guard, the members of the group, in return, formed the Axa nest, becoming elite members of Codreanu's movement.⁵³ This synthesis would provide ideological fuel for the Iron Guard, and can be likened with what Walter Adamson identified in the case of Italian Fascism, where the ideas of "cultural renewal" and "spiritual revolution" championed by some modernist intellectuals were "precisely what Mussolini claimed to be carrying out in the 1920s."⁵⁴

To apply to the Romanian case the conclusions drawn by historian Zeev Sternhell at the end of his book on the birth of fascist ideology,⁵⁵ one would argue that in 1932 – 1933 the Axa group was playing the card of cultural rebellion against old Romania, the old state and the old generation; however, by end of 1933, they were plunged into the realm of political revolution, sucked into the whirlpool of destructive Iron Guard politics.

⁵³ Codreanu highlighted the topics discussed by the Axa nest as exemplary for other nests that contained intellectuals; for the list of these topics, please see Codreanu, *Cărticica șefului de cuib*, 13th edition, (Bucharest, 2000), 19 – 20.

⁵⁴ Walter L. Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: from Modernism to Fascism*, (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1993), 257.

⁵⁵ Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 257–8.



III. 2. The 1933 Electoral Battle: Antidemocratic Views, Violence, and Political Assassination

In a 1933 article Vasile Marin argued that the state based on democratic values was an import and an invention, which was alien for the body of the nation. According to Marin, this imported state emerged out of the nineteenth century as a parasitical, Masonic creation that belonged to foreigners (namely French and German), and to their tools, *i.e.* the Romanian politicians, especially the liberals.⁵⁶ Codreanu also argued against the values of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the nineteenth-century experience generally. For him, “the state based on the old ideology of the French Revolution is ruined.”⁵⁷ The legionaries questioned everything that democracy stood for. Democracy was seen as an abrupt, nineteenth-century intrusion in the historical, organic development of the Romanian nation. According to Codreanu, democracy was a great menace for Romania because it destroyed the unity of the Romanian people, is incapable of enforcing authority and turned millions of Jews into Romanian citizens.⁵⁸ Arguing along the same lines, Vasile Marin accused the democratic state of “encouraging the national aggressiveness of the minorities” while the democratic parties were regarded as “emptied of Romanian soul.”⁵⁹

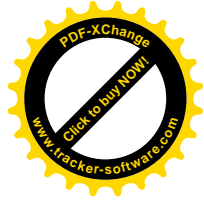
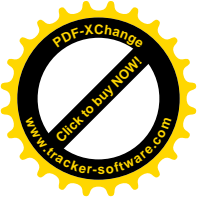
However, although it posed as a fierce opponent of democracy, the Legion took advantage of the democratic system and participated in elections as a political party. In the electoral campaigns the Legion continued to criticize

⁵⁶ Vasile Marin, *Crez de generație*, 176–8.

⁵⁷ Codreanu, *Cărticica șefului de cuib*, 78.

⁵⁸ *Idem*, *Pentru Legionari*, 325–7.

⁵⁹ Vasile Marin, *Crez de generație*, 114.



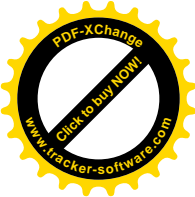
democracy and to advocate a totalitarian solution for the country's leadership. The first most important electoral battle for the Legion was at the end of 1933 when it attempted to capitalize on its increasing popularity across the country.

Towards the end of the year, King Carol appointed the liberal leader I.G. Duca to organize new elections, hoping that he would be able to contain the expansion of the Iron Guard. The Legion invested a lot of resources in this campaign, trying to profit from the political momentum it gained throughout the year. Aware of the violent nature of some of the manifestations of the Iron Guard, the authorities increased their surveillance of the movement, a thing that can also be detected from the increased quantity of archival material existent for the second half of the year 1933. The Iron Guard also managed to establish an important number of regional publications that would complement the national dailies who supported them, *Calendarul* and *Cuvântul*. This network of newspapers numbered 18 publications, an increase that prompted the legionary leaders to organize an office for the legionary press.⁶⁰ Legionary sources claimed that the total circulation of the 18 publication in December 1933 was 35 000 copies.⁶¹ These publications were very useful tools in the electoral campaign, as they propagated the political project of the Legion to a wider audience.

Nevertheless, the style of campaigning chosen by the Legion was far from employing solely the printed word. The police reports and the newspapers of the time are filled with countless violent incidents in which the legionaries were

⁶⁰ *Garda Bucovinei*, II, 1 (13 ianuarie 1933).

⁶¹ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare* (The History of the Legionary Movement), (Timișoara: Editura Gordian, 1994), 153.



involved.⁶² A police note from November 14 stated that Codreanu issued a secret order to his organizations in which he allowed them to use any means necessary in order to fight the new government whose intentions were to ban all extreme rightwing parties.⁶³ The note highlighted that this order was received with great satisfaction by the legionaries. This satisfaction was also detected later in the same month when information circulated that the legionaries planned to shoot three persons for each victim from their ranks, while Mihail Stelescu urged his closest militants to procure handguns as soon as possible.⁶⁴

As historian Armin Heinen stated, the electoral campaign was one of the bloodiest in Romania's history and the clashes between the legionnaires and the authorities caused two deaths and 1,700 arrests among the former.⁶⁵ The Iron Guard wanted to place candidates in 65 counties, but their plans were soon derailed.⁶⁶ On December 9, Duca outlawed the Legion only a few days before the elections, and the conflict reached its climax. Some sources claimed that Duca hesitated before doing it, but the banning took place, nevertheless.⁶⁷ In response, a group of three legionaries (Nicolae Constantinescu, Ion Caranica and Doru Belimace) assassinated Prime Minister Duca on the railway station platform at Sinaia, a mountain resort that hosted the residence of King Carol II. This event marked a special episode in the evolution of Romanian fascism, as for the first time violence was used at the highest level. The newspapers rushed to note that

⁶² Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail de la mit la realitate*, 182-3.

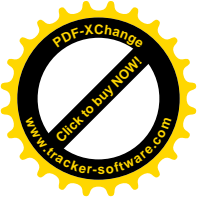
⁶³ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 10 / 193, Vol. 1, p. 175.

⁶⁴ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 10 / 193, Vol. 1, p. 177.

⁶⁵ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 240–1.

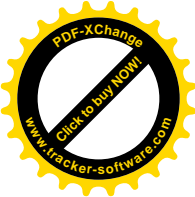
⁶⁶ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 10 / 193, Vol. 1, p. 207.

⁶⁷ Grigore Gafencu, *Însemnări Politice 1929-1939* (Political Notes 1929-1939), (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 313.



the previous assassination of a prime minister took place back in 1862, when the conservative Barbu Catargiu was also shot.⁶⁸ The Legion as a whole was considered responsible for the crime, and many pointed at Codreanu as the moral author of the crime. However, the reaction of the authorities was disappointing and lenient. Although Codreanu was also tried together with the actual assassins, he was found not guilty. Even so, this event had a huge impact on the organization of the movement as it almost led to its dismemberment. The animosities among some of the groups within the movement became even clearer, and this was the most important challenge that Codreanu had to face in order to keep the Legion together.

⁶⁸ Constantin Bacalbaşa, “Dela Barbu Catargiu la I. G. Duca” (From Barbu Catargiu to I. G. Duca), in *Universul*, LI, 3 (January 4, 1934).



CHAPTER IV

The “Silent Work”¹: How the Legion Put its Political Project into Practice and Became a Mass-Movement

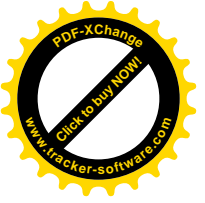
IV. 1. Repression, Dissent and Recovery: the Legionary Movement in the Years 1934-1936

Much like the previous year, 1934 was a very important one in the history of the Legion. Codreanu's movement had to face some of its greatest challenges from its short but intense political history. The assassination of Prime Minister Duca attracted unwanted attention towards the Legion, certifying its often violent and unlawful character. Many legionary leaders as well as foot soldiers of the movement were arrested by the authorities in an attempt to offer swift justice after the aforementioned criminal act. Over 2000 arrests among the legionary ranks were carried out, among them General Zizi Cantacuzino-Grănicerul, Ion Banea, and intellectuals such as Dragoș Protopopescu and Mihail Polihroniade.² Although high-ranking officials from the Ministry of the Interior such as Victor Iamandi demanded that the entire organization should be convicted, many political leaders such as Iuliu Maniu, Gheorghe Brătianu and Constantin Argetoianu testified in favor of the Iron Guard, and only the assassins (Nicolae Constantinescu, Ion Caranica and Doru Belimace) received life sentences.³

¹ This term was used by a German diplomat to describe the activity of the Legion in this timeframe. The report is quoted in Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 278-9.

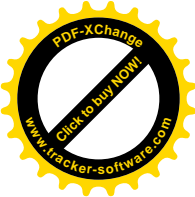
² Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail de la mit la realitate*, 190.

³ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 243-5.



The growing interest showed by the authorities for the Legionary Movement is also reflected by the sudden increase in archival material that can be detected at the end of 1933 and throughout 1934. These records detail the actions taken against the legionaries, especially in preparation for the trial of Duca's assassins and other important figures within the movement, old time militants and newcomer intellectuals together. The abundant archival material also allowed a more complex look at the internal affairs of the Legion, how the component of its leadership evolved and also how it affected the evolution of the movement for the following years.

The historiography of the Iron Guard has generally portrayed the movement as a monolithic one, led with authority and charisma by Codreanu; it has emphasized only Mihail Stelescu as a dissenting voice within the ranks of the Legion. However, it can be inferred from analyzing several archival documents that starting with 1933 and the growth and diversification of the movement, Codreanu faced new challenges in exerting his leadership. The intellectual and ideological impetus infused by the "AXA" group came at a price, with Codreanu having to homogenize the political visions of his "first hour" followers from the Iași days, with those of the Bucharest based young intellectuals who supported his movement and gave it a nationwide appeal. One can conclude from these documents that Codreanu was caught by surprise by these changes within the higher strata of the movement and decided to forcefully intervene in order to solve these emerging issues. Their importance was also amplified following the measures taken by the authorities against the Iron Guard after Duca's



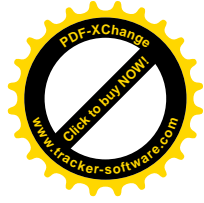
assassination. Thus, after the verdict of the trial Codreanu proceeded to revive the movement and also tried to appease the opposing camps that emerged in 1933, as he became closer to the “Axa” group of intellectuals.

A police report from June 1934 mapped the power relationships within the Legion, allowing a view of how the main camps positioned themselves:

Among the members of the former ‘Axa’ nest divergent views are deepening day by day. Whereas in the beginning there were two currents: one belonging to the legionaries from the former nest of the old Iron Guard intellectuals and the second belonging to the professional journalists grouped around the ‘Axa’ journal, today a third current emerged, which is close to the first one in the struggle to get Corneliu Codreanu out of the influence of the ‘intruders’ (the professional journalists from the former ‘Axa’ journal are considered, together with professor Nae Ionescu, opportunistic intruders) but they also have something in common with them, because unlike old legionaries, they are for immediate action alongside one of the rightwing groups.⁴

The group of old legionary militants was active around Ion Moța while the Axa professional journalists were led by professor Dragoș Protopopescu while the third group had Andrei Ionescu as a disguised leader, advised by Mihail Stelescu. The report emphasized the position upheld by each group with respect to the projected political collaborations of the Legion, with the old legionaries arguing for total independence while the Axa intellectuals favored closer ties with Marshall Averescu and his potential government. The newly formed third camp was described in the report as opportunistic in its argumentation that the Iron Guard had to support any rightwing government, demanding a special

⁴ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, 6.



relationship with Octavian Goga, and even with the Transylvanian nationalists that would leave the National Peasantist Party.⁵

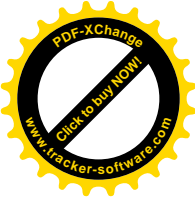
In a way, this debate within the movement was an echo of a manifesto launched by Codreanu on December 10, 1933, after the banning of the Iron Guard, in which he stated the voting options of the legionaries for the forthcoming elections, urging them to vote with Iuliu Maniu in Transylvania, Gheorghe Brătianu's liberal party in the Old Kingdom and to support Alexandru Averescu wherever he might be running. Codreanu explicitly forbade his followers to vote for A. C. Cuza's movement saying that it was just another face of the government, thus marking his decisive break from his former mentor, the endpoint of a political and ideological journey that began in 1927.⁶

The closing of the document emphasized Codreanu's determination to restore his authority in front of these dissenting groups within the movement and disciplining Mihail Stelescu was regarded the first step in this direction. Codreanu's intention was brutally put into practice two years later.

Another police report, dated August 28, 1934 presented the outcome of a discussion between Codreanu and one member of the "Axa" group which concluded with the decision to restart the activity of the group in order to try and ease the tensions between them and the older intellectual figures within the Legion such as Ion Moța. The opening was planned for the month of September

⁵ Ibid., 62

⁶ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 17 / 1933, pp. 13-18.



and was also meant to prove across the leadership of the Legion that Codreanu was still in charge and could maintain a balanced yet firm control.⁷

However, the inner debates within the movement remained vocal enough to make the authorities pay attention to them in their reports. Thus, a note about the meeting between Gheorghe Clime, who was one of the old legionary leaders, and an unnamed member of the *Axa* group revealed another level of the discrepancies between the camps. This time the bone of contention was the relationship between ideology and political practice. While the young intellectuals from the *Axa* group added a lot to the Legion in terms of intellect, credibility, and ideological thrust, the old time militants were still more inclined to emphasize political action, in line with Codreanu's longing for an "ideology of the deed."

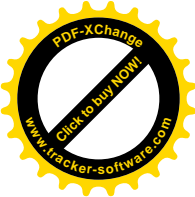
Along these lines, Clime was reported to have said the following to his comrade:

You, the theoretician comrades, know how to put the doctrine on paper, we, the fighting legionaries know what struggle is, and because we know it, I, as the secretary-general of the Guard have included in the reorganizing scheme of the Guard all the possible difficulties to be encountered. [...] We shall know how to die in order for the program prepared by you, the theoreticians and doctrinaires, to triumph. The moment we adhered to the principles of the Guard, in our hearts we have inscribed our testament: "we die for the good of the country."⁸

The apparent deference in Clime's statements could also be read, given the tensions existent in the Legion, as a condescending way to tell the new "theoreticians and doctrinaires" that the driving force behind the movement was still represented by the foot soldiers who put its program into practice since its establishment.

⁷ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 261-262.

⁸ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 285.

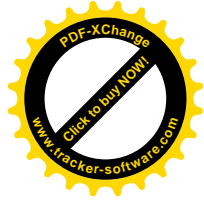
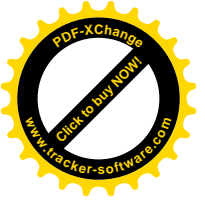


Other problems Codreanu faced were related to the dissatisfaction manifested by an important part of the Legion's leadership with respect to his projected political alliances. A revealing archival document in this regard was a police note entitled "A meeting of Transylvanian legionaries at the central headquarters of the Iron Guard."⁹ The document described a meeting that took place on September 19, 1934 at Codreanu's request in order to discuss the potential collaboration with Marshall Averescu's movement in Transylvania. This meeting turned into an opportunity for Codreanu to deal with the apparent dissenting voices within the movement, as some of the Transylvanian leaders warned against the compromising nature of some local politicians belonging to Averescu's movement. The Transylvanian leaders also claimed that any kind of political arrangement in the region should be done with Moța's consent, an argument that annoyed Codreanu to the point that he allegedly said "I will command from now on, and those who do not want to obey my decisions are free to withdraw. However, I am convinced that everyone will obey".¹⁰ Codreanu's authoritative personality did not allow even someone like Moța, his trusted friend and fellow traveler, to develop initiatives that would undermine his authority in the movement.

However, the most decisive action taken by Codreanu in order to punish those who did not obey his orders and respect his authority within the movement targeted Mihail Stelescu. This action, initiated in the summer of 1934, opened up the most important inner conflict within the Legion, with Stelescu, a former MP

⁹ ANIC Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 238.

¹⁰ Ibid.



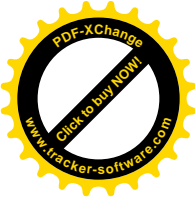
and one of the most politically active legionaries, ending up as Codreanu's number one enemy. The starting point was a series of incident that took place in August and September 1934, culminatig with the accusation against Stelescu that he had planned a rebellion in the Legion and plotted to have Codreanu killed by fellow legionary Vasile Cotea.¹¹

These incidents were treated by Codreanu with the utmost severity. Thus, he considered the behavior of the legionaries involved as unacceptable and excluded Stelescu from the movement under the charge of high treason. Codreanu took things further and disbanded the Bucharest district organization to which Stelescu belonged and excluded other legionaries who did not oppose Stelescu's actions. The legionary leader used this opportunity in order to argue, in a circular addressed to all legionaries, that dissent within the Iron Guard would not be tolerated. He stated that he would not allow the formation of separate groups within the movement, because "groups lead to the disruption of the movement, and the destruction of its unity [...]The Guard is a perfect unity, and any attempt to break this unity is a crime."¹²

Codreanu's handling of the Stelescu case was meant to show strength of leadership. However, Stelescu was one of the fiercest political fighters that the Legion had, and after this episode, he channeled all his political energy against Codreanu. Thus, he founded a political organization called *Cruciada Românismului* (The Crusade of Romanianism) which published a journal with the same title. From this platform, Stelescu constantly attacked Codreanu, accusing

¹¹ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 95-8

¹² Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste 1927 – 1938*, 20.



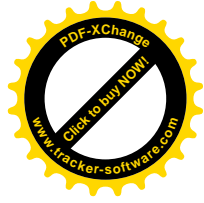
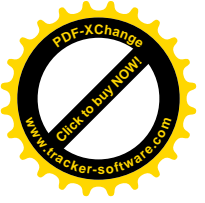
him of being immoral, and also of deceiving his young followers by posing as something that he was not. In an open letter published in the *Cruciada Românismului*, Stelescu launched a devastating assault on Codreanu, blaming him for dubious connections with “old guard” politicians, immoral behavior and using the Legion’s militants for his own personal ambition of posing as an acclaimed political leader.¹³

Nevertheless, one of the accusations that were perpetrated by Stelescu regarded Codreanu’s ethnic origin, a topic much debated in the 1930s. This issue, together with the one regarding Codreanu’s explicit involvement in Duca’s assassination, was quoted by a police report as the ones through which Stelescu “signed his own death sentence.”¹⁴ Some considered Codreanu a hypocrite in his extreme nationalism by many because of his own family background which was thought by many as not being entirely Romanian. The National-Peasantist daily *Dreptatea* (The Justice) wrote a pamphlet based on a document from 1902 that was signed by Ion Zelea Codreanu, requesting the changing of his name from Zelinski to Zelea. The article stated that Corneliu Codreanu could be a Polish or even Jewish because “in the Bucharest phone book there are two Jewish families listed under this name: Mauriciu and Morit̃ Zelinski.”¹⁵ Armand Călinescu, National-Peasantist leader and future victim of the Iron Guard, also wrote in his daily notes that: “the elder Codreanu is Polish by his father and Hungarian by his

¹³ *Cruciada Românismului*, I, No. 18 (April 4, 1935).

¹⁴ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 103 / 1933, p. 232.

¹⁵ “Originea ‘etnică’ a d-lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu – un document senzațional” (The ‘Ethnic’ Origin of Mr. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu – a sensational document), in *Dreptatea*, No. 2555, (April 30, 1936).



mother. Young Codreanu has a German mother, Lanner. And this Polish-Hungarian-German half-breed is teaching us lessons in Romanianism!”.¹⁶

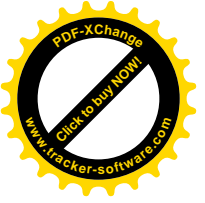
Stelescu's actions were highly damaging to Codreanu and the Legion, so the decision to suppress him in the summer of 1936 came as no surprise. The facts regarding Stelescu's bloody assassination are well known and thoroughly documented in Romanian historiography. Stelescu's was killed by a squad of ten legionaries (some of them theology students) while being hospitalized in Bucharest. Dozens of bullets were fired at him, and he was also hit repeatedly in the head with an axe, all this while the assassins sang and praised the Legion.¹⁷ They surrendered themselves to the police immediately. This action only came as a confirmation that the threats of the Legion were indeed serious.¹⁸

Also of interest are the inner motivations of this violent hatred displayed by the legionaries against Stelescu. A manifesto signed by the legionary student leaders from all the important university centers: Gheorghe Furdul (president of the National Union of Christian Students from Romania), Alexandru Cantacuzino (the foreign affairs director of the aforementioned student union), Ion Antoniu (Bucharest), Teodor Tudose (Iași), Filon Lauric (Cernăuți), Tiberiu Vereș (Cluj) and Nicolae Constantin (Chișinău), provided a moral and historical justification for the assassination of Mihail Stelescu. Thus, keeping in line with Codreanu's own views regarding the nefarious role played by traitors in Romania, the student

¹⁶ Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice (Political Notes)*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 310.

¹⁷ Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 228-229; Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci*, 306; Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice*, 310; ANIC Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 103 / 1933, p. 232.

¹⁸ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 287-8.



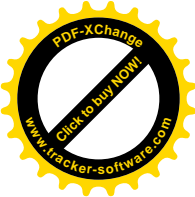
leaders argued that for five centuries the history of Romania was marked by a curse that led to the deaths of leaders such as Michael the Brave, Tudor Vladimirescu and others.¹⁹ The Romanian society was regarded as an “infected field” where treason, corruption, and cowardice were prosperous, and this state of affairs was the main reason why Mihail Stelescu did not commit suicide. Again, the present day youth was revered as the pillar that would avenge “these times of shame”, and the assassination of Stelescu was seen as the beginning, as “from now on, the leaders will leave and the traitors will die.”²⁰ The justification of this criminal act reconfirms in a radical way some of the statements made in the previous chapter with respect to the relationship of the legionaries with time and history. Stelescu’s execution was regarded as a new historical beginning, an attempt to make right the wrongs of history, a radical critique of the perceived moral weaknesses of the Romanians in the past:

“From all the bullets that punished him, only one was for him. All the others avenged the hundreds of sales to which the Romanians were sentenced by their resignation, weakness, and cowardice under the blows of treason. These are the bullets that redeem our disgrace and give peace to the souls of our great forerunners [...]. If, from the ranks of our nation, people would have been found to butcher traitors and their successors with axes, then the seed of treason would have been wrested from the Romanian furrow and we would have had another History and another destiny.”

This desire to pose as a “maker of history,” as a movement dedicated to a “higher cause” highlighted the legionary predisposition to showcase their political project as one with the aim of regenerating the moral fiber of the nation in decay.

¹⁹ The manifesto can be found at ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 10 / 1935, p. 99.

²⁰ Ibid.



The manifesto was in fact the brainchild of Alexandru Cantacuzino, one of the most active doctrinaires of the Legion,²¹ and that can be deduced from the fact that he published an article containing large parts from the manifesto in a newspaper sympathetic to Codreanu's movement – *Cuvântul Argeşului* (Word of Argeş).²² The fact that this manifesto was also signed by student leaders from all over the country was only meant to show the determination of the legionary youth and the sense of national unity for Codreanu's project. The fact that the only the assassins of Stelescu were tried and convicted by the authorities, and that Codreanu managed to avoid being connected to this criminal act, only enhanced the feeling that the "Captain" was a difficult target to hit.

Besides the repression and the dissent, the years 1934–36 also marked the recovery of the Legionary Movement after the events that took place at the end of 1933. The competition on the far-right track of Romanian politics was increasing, as in July 1935 A. C. Cuza and Octavian Goga decided to join forces and form *Partidul Național Creștin* (the National Christian Party).²³ PNC was to become the most important competitor for the Legion in the quest for capitalizing on the increasing nationalistic and rightwing sentiment across Europe and Romania. Although the newly formed party still upheld ultranationalist and anti-Semitic sentiments, some former members saw it as an example of "politics as

²¹ Between 1934 and 1936 Alexandru Cantacuzino was very active within the Legion and also in the student movement publishing two booklets that advocated an "anthropological revolution" to create a "new man" while also placing the legionary project in stark contrast to the communist one: *Între lumea legionară și lumea comunistă* (Between the Legionary World and the Communist World), (Bucharest: 1935) and *Românul de mâine* (The Romanian of Tomorrow), (Bucharest: 1936).

²² "Despre vânzarea de neam" (About Betraying the Nation), in *Cuvântul Argeşului*, I, No. 23-24 (July 25, 1936).

²³ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 248.



usual” and walked away from its ranks in order to pursue a more radical agenda. This was the case of lawyer I. V. Emilian, one of the most active militants within LANC’s paramilitary organization “The Blue Shirts”, who founded a new organization entitled *Svastica de Foc* (Fire Swastika).²⁴ As one police report stated, the name was inspired by the French *Croix-de-Feu*. What was important with respect to its program was the fact that the movement also strived for the creation of a new type of man, based on the efforts of the young generation, while expounding deep anti-Semitic, anti-freemason and anticommunist beliefs.²⁵

The Legion’s regrouping plans started under the mark of revenge against the liberal party which, in their view, was responsible for the repression and eventual disintegration of the movement. An order signed by legionary leader Gh. Clime on May 25, 1934 underlined that the struggle for the punishment of the liberal party had to commence the day after the liberals leave power and had to end only with their “total extirpation from Romanian politics.”²⁶ He then went on in the same avenging tone, in what can be considered an attempt to show the militants that the Legion was back in the political arena:

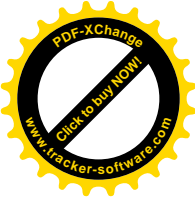
Let the example of their unremitting punishment in every Romanian town and village be a severe historical lesson for anyone who would dream of repeating the naughtiness and impudence of last winter. The slogan of this punishing, avenging, struggle should be: THE GUARD DOESN’T FORGET! THE GUARD DOESN’T FORGIVE!”²⁷

²⁴ A police report regarding I. V. Emilian and his political activity may be read in Ioan Scurtu and others (eds.), *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România 1934–1938*, (Ideology and Rightwing Formations in Romania 1934-1938), vol. IV, (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2003), 159-60.

²⁵ Loc. cit., 157-8.

²⁶ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 22.

²⁷ Ibid.

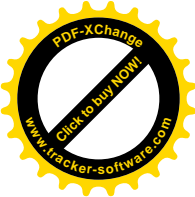


The formal restructuring of the movement started quickly. On June 14, 1934 a police report detailed the plans of the Iron Guard to reorganize its structures. Thus, every county was divided in sectors led by trustworthy legionaries who reported directly to the central command of the movement. In turn, the leaders of the sectors would name village committees of five people as the organizational cell at the basis of the movement. The center, the sectors and the village committees were to communicate through trustworthy persons that did not know each other, in order to avoid postal services that could have been easily controlled by the authorities.²⁸

On another level, the program of the Cross Brotherhoods from secondary schools was reissued by its leader Gh. Gh. Istrate on December 4, 1934 in an attempt to reorganize this very important component of the Legionary Movement at Codreanu's explicit order issued on November 10. The major change was that the organization became more flexible as it was supposed to function at the level of secondary schools and not at the town level. A Cross Brotherhood cell was comprised of seven members guided by a legionary student, and on a countrywide level the organization was divided into 5 sections pertaining to the biggest university centers. The young members were supposed to attract new members into the movement while also serving as models for the others in term of behavior and class performance "this in order to shatter the false mentality that the legionaries are the weakest in classes and also in order to be well regarded by the professors".²⁹

²⁸ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, 15 / 1933, p. 12.

²⁹ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 12.

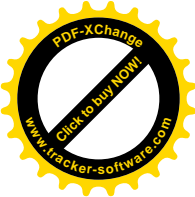


A police report regarding the situation of right and extreme rightwing organizations dated October 8, 1934 summed up the political evolution of the Legion in that respective year accounting for the changes that have occurred following Duca's assassination and the ensuing trial. One can also notice a certain change in the tone of the report with respect to the Legion, as the police started to talk about it more seriously, in terms of its goals and complex leadership, rather than regarding it as a fringe movement consisting of young and marginal troublemakers. The Legion was described as "a nationalist organization, not with a defensive, but an offensive character, which aims at creating 'a New type of man' on which to base the future legionary corporatist State."³⁰ The report emphasized the new tactic of the legionaries to continue their activity under the guise of working endeavors for churches and schools, while also underlining the important role played by women's nests (called "fortresses"), the Cross Brotherhoods and the Sports Legion. One other important aspect detailed in the report was the growing influence of the nests founded by intellectuals, such as *Axa* and *Athénée Palace*, now constituting a force within the movement, as Codreanu was often advised by their members.³¹

After being tested during the repression of the authorities following Duca's assassination, the group of intellectuals around the journal *Axa* remained a core component of the movement. Attempts to launch the journal again under the same name failed, yet in April 1936 the journal *Vestitorii* was published and grouped some of the most prominent young intellectuals who adhered to the Iron

³⁰ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 117 / 1933, p. 50.

³¹ Ibid., 53-4.

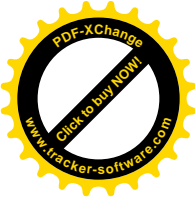


Guard and who were at the core of the Axa group. The publication was supported by Virgil Ionescu, one of the financial benefactors of the Iron Guard, and was intended to become a propaganda tool, targeting existing members but also the student movement.³² The editorship was undertaken by Gheorghe Ciorogaru, but it was the former Axa contributors who provided the content. Mihail Polihroniade, Ion Victor Vojen Alexandru Constant, and Vasile Christescu, but also new intellectual adherents such as Traian Herseni, wrote articles that openly supported the Iron Guard while the journal tried to replicate the layout and headings of the former Axa. The reaction of the authorities was, this time, swift, and the journal was banned after only four issues. Archival sources reveal that attempts to reopen the journal *Vestitorii* were envisaged in September 1936, but this intention never materialized.³³

However, the Legion still had a plethora of journals that were sympathetic to its ideas and which served as useful communication tools for the intellectuals of the movement. Although not officially belonging to the Legion, these publications supported it and complemented the political endeavors of Codreanu. One such example was the journal *Însemnări Sociologice* (Sociological Notes) founded in 1935 at the University of Cernăuți by professor Traian Brăileanu, one of the first important intellectuals who joined the Legion, a member of its Senate and a person much treasured by Codreanu. Under the appearance of an academic journal, Brăileanu developed an ideological system to underpin the Legion's political actions and hosted voices such as those of Leon Țopa, Barbu

³² ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 283 / 1936, p. 142.

³³ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 3 / 1936, p.207.



Slușanschi, George Macrin and Liviu Rusu.³⁴ By his own admission, Brăileanu later took pride in the fact that he used an academic platform for promoting the legionary ideology, as he confessed in 1940, while being a minister in the short lived Iron Guard – Ion Antonescu government³⁵:

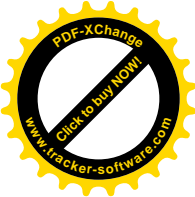
Însemnările Sociologice set its path from the very beginning: to give the legionary doctrine all the support of the social science and at the same time to contribute to the spreading of the Captain's doctrine, being convinced that it is the only saving teaching for the Country and Nation. [...] In this way, the legionary doctrine, springing from deep faith and immaculate sacrificing spirit, had and will have in the social science the best tool for organizing the Romanian ideal according to the Captain's ideal.³⁶

Another important intellectual journal that supported the Iron Guard was *Rânduiala*, subtitled "Archive of Romanian Thought and Deed". At the core of the publication were two young intellectuals, Ernest Bernea and Dumitru C. Amzăr who started initially with a program to offer an alternative to the mainstream cultural trends that dominated Romanian public life of the time. In the first issue, for example, Ernest Bernea engaged in a critical analysis of the "Sociological School" initiated by Dimitrie Gusti with the help of younger scholars such as Taian Herseni and H. H. Stahl, arguing that instead of suggesting "theories that

³⁴ Just to exemplify, one may quote articles such as: George Macrin, "O nouă școală românească. Taberele de muncă" (A New Romanian School. The Work Camps) in *Însemnări Sociologice* I, 4 (July 1935): 16-23; Traian Brăileanu, "Desăvârșirea structurii elitei legionare" (The Accomplishment of the Structure of the Legionary Elite) in *Însemnări Sociologice* II, 9 (December 1936): 1-8; Barbu Slușanschi, Școala tineretului de azi și țelurile ei (The School of Today's Youth and its Goals), in *Însemnări Sociologice* I, 8 (November 1935): 12-20

³⁵ For more on the Ion Antonescu – Iron Guard regime (September 1940-Febrary 1941), please see the chapter "Antonescu and the National Legionary State" in Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania 1940-1944* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 52-68.

³⁶ Traian Brăileanu, "Doctrina legionară și știința socială" (Legionary Doctrine and Social Science) in *Almanahul Cuvântul* (Bucharest: 1941), 97.

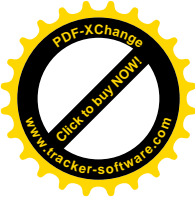


lure and deceive” the School should focus on providing concrete and empirical studies of the rural civilization that were important “from a scientific and Romanian point of view.”³⁷ With time, the journal gained a political thrust, becoming more interested in providing a cultural and even mystical support for the legionary ideals, a thing clearly visible with the occasion of the publication of Codreanu’s book *Pentru legionari*, but also in relation with the funeral of Vasile Marin and Ion Moța, legionary leaders who died in the Spanish Civil War. Thus, Ernest Bernea praised Codreanu’s project, considering it a revolution of the soul, aimed at creating a ‘new man’ through legionary education, while Amzăr considered Moța and Marin “martyrs of faith”, “soul builders and path openers of Romanian history.”³⁸

The recovery of the movement was marked by the publication of other journals sympathetic to the Legion, especially outside Bucharest, since the censorship seemed to be harsher in the capital, as it has been proven in the aforementioned case of *Vestitorii*. Publications such as *Brațul de Fier* (Focșani), *Cuvântul Argeșului* (Pitești), *Glasul Strămoșesc* (Cluj) or *Revista Mea* (Cluj) provided the platforms for supporting the Legion in its actions, especially the new constructive approach embodied by the work camps system.

³⁷ Ernest Bernea, “Monografia sociologică” (The Sociological Monograph) in *Rânduiala*, I, 1 (January-March 1935): 60-71.

³⁸ Ernest Bernea, “Cartea unui început de veac” (The Book of the Dawn of a New Era), II, 1 (1936): 36-40; Dumitru C. Amzăr, “Destin legionar” (Legionary Destiny), in *Rânduiala*, II, 2 (1937): 51-4.

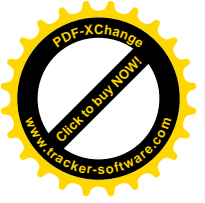


IV. 2. Working towards Regeneration: the Legionary Work Camp System

The work camps system played a crucial role in the regenerative project constructed by the Legion and was the perfect place where the taming of the body took place.³⁹ In an orderly manner, young legionaries took part in common working endeavors. The lifestyle within the camp was ordered in a military fashion, with discipline being well enforced. Both physical and moral education were emphasized. The principles of unity, camaraderie and self-sacrifice were advocated, while class distinction was rejected *ab initio*. Propaganda songs accompanied the work, and lectures concerning the legionary doctrine were held on a regular basis. Codreanu considered the work camps, due to their complexity, the ultimate legionary school with the mission to physically and mentally strengthen the future “new men” and thus accomplish what, in his view, the regular educational system could not do.⁴⁰ Once this anthropological transformation was accomplished, the rebirth of the country as a whole could

³⁹ I have mapped in a previous contribution the process of the taming of the legionary body, mainly through the development of the work camps system. For this, please see Valentin Săndulescu, “Taming the Body”: Preliminary Considerations Regarding the Legionary Work Camps System (1933 - 1937)” in *Historical Yearbook V* (2008): 85 – 94. The importance of the taming of the revolt for the development of fascism has been highlighted by George Mosse in an article published more than four decades ago: “Introduction: The Genesis of Fascism,” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1 (1966): 15.

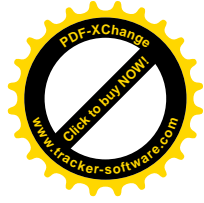
⁴⁰ For the constant mass socialization of the young fascist new men in Italy, please see Ruth Ben Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 93. For another analysis of the political socialization of the youth please see Tracy Koon, *Believe! Obey! Fight! : Political socialization of youth in Fascist Italy 1922 – 1943*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), xv. The preoccupation for bypassing the conventional school system was also present in the German case, after Hitler came to power. For more on this, please see Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48 – 50.



take place. The system became efficient in the mid 1930s, with the highest numbers of camps and working sites being reached in 1935 and 1936. Due to their increasing popularity, the government banned the organization of such camps in 1937. By extending the work camps model at a nationwide level after I. G. Duca's assassination, the Legion wanted to abandon its image of a destructive, violent and anarchic movement. By doing free, humble physical work that was for the benefit of ordinary people, Codreanu's militants wanted to show the public opinion that they could also be a constructive force. The work camps served as a proof, to all those who ventured to visit them, of how the theoretical notions of "new men" and "new country" employed by the Legion would actually take shape. No less important was the fact that these work camps were used to strengthen the inner cohesion and solidarity within the movement, providing a feeling of belonging to the Legionary youth, while highlighting these endeavors as micro projections of the "new Romania" to come.⁴¹

Every important moment in the history of the Romanian Legionary Movement was, in one way or another, marked by the existence of a work camp, which sparked controversy and attracted interest from public opinion; however, more than anything else, the work camp helped coalesce the movement both organizationally and ideologically. In 1924, the first work camp was set up by Codreanu for building the Râpa Galbenă student hostel in Iași, a place of gathering for him and his followers. This event drew attention to Codreanu as a leader, while the attempt of the authorities to terminate it and the ensuing trial

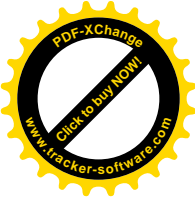
⁴¹ Valentin Săndulescu, "Taming the Body": Preliminary Considerations Regarding the Legionary Work Camps System, 86.



brought him nationwide fame. In 1933, the work camp at Vișani, on the Buzău River, showed the determination of the Iron Guard to impose a new way of doing politics and also served as a way for the movement to victimize itself in order to pose as a constructive movement that was oppressed by authorities. Another famous work camp was connected to the construction of the Legion's Bucharest headquarters. The "Casa Verde" (Green House) as it was called, brought the work camp model and the Iron Guard's new political project in front of the eyes of the people of Bucharest. It impressed the intellectuals who were looking for a "spiritual" alternative, and it drew many famous visitors, while marking the leap from a provincial to a national movement.⁴² This was probably the time when the authorities also realized the image and propaganda potential of the work camps, as a police report carefully accounted for those who visited the camp: Nichifor Crainic, General Cantacuzino-Grănicerul, Mircea Eliade, Dan Rădulescu, Gheorghe Racoveanu, Dragoș Protopopescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Alexandru Cantacuzino, N. Crevedia, N. Roșu, Ștefan Tătărăscu, Victor Papacostea, P. Pandrea.⁴³ Although some of those who visited the 1933 Bucharest work camp did it out of plain curiosity, the fact that some of those who by that visit made their first contact with the Legion remained faithful to it in the years to come was certainly more than a coincidence. As the police report also stated, the Legion gained respectability among other political parties at a level never encountered before, as it could be observed from the meetings with the conservatives and the

⁴² Mihail Polihroniade wrote a full page article about this moment, insisting that a new ethic was born, with the youth learning "the value of the collective effort, the discipline of obscure work, the ardor of anonymous sacrifice." Mihail Polihroniade, "Construim!" (We Are Building!), in *Axa*, II, 17 (September 6, 1933): 3.

⁴³ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 10 / 1933, Vol. 1, pp. 58-9.



leaders of Marshall Averescu's party. A meeting between Codreanu and Averescu took place after a visit of the latter to the working site, and the Marshall pointed out to the legionary leader that some of the talking points of his political program, which resembled German national-socialism, had to be dropped because they could not be adapted to the Romanian context.⁴⁴

The work camp from Rarău Mountain (Bukovina) from the summer of 1934, which provides a very interesting case study, was crucial in rebuilding the trust of the legionaries in the movement after the trial following Duca's assassination. It showed that the movement was still determined to play an important role in politics and that its regenerative project was still very much a driving force for the movement. By gathering the most active legionaries in the camp based in the mountainous region of Moldova, Codreanu was able to get an accurate picture of how many militants were still at his disposal while also sending them the message that the Iron Guard was back in the political arena. Archival records allow us to reconstruct the history of this work camp, and a brief look at how things evolved in the summer of 1934 would be quite enlightening with respect to the mechanisms that were behind organizing such an endeavor, and to the way in which the main protagonists (Codreanu, the legionaries and the authorities) actually behaved.

On May 26, 1934 Corneliu Codreanu together with his father and General Cantacuzino-Grănicerul went on a trip to the Rarău Mountain and donated an Orthodox icon to a local hermitage.⁴⁵ He explained to those present his plans

⁴⁴ Ibid., 59-60.

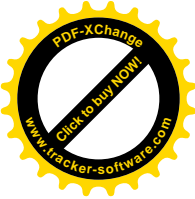
⁴⁵ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 18.

regarding the reorganization of the Legion and decided to build there a summer house for legionary students. He summoned all available legionaries from Transylvania, Moldova, Bessarabia and Bukovina to come to the planned working site starting July 1.⁴⁶



IV.1: Outline of the site of the legionary work camp on Rarău Mountain done by the local police. (ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 245).

⁴⁶ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 143.



Codreanu arrived there together with his wife on July 2 and initiated the building of the house, with the help of close to a hundred legionary students. The authorities kept the movement under close surveillance, and a note of the Iași Police Inspectorate reported the departure towards Rarău of 20 legionary students, equipped with shovels and pickaxes, and wearing their green shirts under their street clothes.⁴⁷ Warning their superiors that other groups may go to the same place in the near future, the local police asked if they should stop them. The authorities acted in a lenient manner, and the groups were obviously not prevented from joining the work camp, thus allowing it to grow.

The first weeks of the camp were marked by a scarcity of the food supplies, doubled by intensive work for chopping down the trees necessary for the construction of the house. In spite of the difficult conditions encountered, the legionaries obeyed Codreanu's orders and respected the dense schedule imposed by him.⁴⁸ If in the beginning the police reports had a neutral tone, later on a touch of compassion could be detected, thus leading one to the conclusion that the local police authorities themselves were quite impressed by the disciplined and orderly character of the camp. According to observations made by the police, the camp was thoroughly organized, with legionaries responsible for the daily current affairs and the necessary supplies, and even students from the Faculty of Medicine who provided medical assistance when needed. The daily schedule started at six in the morning with tea, two ours of physical exercises followed by work. Once a week the legionaries went on a trip to the

⁴⁷ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 93.

⁴⁸ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p.165.

mountain, barefooted, with many of them being wounded but not complaining about Codreanu's orders. The girls in the camp, although were mainly working in the kitchen, followed the same schedule as the other legionaries.⁴⁹

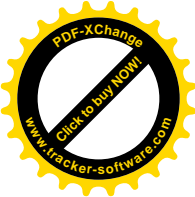


IV.2: Group of legionaries in the Rarău work camp. Source: *Almanahul Cuvântul* (Bucharest: 1941)

The police informants reported that the legionaries refrained from open political propaganda but made a lasting impression on the visitors of the nearby monastery. Codreanu used the opportunity for announcing new promotions within the ranks of the movement, rewarding some of the legionaries for their activity, the most important being the naming of Vasile Iaşinschi as regional commandant for Bukovina.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 178.



An interesting detail about the orders given by Codreanu to those in the camp was the fact that they were discouraged from causing any trouble against any Jewish tourists they might have encountered at the nearby chalet.⁵¹ By doing this, Codreanu wanted to stay out of trouble and not give the authorities any occasion for intervening against those in the camp thus ruining his plans.

The element that caused a big surprise among the local authorities and made the work camp more interesting for the central authorities was the fact that the land where the legionary house was built had been donated by Prince Nicolae, the brother of King Carol. Prince Nicolae also donated 200 cubic meters of wood to help the building of the house.⁵² Among the legionary students, this fact represented a moral booster, as they regarded this help as a sign that the King himself approved their endeavor. This feeling was amplified by the visit made to camp by Colonel Manolescu, Prince Nicolae personal aide.⁵³ However, as the events proved it, the Prince helped the Legion because of his interest to use the movement against King Carol, and also encouraged various army officers to join the Iron Guard. The misunderstandings between him and the King culminated with the withdrawal of all his rights as a member of the Royal House in April 1937.⁵⁴

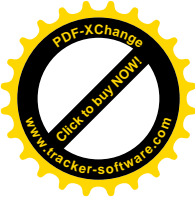
In order to gain a more complete view of this case study, one can also rely on the personal experience of one of the participants, George Macrin, who wrote in 1940 about his two months in the work camp. According to Macrin, by

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, p. 199.

⁵³ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 15 / 1933, pp. 240-1.

⁵⁴ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 301-2.



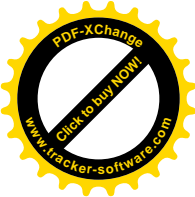
establishing the Rarău work camp, “the Captain only wanted to make a school. A new school for the Romanian of tomorrow.”⁵⁵ Macrin insisted on describing the daily life within the camp, stating the very well organized manner in which everything was conducted, the physical exercises, the quasi-military training and the construction work. Macrin also described the evening meetings in which Codreanu also engaged in the spiritual and political education of his devotees. He talked to them about the path to be followed by a legionary in his activity, about treason, and also about the differences between the Legion and other political parties.⁵⁶ Macrin’s recollections were strikingly similar with what the police reports also informed about the general atmosphere of the working camp. Codreanu managed to energize an important part of the young legionaries from Northern Romania and to get them to rally around the flag of the Legion after some very difficult months. Macrin’s closing statements summed up the kind of personal experience a young legionary took out from the endeavor: “Those of us who lived there parted ways with the Captain with a broken heart. More than spiritual connections were formed between us. We climbed down from the mountains with the Captain’s will to win at all costs.”⁵⁷

The 1934 Rarău work camp served as a model for the work camp system that took off in the following two years. It was no coincidence that the years that marked the greatest expansion of the Legion were also the years when the number of work camps was at its highest. The number of camps grew from four

⁵⁵ George Macrin “Două luni cu Căpitanul în tabăra de la Rarău” (Two Months with the Captain in the Rarău camp), *Almanahul Cuvântul* (Bucharest: 1941): 208.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.



in 1934 to 50 in 1936, along with more than 500 working sites.⁵⁸ As a confirmation of the success of these undertakings, one can quote archival sources from 1936 that underlined the constructive character of the work camps and their impact among the public opinion and other political parties who wanted to replicate the model for their own benefit.⁵⁹ Thus, it came as no surprise that Codreanu felt entitled to write the following to his militants, in a circular letter about legionary education that he issued in the summer of 1936:

Dear all, the country is full of work camps. There is order everywhere. People are satisfied with our behavior and our work. You should all be touched by the fact that hour by hour and day by day we are paving the way for a great future to this Romanian nation.⁶⁰

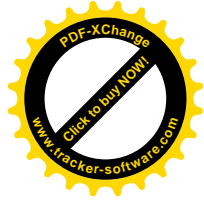
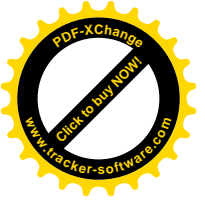
The Carmen Sylva work camp, on the shore of the Black Sea, organized in 1935 and 1936 was the biggest in the history of the Legion. It was used by Codreanu in order to showcase to the public opinion the model for the future legionary Romania. It attracted many visitors and also served as a training ground for the Movement's elite, with 70 percent of attendants having a higher education.⁶¹ Its banning in 1937 can be regarded as a somber sign of the struggle between the Legion and the authorities, which reached its climax in 1938 with the dismemberment of the movement and the killing of Codreanu.

⁵⁸ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 268. Heinen also emphasized that work camps were considered training sites for the "new man."

⁵⁹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 3 / 1936, pp. 301-2. This note was followed by a table containing details about 61 work camps.

⁶⁰ The full text can be read in Ioan Scurtu ed., *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România 1934–1938*, (Ideology and Rightwing Formations in Romania 1934-1938), vol. IV, (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2003), 196.

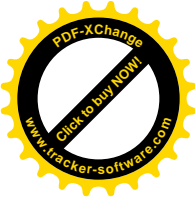
⁶¹ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 369.



The impact of these kinds of enterprises in the history of interwar fascism should not be underestimated. If one could dismiss their influence on the local peasant population, for example, it was absolutely obvious that it also caused a great impression among the urban and the educated, and that did not happen only in Romania. In a book assessing British responses to fascism in the 1930s, Dan Stone highlighted the positive reactions towards the German youth labor camps by visitors from Britain, including intellectuals and politicians. As Stone remarked, the admiring language was “quasi-religious” and emphasized the work camps as places that rejuvenated the German youth and even contemplated the implementation of such a system back in Britain.⁶²

The work camp system proved to be of great use for Codreanu’s movement. In some respect, it managed to change the image of the Legion from a fringe, violent and chauvinistic organization to that of a constructive, selfless enterprise that educated the youth. Looking at it from the inside out, it did provide for many legionaries a way to socialize with likeminded fellows while contributing to the achievement of the higher goals of the movement as defined by Codreanu, i.e. the regeneration of the country by creating a “new type of man” and a “new Romania.”

⁶² Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933 – 1939: Before the War and the Holocaust* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 116.



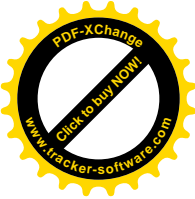
IV. 3. Social Components of the Legionary Movement - Expansion through Diversification: the Role of the Student Body and of the Workers; Women and the Legion

One of the main characteristics of fascist movements was their reliance on youth as the driving force towards behind their ascension. As historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat asserted, the cult of youth was central to fascist ideology in Italy, as was the generational way of thinking and the desire to create “millions of ‘new man’ and ‘new women’ who would perpetuate fascist behaviors and values”.⁶³ The youth were considered the only persons capable of radically changing the existent political reality. They were associated with dynamism, vigor, speed, determination and they were opposed to the older generation which was seen as stagnant, unreliable and responsible for the crisis against which fascist claimed to fight. Out of this tension an inevitable generational conflict emerged. Within the Legionary Movement, the youth was regarded as the main actor with respect to the accomplishment of the country’s rebirth. Codreanu targeted the young generation very explicitly, and considered it as the main actor in what he called the resurrection of Romania. According to him:

In this resurrection an overwhelming role will be that of the youth. The youth is summoned by destiny to play its part on the scene of history. Do old people misapprehend us? They misapprehend us because only we can hear the sacred appeal of destiny, and only we can understand it because it is directed solely towards us.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 93-4.

⁶⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Carticica sefului de cuib*, p. 80.



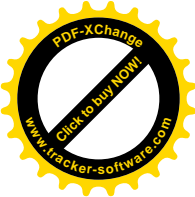
Thus, Codreanu depicted the emerging generational conflict between the youth that “can hear the sacred appeal of destiny” and the older people who represented the decaying democratic state and hold on to power. In order to prepare the youth for this confrontation, Codreanu emphasized the importance of education among the young legionaries. The youth that adhered to the Legion and underwent its educational process became, as Vasile Marin put it, “the youth organized by us, which will carry the torch of the nation's resurrection all over the country.”⁶⁵ The legionaries attributed many great accomplishments to the young generation. Thus, Vasile Marin acknowledged enthusiasm and fanaticism as defining for the spirit of the young generation. The fanaticism of the young legionaries made history, according to Marin, because it saved Romania from the communist fanaticism, thus preventing it from becoming “the Russia of today, the Spain of tomorrow and the France of the day after tomorrow.”⁶⁶ Marin's claims were backed by Ion Moța, who also regarded as crucial the moment when Romania had to choose between “the resurrection of integral nationalism” and communism.⁶⁷

The most active part of the Romanian youth that constituted the backbone of the Legion in so many instances, was the student movement. Channeling the energies of the student movement had been the most constant source of dynamism for Codreanu's political projects since the 1920s. By disciplining the bodies and minds of his followers, Codreanu succeeded in the taming of the

⁶⁵ Vasile Marin, *Crez de generatie*, p. 106.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷ Ion I. Moța, *Cranii de lemn*, 137.



revolt that started with the 1922 student generation. He built a core group of devoted and fanatic followers, based on those who were at the forefront of the 1922 protests. He also managed to gain full control of the student movement, starting with the first half of the 1930s. That was why in the mid 1930s it was difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the student movement and the most active, core members of the Iron Guard. The legacy of the 1922 student movement was overwhelming, and it served as a powerful legitimating factor well into the 1930s. A resolution of the *Bucharest Student Center* stated in 1934 that:

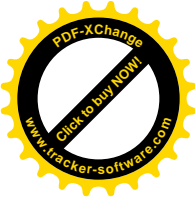
1 – Bucharest's Christian students solidly reaffirm the December 10th 1922 creed, considering it the cornerstone of future Romania, and an ideal worthy of fight and sacrifice. We strongly believe in the victory of this ideal, today, as well as tomorrow.

2 – We request the government to legalize the Iron Guard, born and living out of the spirit and holiness of December 10, 1922, which was unjustly dissolved.⁶⁸

Thus, when the Legion was in one of its most difficult moments, the student movement, which was filled with young legionaries, came to its aid and pressured the government to allow it to become a legal movement again. In turn, the Legion paid special attention to the students, incorporated many of them into its ranks and integrated them into its alternative educational system.

The authorities were very much aware of this symbiotic relationship between the student movement and the Legion. A police report underlined that due to “this systematic action to take hold of the student societies, manifestations

⁶⁸ *The Resolution of the Bucharest Student Centre (Arhivele Naționale Istorice Central (National Central Historical Archives, Bucharest, hereafter ANIC), Fond Ministerul de Intene, Fond Documentar, Dosar 9, vol. II, f. 82, 1934, in Dragoș Zmfireșcu, Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail de la mit la realitate, 398–9.*

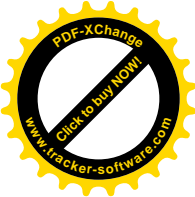


that were supposed to be only for students became quasi-legionary. When the Union and the student centers fell completely in the hands of the legionaries, demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts were organized, all with the legionary seal of approval.⁶⁹ As one could see, legionary students were also used for violent and even criminal acts, as the aforementioned case of the assassination of Mihail Stelescu demonstrated.

Knowing that the students needed to be kept close to the movement, Codreanu encouraged prominent intellectuals who were members or sympathizers of the movement to cultivate the legionary ideals even in the auditoriums of the universities, if such a thing was possible. Thus, an interesting case was that of priest Grigore Cristescu, who was also a professor of theology at the University of Bucharest. Two revealing police notes detailed his activity in the year 1934, when most of the Legion's leadership was under arrest following Duca's assassination. In the first note he was reported for lecturing about topics that were deeply related with the ideas and doctrine of the Legion, such as the "apology of crime", much to the approval of the students who filled the auditorium in order to take part in his classes.⁷⁰ The second note substantiated the statements made in the previous one, as it described a lecture held on March 20, 1934 in front of 250 students in the big auditorium of the Theology Faculty. The topic of the lecture was the personality of Nichifor Crainic, in fact just a cover-up to enable Cristescu to talk about the Iron Guard intellectuals such as Crainic, Nae Ionescu and Dragoș Protopopescu who at the time were arrested for their alleged

⁶⁹ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 103 / 1933, p. 231.

⁷⁰ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 148.



responsibility for the Duca's assassination. Cristescu's argument emphasized that Crainic was always on the right side in his intellectual activity and that he was always ready to help the new generation while it was being let down by the elder generation. The lecture was received with unconcealed enthusiasm by the student crowd who also sang nationalistic songs.⁷¹

Another similar example was that of poet Radu Gyr, the legionary commandant of Oltenia. Gyr decided in 1936 to organize a series of lectures for legionary students from Oltenia who were studying in Bucharest. The lectures were to be delivered by leaders of the Iron Guard, and were also meant to serve as future discussion topics for the legionary student nests. The lectures disseminated ideas that the leadership of the movement wanted to deliver to the student component. Thus, one can quote the following topics, among many others: sacrifice and betrayal, the new legionary ethic, legionarism and historical consciousness, legionarism and art, work ethic and the work camps, university reform in the legionary State.⁷²

The moment that proved to the public opinion and the authorities that the Legion openly controlled the student movement was the general student congress that took place in Târgu Mureș in April 1936. On their way to Târgu Mureș, some of the students stopped at the Sinaia railway station and profaned the memorial plaque installed in the place where Duca was assassinated, while singing songs that praised the three legionaries who murdered him. Once in Târgu Mureș, the students paraded on the streets of the city in legionary uniforms

⁷¹ Ibid., 149.

⁷² ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 283 / 1936, p. 47.

and performed the legionary salute in front of the local, newly built Orthodox Cathedral. When after the congress the students were accused in the press for causing disturbances while in Târgu Mureș, the Legion answered promptly by publishing a photo book entitled *“Dezordinile” de la Târgu Mureș* (The “Disorders” from Târgu Mureș) which was aimed at demonstrating the well ordered manner of the public manifestations during the days of the congress.



IV.3: Students marching on the streets of Târgu Mureș in legionary uniforms. Photo from the book *“Dezordinile” de la Târgu Mureș* (The “Disorders” from Târgu Mureș).

As for the congress itself, it was completely hijacked by the extreme rightwing agenda, with the legionary students being the most active in this respect. Songs praising the Legion and the assassins of I. G. Duca were sung, and the issues discussed targeted the Jewish minorities and the political

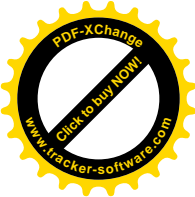
opponents of the far right. The resolution adopted at the end of the congress reflected this political agenda. After the ritualistic legitimating assertion regarding the continuation of the heritage of the “1922 generation”, the resolution stated physical and spiritual being of the nation was under threat, thus asking, among other things, for measures of “social hygiene” in order to rejuvenate it.⁷³



IV. 4: Students doing the legionary salute in front of the Orthodox Cathedral from Târgu Mureș. Photo from the book *“Dezordinile” de la Târgu Mureș* (The “Disorders” from Târgu Mureș)

Another request targeted the opposing political ideologies by stating the view that “restrictive and legal measures need to be taken against destructive social and spiritual currents that undermine the existence of the Romanian state

⁷³ Ioan Scurtu (ed.), *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România 1934–1938*, 175.



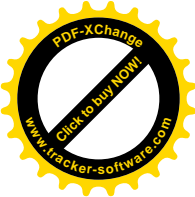
and culture: liberalism, communism, freemasonry and religious cults.”⁷⁴ With profound disregard for plurality of ideas or political options, the resolution also requested the exclusion of students that were members of the Liberal Party from all student organizations.

These rather awkward requests for a student congress replicated many of the talking points that one could identify in the far right press of the time and also in the political discourse of the leaders of the Legion. However, alongside this resolution, concrete actions were also planned under the guise of student squads formed with the specific purpose of threatening the lives of certain politicians and public figures such as Armand Călinescu or Mihail Stelescu, to name just two. The authorities were caught off-guard by these developments, and the congress caused worrying reactions in the press and the public opinion. Nevertheless, the Târgu Mureș congress reconfirmed for everybody the fact that the student movement was under the total political and ideological control of the Legion, and served as its most dynamic and efficient component.

This moment marked the highest point of the student allegiance to the Iron Guard and coincided with another important shift in the policy of Codreanu’s movement the move towards creating a solid legionary workers movement. As one police report noticed, the Legion detected a certain fatigue among the student masses because of their overuse and overexposure, so the search for new social support was imperative. The students were thus sent to workers strongholds for propaganda.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 103 / 1933, p. 233-4



As a direct consequence, in October 1936, Codreanu decided to form the 'Legionary Workers' Corps', thus allowing the workers to have their own autonomous unit (along with the students and the 'cross brotherhoods'), acknowledging their importance within the party.⁷⁶ Codreanu named Gheorghe Clime as the leader of the "Legionary Workers' Corps", and with this occasion addressed the workers through a circular letter, underlining their previous defeats under the banner of "agents of communist Jewry and also agents of capitalist Jewry"⁷⁷ and promised them victory under the guise of the Legion. As historian Eugen Weber stated, the workers "in the absence of an effective labour movement, turned to the one leader who offered solutions more extreme than those of the established parties".⁷⁸ As early as January 11, 1937, at a meeting with a group of workers from Dâmbovița county, legionary leaders stated that the 'Legionary Workers' Corps' had 5 000 members.⁷⁹ This figure would sharply increase throughout 1937. As a detailed police report revealed, the Legion managed to gain the sympathy of many workers in industrial areas such as Prahova, Jiu Valley, Timișoara, Arad, Reșița, and some Bucharest factories.⁸⁰

The offensive to attract more workers to the movement was given intellectual support through the articles published in journals such as *Însemnări Sociologice* and *Rânduiala*. Traian Herseni also published in 1937 a booklet outlining the Legion's position towards the workers entitled *Mișcarea Legionară și*

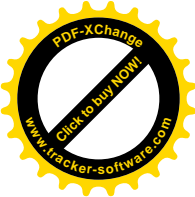
⁷⁶ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 157.

⁷⁷ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 96.

⁷⁸ Eugen Weber, "The Men of the Archangel," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1 (1966): 118.

⁷⁹ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10/1937, p. 11.

⁸⁰ ANIC Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 103 / 1933, p. 234.



muncitorimea (The Legionary Movement and the Workers).⁸¹ Herseni argued that the Legion made a clear distinction between what he termed “the justice of the workers”, for which it would always fight, from the communist ideas that some of the workers favored, arguing that communism was not a workers doctrine but “a Jewish doctrine meant to serve a people without a homeland.”⁸² The booklet wanted to send the message that was that the legionary project did in fact incorporate the workers as a valuable component of the national body, aiming to rescuing it from the lure of communism.

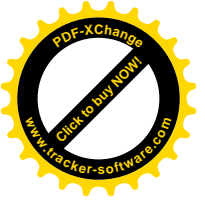
One of the most intriguing topics that has been neglected in the historiography on the Legion is the presence and the status of women in the Legionary Movement.⁸³ The organizational structure set forth by Codreanu since 1927 raises important research issues regarding the part played by factors such as masculinity and gender in the development of the movement. Over the last two decades, a large body of work has dealt with these issues and the way they have influenced the history of fascism.⁸⁴ The special attention awarded by

⁸¹ Traian Herseni, *Mișcarea Legionară și muncitorimea* (The Legionary Movement and the Workers), (Bucharest: 1937).

⁸² Ibid., 6-7.

⁸³ For the reluctance of researchers to take up issues such as fascist women and their biographies, please see Andrea Pető, “Who Is Afraid of the “Ugly Women”? Problems of Writing Biographies of Nazi and Fascist Women in Countries of the Former Soviet Block,” *Journal of Women’s History* 21, 4 (Winter 2009): 147-151.

⁸⁴ From the abundant literature covering these issues, one can mention Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism*, (London: Routledge, 1998); Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Kevin Passmore ed., *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe, 1919-45*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Robin Pickering-lazzi, ed., *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); George Mosse, *The*



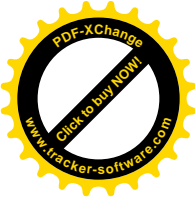
Codreanu to young males whom he trained to be the “new Romanian men” of tomorrow included an emphasis on their virility and war-like heroism. The importance of physical and spiritual education in their case, under various forms, has been analyzed throughout this dissertation. Nevertheless, as stated before, there has been very little work done on gender and its impact in the development of the Legion.⁸⁵ The starting methodological assumption for the Romanian case is drawn from Victoria de Grazia’s point of view with respect to the role of women under Italian fascism, regarding them “not as mere victims of dictatorship and patriarchy, but as historical subjects and actors, whose experience of fascist rule was enormously varied.”⁸⁶ This approach proves to be very fruitful if combined with the culturalist view that fascism has to be analyzed “from the inside out”, thus focusing on how women experienced their activity in the Legion, how they organized themselves and what enticed them to be part of a movement that exalted the virtues of masculinity and virility.

As mentioned in chapter II, the Legionary Movement had special sections for women from its early beginnings in 1927, with the purpose of inculcating in them a tripartite model: woman of faith, woman of work, woman of action. The growth of the movement over the years implied certain changes in its structure,

Image of Man: the Creation of Modern Masculinity, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vol., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990-1992.

⁸⁵ The only lengthy contribution on this issue is Maria Bucur’s article “Gender and Fascism in Interwar Romania,” in Kevin Passmore, ed., *Women, Gender and the Extreme Right in Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): 58-79. Constantin Iordachi also wrote about this issue in a subchapter of his book, *Charisma, Politics, and Violence*, 86-89.

⁸⁶ Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): xii.

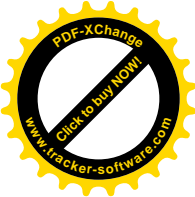


most of them codified in *Nest Leader's Booklet*. Thus, three types of nests were codified in this handbook, revamping the organizational scheme designed in 1927 when the movement had a sizably smaller number of followers. Girls' nests were kept along with the Cross Brotherhoods and the Legionary Corps. Their aim was an educational one because the girls were the mothers of tomorrow, and in that capacity they were expected to raise their kids in the legionary spirit. Overall, their mission was to "help the Legion with their work and with propagating legionary ideas."⁸⁷ Recommended topics to be discussed in the girls nests included the role of the legionary women in the new Romania, their duties as mothers, sisters, fighters, as well as ways in which they could feed their family properly, keep the household clean, or "initiation in the art of cooking that is so little known in the villages."⁸⁸ One may notice a combination of topics that included regular political issues reflecting the legionary program, but also the traditional societal roles ascribed to women in general.

The command of the women organization was held by Nicoleta Nicolescu, the most successful female legionary in the history of the Iron Guard, and also the only one who ever reached the rank of "legionary commander." Under her leadership, the organization gained in dynamism and importance, also due to her close relationship with Codreanu. Following the transformation that affected the movement after I. G. Duca's assassination, Nicoleta Nicolescu engaged in the general process of reorganizing the movement by reforming the women's section. In a circular letter sent by her to female legionaries across the country,

⁸⁷ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Cărticica Șefului de cuib*, 35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-9.



one can notice that the duties of the legionary women were similar to those of their male counterparts in terms of listening to Codreanu's orders, attracting new members, contributing financially to the projects of the movement and reporting back to the central command about their activities. A very important aspect was the request to finalize lists with legionary women willing to participate in the summer work camps where, according to Nicoleta Nicolescu, "we shall live the true legionary life and we shall learn to treasure the Captain."⁸⁹

Legionary women were in fact part of all the activities carried on by the Legion. They were present in the work-camps, with Nicoleta Nicolescu being an example in the Rarău work camp where he left a good impression to Codreanu and the other participants.⁹⁰ They also took part in the demonstrations that took place with the occasion of the student congress in Târgu Mureș, contributing to the mass display of power staged by the legion, as it can be attested by photographic sources.

⁸⁹ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 340.

⁹⁰ George Macrin "Două luni cu Căpitanul în tabăra de la Rarău" (Two Months with the Captain in the Rarău camp), *Almanahul Cuvântul* (Bucharest: 1941): 207-215; Sofia Cristescu Dinescu, "Cetății Sfărâmate" (Broken Fortresses) in *** *Lacrima prigoanei: din lupta legionarelor române* (The Tear of Persecution: from the Fight of Romanian Legionaries), (Timișoara: Ed. Gordian, 1994).

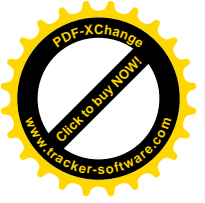


IV. 5: Female legionaries from Cernăuți at the student congress in Târgu Mureș (April 1936). Photo from the book *"Dezordinile" de la Târgu Mureș* (The "Disorders" from Târgu Mureș).

A further reading of existing documents written by Nicoleta Nicolescu for the legionary women provide useful insights into how they were organized, what was their role in the movement and what was expected from them. Not being written by Codreanu but by Nicolescu, they represent the outlook of a female legionary leader regarding these issues, thus offering a view from within.

A circular letter from December 10, 1934 stated the importance of the women for the current historical moment: "Comrades, the difficult times we live in, when nothing is holy anymore, when everything that is good is dying, and contempt is growing more than ever, when we feel how we are continually falling, these times are calling us more than ever."⁹¹ The calling of the times was

⁹¹ ANIC Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 341.



felt as a true mission to restore core values such as “love” and “faith” to a nation in desperate need of them. In order to do that, Nicoleta Nicolescu argued for creating a “great woman”:

“We have to wish, comrades, to give to this Romania a great woman who understands its aspirations, a great woman that does hesitate one moment but, renouncing herself, gives everything: mind, heart, will, to her people, risks everything for it and dies on the barricades always thinking forward. And if the downfall from around would increase and enthusiastic arms would betray us with out taking anything into account, as if we are alone in the struggle, then we shall rise, and from our deeply sacred love, silent but energetic and irrefutable, we shall raise a wall out of women’s souls, fair, unabated in faith with which they have started and will die defending it and exalt it through death.”⁹²

This sporadically incoherent text was actually in line with what Codreanu professed for the Legion’s devotees: the willingness of self-sacrifice for the higher cause of regenerating a nation in decay, thus making the women an integral part of the legionary project. This transformation, according to Nicolescu, required three sets of attributes: 1) dignity, honesty, earnestness; 2) sincerity, devotedness, and faithfulness through unbounded love; 3) determinedness, fearlessness, readiness to die. What can be noticed is the fact that these attributes and the mission statement do not profess the traditional gender roles attributed to women. Instead, consciously or not, it places the legionary women on equal footing with their male counterparts.

These passionate and uplifting paragraphs were followed by a set of instructions regarding the reorganizing of the women’s nests. Thus, Nicolescu ordered the cancellation of all existing women’s organizations and a fresh start in

⁹² Ibid.



recruiting new followers based on the three sets of attributes outlined above. The new followers were not to be directly enlisted in the movement but considered sympathizers until they could prove their attachment to the Legion. *The Nest Leader's Booklet* was imposed as the guide for daily activities within the nests.

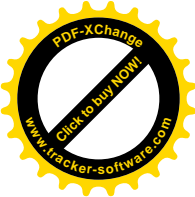
The circular letter also included new appointments for women leaders who would start rebuilding the organization in the provinces: Coca Cazacenco (Northern Moldova), Maria Radomir (Southern Moldova), Maria Bârsan (Western Wallachia), Elena Bagdad (Eastern Wallachia), Sica Popescu (Dobrogea), Constanța Stănciulea (Bessarabia), the Rădășanu sisters (Transylvania), Natalia Cojocar (Oltenia) and Teodora Niculescu (Bukovina).⁹³

A set of instructions for organizing the women's nests, "the fortresses", provided further details about what was expected from the female legionaries. The education of future members relied on three main topics: the history of the Legion, Codreanu's life and the role of the women within the Legion. The educational emphasis would fall on the goals of the Iron Guard and Codreanu's actions towards "creating a 'Romania of Romanians' great and dignified." Furthermore, it was argued that to enable "this transformation of Romania and Romanians, the woman is summoned to take part with all her power together with the man."⁹⁴

Regarding the organizational matters, the instructions stated that the woman who gathered the group and was the oldest in the movement would become the leader of the fortress and would choose a cashier, a secretary and a

⁹³ Ibid., 342.

⁹⁴ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 102 / 1933, p. 343.



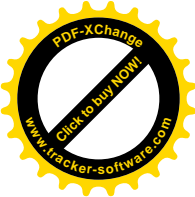
courier. The head of the fortress closely supervised the activity of the members and was supposed to write reports on a regular basis, once every two weeks. The members were also expected to pay a regular subscription for the fortress as well as one for the Legion (2 lei per week).

The meetings of the fortresses were similar to those of the other legionary nests, and obeyed the rules from *The Nest Leader's Booklet*. The topics suggested in these instructions, however, did not emphasize only the traditional topics mentioned by Codreanu as appropriate for the fortresses. One can notice how the issues, mentioned first in these order, focused on mainstream Iron Guard politics and ideology and not particularity on allegedly women's issues. Thus, legionary women were urged to take up issues such as legionary sufferings, the goals of the Legion, the legionary character, the Iron Guard's attitude towards politicking, the Jews, freemasonry and communism. Topics such as honesty within the movement and the legionary faith were combined with those regarding the contribution of the legionary woman in the struggle for national salvation, the legionary woman as fighter and also as mother, wife and sister.⁹⁵

Based on the documents presented above one may argue that, at least in theory, the legionary women did not regard themselves as passive objects of the movement's policies, but aimed at becoming important pillars for fulfilling its regenerative project.

Among the recommended propaganda materials for use within the fortresses, one journal is explicitly mentioned by the instructions - *Revista Mea*.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 344.



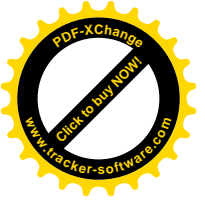
This journal, published in Cluj starting in 1935, deserves special attention, as it was the product of the efforts of a young female writer named Martha Rădulescu. Martha Rădulescu was born in 1912 and was the daughter of university professor and legionary sympathizer Dan Rădulescu. She studied at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Bucharest but did not graduate, though she published her literary works in various journals starting from a very young age.⁹⁶

Between 1935 and 1937, *Revista Mea* became one of the important pro-legionary publications outside Bucharest, posing as a cultural journal but in fact giving a voice to numerous legionary political and intellectual figures. The first issue of the journal provided the motivation that would make such a young writer to engage in the publication of a journal with such a radical political agenda. In an article entitled “Instead of a Platform” she described how a Jewish conspiracy, led by the newspaper and the publishing house *Adevărul*, boycotted her novels recently.⁹⁷ She associated this event with the time when her father started to “publicly express his admiration for the legionary youth and the constructive nationalist movement.”⁹⁸ Thus, she regarded the journal as a platform from where she could fight against the Jewish threat towards Romanian culture. Although she certainly received help from her father with the publication of the journal, it is worth noting that this kind of undertaking was extremely rare for young women intellectuals of the time.

⁹⁶ *** *Dicționarul general al literaturii române, P/R*, (Bucharest: Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, 2006), 533.

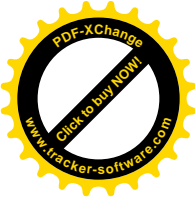
⁹⁷ Martha D. Rădulescu, “În loc de program” (Instead of a Platform), *Revista Mea* I, 1 (January 1935).

⁹⁸ Ibid.



The kind of political pro-legionary dedication demonstrated by the likes of Nicoleta Nicolescu and Martha D. Rădulescu shows that there were women who took their role as fighters for the Legion's regenerative project very seriously and did their best to help its accomplishment.

The important political, social and intellectual transformations that took place within the Legion between 1934 and 1936 left their mark on its development. Enduring the disarray that followed Duca's assassination, the Legion managed to reinvent itself and to promote to the public the image of a youthful, constructive movement that not only talked about transforming the country but already started to do it. The political impetus of the student movement, redoubled by the recent emergence of the workers as a force, created the necessary conditions for 1937 to be a decisive year in the history of the Legion.



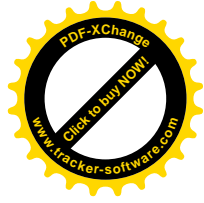
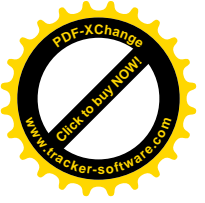
CHAPTER V

1937 as the Peak of the Legionary Regenerative Project: From the Moța – Marin Burial to the Parliamentary Elections

Following the consolidation of the movement between 1934 and 1936, the Legion regarded 1937 as a year filled with opportunities. The support for its project was constantly growing and the European political context became increasingly favorable. The decision to show its support for Franco's side in the recently started Civil War ended tragically for two of the most important legionary leaders, but the event opened up a new dimension in the public manifestations of the Iron Guard. The ensuing events influenced the way in which the public opinion perceived the message of the Legion, and that reflected in the electoral results from December.

V. 1. Sacralised Politics in Action: the February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin

When referring to movements such as the Spanish Falange or the Iron Guard, Italian historian Emilio Gentile argued that they “may already be placed within the dimension of sacralised politics, notwithstanding their exaltation of Catholic or Orthodox Christianity, because their ideology makes the sacralisation of the nation and the State evident, even if through a strongly politicized version



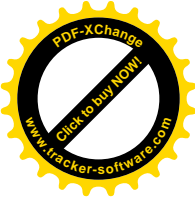
of a traditional religion.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, Gentile considered that “movements like the Iron Guard assume, in reality, the character of a political religion in that they become the main factor of legitimation for the sacralisation of the nation, and for the nationalisation of Orthodox Christianity itself [...]”¹⁰⁰ The presence of the clergy in this type of political projects has raised the issue of the relationship between the Church and fascism to the point where some scholars analyze the legitimacy of a recently often used term such as “clerical fascism.”¹⁰¹

One of the goals of this sub-chapter is to investigate the Iron Guard’s attempt to offer a sacralised version of politics under the guise of its regenerative project of creating a “new man” and a “new country.” The case study of the mass burial of the two legionary leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin provides a highly appropriate opportunity for such an analysis and would also allow a deeper look into the relationship between fascist ideology and the institutionalized religious establishment represented by the Romanian Orthodox Church, whose clergy was, in a significant proportion, profoundly attached to the Legionary Movement. Presenting this moment in its unfolding, focusing on its main characteristics (ritual, aesthetics, propaganda) while attempting to assess its impact on Romanian public opinion of the time proves crucial in order to illuminate the success of the Iron Guard in the political context of the year 1937.

⁹⁹ Emilio Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004): 361.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Roger Eatwell, “Reflections on Fascism and Religion,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4 (2003): 145–66; Marius Turda, Matthew Feldman, Tudor Georgescu (eds.), *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).



The Legionary Movement, Death, the “Rebirth of the Nation” and the Spanish Civil War

Between 1934 and 1936 the movement underwent important changes. Reacting to those that considered the Legion a destructive and anarchic movement, Codreanu emphasized the constructive and educational character of the legionary ideology. According to him, the ultimate goal of the Legion was to radically transform the Romanian people and the country, which were perceived as irreversibly decayed. Codreanu wanted to create a “new man,” with hero-like qualities,¹⁰² shaped after the profile of its young followers. Self-sacrifice to the point of giving up one’s life was considered the key to the ultimate success of the legionary project. As historian Roger Griffin pointed out:

The more fanatical of Codreanu’s followers took the willingness to die for the higher cause to the point where only self-sacrifice could guarantee the success of the revolutionary project, at which point the exoteric language of militarist rhetoric crosses the Rubicon into the realm of a genuine cult of death.¹⁰³

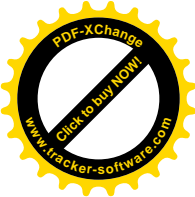
The inexorable connection between self-sacrifice, death and the success of the legionary project of resurrecting the country was deeply internalized by the legionaries, illustrating “the esoteric concept of ‘winning by dieing.’”¹⁰⁴

It was in this historic and ideological context that the Legion referred to the Spanish Civil War, which started in 1936. For the Legionary Movement, religion was one of the central pillars of its project. When talking about the goal of all

¹⁰² Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 239.

¹⁰³ Roger Griffin, “Shattering Crystals: The Role of ‘Dream Time’ in Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence,” *Terrorism & Political Violence* 15 (2003), 80.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.



nations, Codreanu stated that “The final aim is not life. But *The Resurrection*. The resurrection of the nations in the name of Jesus Christ the Savior.”¹⁰⁵

Even in present days, the Spanish Civil War with its legacy sparks never-ending, controversial debates that still tend to become very emotional. Historian Eric Hobsbawm presented this moment, only a few years ago, in a challenging perspective, stating that the creation of the world’s memory of this event was a victory for the intellectuals in the West: “... the pen, the brush and the camera wielded on behalf of the defeated have proved mightier than the sword and the power of those who won.”¹⁰⁶

However, on the other side of the continent, in 1936 - 1937 Romania, a different picture was painted. When the Spanish Civil War broke, Romanian nationalists perceived it as a confrontation between communist atheism and Christianity. An important part of the public opinion, as well as part of the press, sympathized with Franco’s side. News of churches being destroyed and priests getting killed by the Republican side strengthened these feelings.

For the legionaries, this conflict was considered of great importance, because, as Ion Moța put it, “if the Cross will fall in Spain, its foundations will be shaking in Romania as well, and if communism wins there today, it will come against us tomorrow.”¹⁰⁷ Animated by the idea of a fight between Good and Evil, Moța, one of the most active and respected legionary leaders and Codreanu’s right hand, suggested that an elite group of legionaries should go to Spain and

¹⁰⁵ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 336.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, “War of Ideas”, *The Guardian Review*, February 17, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Ion I. Moța quoted in *Cuvântul Studentesc* XII, 1 – 4 (January – February, 1937): 25.



present an honorary gift to General Moscardo the defender of Alcazar.¹⁰⁸ The gift was a Toledo sword that belonged to General Cantacuzino, who would also be the leader of the expedition.

Many legionaries considered Moța as one of the “finest products” of legionary education, coming close to Codreanu’s ideal “new man,”¹⁰⁹ and thus, his action had a great impact. Codreanu himself thought of Moța as second in command within the movement, and he made this official by awarding him the position of vice-president on January 1, 1937.¹¹⁰ Archival sources reveal that, after the tragic outcome of the expedition, Codreanu was accused of lacking “basic political common sense” because he let the seven leaders go to a war zone, an accusation that he allegedly dismissed in tears.¹¹¹ The rest of the group consisted of other important leaders, thus making the expedition a symbolically loaded one, an example for what every legionary should do. The other leaders were: engineer Gheorghe Clime, lawyer Nicolae Totu, priest Ion Dumitrescu–Borșa, lawyer and former diplomat Alexandru Cantacuzino, economist Bănică Dobre and, added at the last moment, lawyer Vasile Marin.¹¹² All of them held important positions within the Legion.

¹⁰⁸ Ion Dumitrescu – Borșa, *Cal troian intra muros. Memorii Legionare*, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 162.

¹¹⁰ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 114.

¹¹¹ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10/ 1937, pp. 31 – 35.

¹¹² *Ibid.* Marin said: “You have decided to bring seven coffins from Spain, I would like the eighth coffin to be mine.”



V. 1. The Legionary group of volunteers for the Spanish Civil War in a group photo, before departure (November 1936)

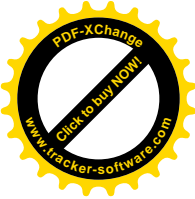
The team departed for Spain in late November 1936, and went through Poland, Germany, and then boarded on a ship from Hamburg to Lisbon, because the French government, led by Leon Blum, refused to grant them visas.¹¹³

According to Codreanu's orders, the mission was supposed to be symbolic,¹¹⁴ and, after giving the sword to General Moscardo, the legionaries were supposed to join the nationalist forces but not for more than a month, without putting their lives at risk. However, due to Moța's insistence, the legionaries decided to enroll as ordinary soldiers in order to fight in the front lines.¹¹⁵ All the narratives concerning the event insist on Moța's tormenting desire to fight. Before leaving Romania, he left his testament and several other letters

¹¹³ Vasile Marin, *Crez de generație*, 19.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 163; Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa, *Cal troian intra muros*, 190–1.



that justified his act and insisted on his imminent death for the defense of the Church.

The legionaries were involved in the violent fights near Madrid, where they have experienced war “in all its horror and misery.”¹¹⁶ Soon, one of them, Bănică Dobre, was wounded and another, Nicolae Totu, got sick. Faced with the harsh realities of war, Moța’s enthusiasm seemed to decrease, especially because the group already had two victims and, thus, paid its blood tribute.¹¹⁷ However, on January 13, 1937, while fighting in Majadahonda, a locality near Madrid, a shell killed Ion Moța and Vasile Marin.

Moța’s premonitions turned into reality and the news about the death of the two legionaries soon reached Romania where it had a huge impact within the public opinion.

*Staging Martyrdom: The Political Life of Two Dead Bodies*¹¹⁸

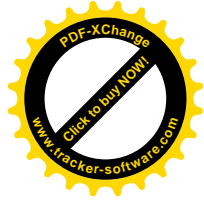
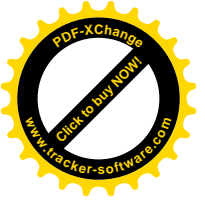
The social, political and psychological implications of death in modern societies provided salient topics for scholarly inquiring. Anthropologists highlighted the “intense emotional impact”¹¹⁹ that death causes for the survivors, both at individual and collective level. Funerals, with all their rituals, are meant to

¹¹⁶ Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919–1941*, 231.

¹¹⁷ Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa, *Cal troian intra muros*, 199.

¹¹⁸ This subtitle draws upon the book written by American anthropologist Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), a study in the frenzy of ideologically motivated reburials in postsocialist Eastern Europe.

¹¹⁹ Peter Metcalf, Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: the Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd revised edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 43.



accompany the dead to their resting-place while also providing comfort for those still living.

At a certain level, the care for the dead also constitutes an efficient device for maintaining and reinforcing the ties of a group by creating “a feeling of belongingness for the definable community of mourners.”¹²⁰ This function of death and funerary rituals was heavily exploited throughout the twentieth century at political level in order to transmit certain ideological messages to a larger number of people. As Katherine Verdery rightfully points out, the bodies are also very efficient symbols because they are concrete, (unlike abstract ideas) while transcending time and “making past immediately present.”¹²¹ The dead body becomes significant not by its simple presence but through the importance that is attributed to the dead person.¹²²

Thus, when important political figures are involved, death enhances its meaning. Drawing upon the work of Robert Hertz, anthropologists Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington argued that when important leaders die, the event “becomes a symbolic paradigm for our own deaths” and also “one has a strong and vicarious personal identification with his death.”¹²³

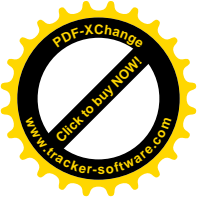
When certain political characters die in what are perceived as heroic circumstances, their death can be used as an opportunity to signal the rightfulness of their cause. With the help of aesthetic and ritualistic devices, the identification of the masses with the death of these leaders and their cause may

¹²⁰ Istvan Rev, “Parallel Autopsies,” *Representations*, 49, Special Issue: Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe After 1989, 49 (Winter, 1995): 30.

¹²¹ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 27.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²³ Peter Metcalf, Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, 188.

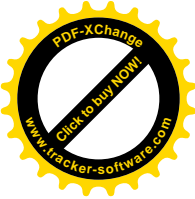


be established, thus fortifying the prestige of their surviving political colleagues. With the death of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin the Legion had the “dying proof” of its project of creating a “new man” that would assure the rebirth of the country on new grounds. Until the death of Moța and Marin, the Legion’s discourse regarding self-sacrifice and the will to give up one’s life for an ideal was dismissed by many as mere rhetoric. Now they had the dead bodies to prove their ideological goals and the Legion took advantage of this opportunity in order to gain popular support. The bodies were there for everybody to see, and the Legion made sure that the death of the two of its most important leaders did not remain unnoticed. A massive, nationwide parade of the two bodies was staged. The most salient aspect of this parade was that it was accomplished against the will of the official authorities that wanted to downplay the scale of the event.

The journey back home of the legionary group was by far more spectacular than the first part of their trip and it was an integral part of the staged mass funeral. Now they could pass through France and at the border between France and Spain a mortuary wagon was created for the two bodies. After passing through France and Belgium,¹²⁴ the two coffins arrived in Berlin on February 6, where S.S. and S.A. squads, including a squad from Hitler’s personal guard met them. Representatives of NSDAP, the Spanish Falange, and Fascist Italy were present, and “a huge crowd hailed in mourning the two coffins.”¹²⁵ The mortuary train continued its route through Poland and arrived at the Polish-Romanian border on February 9.

¹²⁴ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 173.

¹²⁵ *Curentul*, X, No. 3241 (February 9, 1937).



In the meantime, in Romania, the reactions regarding the death of the two young leaders began to intensify. *Universul*, one of the biggest and most influential dailies, kept its readers up to date with events regarding the commemoration of the two legionaries. Even so, the newspaper was accused by legionary students that it did not do enough to support the legionary mission into Spain. The director of the newspaper however, blamed the government's censorship for this situation.¹²⁶ Various associations paid their respects (e.g. "The Association of the Christian Doctors",¹²⁷ or "The Romanian Christian Lawyers Association"¹²⁸), while requiems were held throughout the country.¹²⁹ However, left-oriented newspapers such as *Adevărul* (The Truth) and *Dimineața* (The Morning), preferred to ignore the event, in order not to further amplify its effects.

The political scene was influenced by this event, and this was true especially regarding the right wing parties. Although rivals of the Legion, all the leaders of the right wing parties paid their respects to the death of the two legionaries. Gheorghe Brătianu, the leader of a dissident liberal party, considered Moța as one of the "most capable and honest fighter from the legionary ranks".¹³⁰ Even Nicolae Iorga wrote a laudatory piece about Ion Moța and Vasile Marin entitled "Two Brave Boys", praising them for their "fight for their Christian faith and for the honour of their people".¹³¹ However, several weeks later, after the

¹²⁶ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10 / 1937, p. 20.

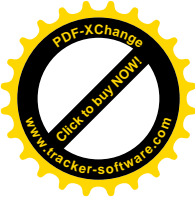
¹²⁷ *Universul*, LIV, No. 17 (January 18, 1937).

¹²⁸ *Universul*, LIV, No. 19 (January 20, 1937).

¹²⁹ The most important such requiem took place in Bucharest and enjoyed mass participation. See *Universul*, LIV, No. 18 (January 19, 1937); Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 119 – 120.

¹³⁰ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10/ 1937, p. 34.

¹³¹ *Neamul Românesc*, XXXII, No. 12 (January 20, 1937).



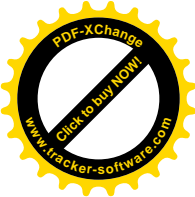
mass funeral of Moța and Marin, Iorga condemned the aesthetic and ritualistic components displayed by young nationalists (alluding, of course, to the Legion) and also condemned violence and the use of symbols such as the swastika, which he considered pagan.¹³² In fact, Iorga was eloquently illustrating the difference between traditional nationalism and the new, “palingenetic” (Roger Griffin) nationalism of fascist movements such as the Legion that used public, mass-displays of power to the point of transforming their ideas into a political religion.

With the mortuary train wagon arriving at the Romanian border, the plans of the Legion became clear. Instead of choosing the fastest way towards the burial site, the train was directed on a cross-country route that would pass through almost all the historical provinces of Romania. The train had to live from Cernăuți, in Bukovina, go through Moldova and then cross the Carpathian Mountains into Transylvania. From there, it would again cross the Carpathians, this time into Oltenia, and then, going through Wallachia it would arrive in Bucharest, the endpoint of the journey.¹³³

The route of the train was obviously a symbolic one. It was designed to unite all Romanian provinces in their mourning for the two dead leaders. The legionaries attempted a “fascistization of the masses”. The Legion had the ‘dying proof’ of its success in creating a ‘new man’, willing to make the supreme self-

¹³² *Neamul Românesc*, XXXII, No. 34 (February 15) and No. 35 (February 17, 1937). There was to come a growing conflict between Nicolae Iorga and the Legion, culminating with the assassination of the great historian by a legionary squad in November 1940.

¹³³ For the fully detailed route, see ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 4 / 1937, pp. 39 – 40.



sacrifice for the legionary cause, and wanted everybody to see it. The fact that a sizable part of the Romanian public opinion sympathised with the cause Moța and Marin fought for, i.e. the alleged struggle between communist atheism and Christianity in Spain, explains the great success enjoyed by the legionary funeral parade. This fact was also acknowledged by the secret reports of the police, reports that mentioned the effect of the funeral, i.e. the dissemination of the legionary ideas across the masses and the attraction of some intellectuals to the Legionary Movement.¹³⁴

The train with the remains of Moța and Marin accomplished successfully its cross-country route. Although many historians of the Iron Guard accused the lenient attitude of the authorities in front of this offensive, archival records reveal that the authorities kept a very close eye on the events, being ready to intervene in case the situation turned violent.¹³⁵ The authorities also circulated a coded telegram urging local gendarmerie and police units to submit reports about the number of legionaries present in the train stations, whether they were in uniform or performed the oath. They also requested information regarding the presence of the priests, military or local authorities, and also the social strata and political convictions of those attending the commemoration.¹³⁶

On February 9, the train crossed Moldova. It stopped in the main railway stations and huge crowds performed the ritual towards the two bodies. The religious ritual was mixed with the secular, political pledge of continuing Moța's

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

¹³⁵ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 4 / 1937, pp. 2 – 15. These pages contain an abstract of detailed police reports sent from every station where the mortuary train stopped.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 35–6.



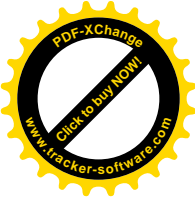
struggle. Thus, an attempted “sacralisation of politics” (Emilio Gentile)¹³⁷ took place, with the help of the political liturgy developed by using the death of the two leaders. After the religious ritual, a legionary leader from the mortuary wagon urged those present to join this sacralised form of politics by saying: “Romanians, baptize yourselves in the legionary faith”. This call usually constituted the closing moment of the ceremony and, together with the “Moța – Marin oath”, which was performed in every railway station, made a long-lasting impression among the crowds.

In Pașcani, ‘a crowd of over 5000 people formed by peasants from the Neamț and Baia counties, on their knees, meet the mortuary wagon’.¹³⁸ In Bacău, an important town in Moldova, the railway station platform and the surroundings were packed with people, and the flags were in mourning. Myrrh and incense were smoking in ten amphorae. The crowd kneeled when the train entered the station and thirty priests performed the religious service.¹³⁹ In Transylvania, the most important stop was in Cluj, on February 10, around noon. Here, important politicians and intellectuals were present at the railway station: Alexandru Vaida-Voievod, Sextil Pușcariu, Emil Hațiegan, I. Lupaș, D. Manu. After a service performed by bishop Colan, Ion Agârbiceanu spoke on behalf of the Romanian Uniate Church. Other speakers were Sextil Pușcariu and I. Vereș (the president of the “Petru Maior” student’s society, which had been led for a long time by Ion

¹³⁷ Emilio Gentile, ‘The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1 (2000): 21– 2.

¹³⁸ *Cuvântul*, X, No. 3244 (February 12, 1937).

¹³⁹ Ibid.



Moța).¹⁴⁰ The stop in Cluj witnessed a very impressive presence among the clergy. There was a strange, even surreal moment of unity in beliefs between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church, both represented at a very high level. What was even more revealing was the fact that the two hierarchs delivered speeches that contained encomiastic references about the deeds of the two leaders, an attitude that was in dissonance with the official line of the Romanian Patriarch, Miron Cristea. Bishop Colan praised the fight of Moța and Marin against what he called ‘the red madness’ and stated that “treasuring their supreme sacrifice, God did not leave them prisoners to the enemies, and their souls made their way to the Heavens”.¹⁴¹

After Cluj, the train also stopped in Orăștie, a small Transylvanian town in which Ion Moța was born. Here, the public show of support was amplified by the fact that Ion Moța was considered a son of the town, and his father, and Orthodox priest, was a respected public figure among the local community. In Sibiu, another important Transylvanian location, 32 priests conducted the religious service, while Vicar Liviu Stan gave a speech highlighting the deeds of the two fallen legionaries.¹⁴²

After crossing Oltenia and Wallachia in the morning of 11 February with a significant stop in the town of Pitești, the mortuary train arrived at the North Railway Station in Bucharest at 11.50.

¹⁴⁰ *Universul*, LIV, No. 42 (February 12, 1937); *Curentul*, X, No. 3245 (February 13, 1937).

¹⁴¹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 4 / 1937, p. 177.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 9.



V. 2. The Moța-Marin funeral procession on the North Railway Station platform in Bucharest.

Here, the final and most impressive stage of the procession took place. Being in conflict with the authorities, and wanting to prove that order was one of the most important characteristics of the Legion, the legionaries took care exclusively of the funeral's organization. Thousands of legionaries dressed in uniforms¹⁴³ (with the tacit approval of the authorities, who lifted the ban of wearing uniforms in public places) met the two coffins in front of the railway station. Tens of thousands of sympathizers or bystanders were also present, at the railway station and also throughout the city, following the procession. The staff of the diplomatic missions of Italy, Germany and Nationalist Spain,¹⁴⁴ groups of Italian Fascists and German Nazis from Bucharest, many politicians, university

¹⁴³ Estimates vary concerning the exact number of legionaries in uniform present, from 16, 000 – German consular representative quoted by Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*, p. 294 to 50, 000 - Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 175.

¹⁴⁴ This diplomatic presence caused a political scandal in the Parliament, while the authorities were genuinely concerned because of the potential support for the Iron Guard from countries such as Germany. See Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936 – 40* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 31–3.

professors, students, officers, and former comrades of the deceased legionaries from the student movement also took part in the ceremony.

After a short religious service, one of the most important parts of the ritual took place. In front of the two coffins, the ordered legionaries performed 'The Ion Moța and Vasile Marin Oath', conceived by Codreanu himself and which was meant to solidify the legionary desire for self-sacrifice in order to achieve the higher goal of resurrecting the decaying Romanian nation.

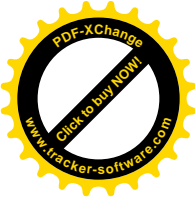
All the legionaries present collectively pronounced the oath:

Moța and Marin,
I swear before God, before your holy sacrifice, for Christ and
the Legion, to tear from me the earthly happiness, to render
myself from humanly love and, for the resurrection of my
People, to be ready for death at any time!¹⁴⁵



V.3. *Thousands of Legionaries perform the Moța-Marín Oath in front of the North Railway Station in Bucharest.*

¹⁴⁵ *Curentul*, X, No. 3245 (February 13, 1937). The text of the oath was also distributed in most of the locations where the mortuary train stopped during its cross-country itinerary.



As Emilio Gentile argued in the case of Italian fascism, this “cult for the fallen” and this “attitude towards death” constituted “manifestations of a will for power fighting against time and of a longing for immortality”.¹⁴⁶ Also, one of the obsessions of the legionary intellectuals and doctrinaires was to find a way to escape time, to bypass the Romanian inferiority complex regarding the historical past and to actually become a maker of history. This was the message taken by legionary intellectuals from the deaths of Moța and Marin. In this vein, historian and legionary leader Vasile Christescu argued that “by falling with their face towards God, on Spanish soil, the homeland of the emperor that gave birth to us as a people, our missionaries torn down the padlocks that kept locked for us the wide gate of universal history”.¹⁴⁷ Thus, according to the legionaries, Moța and Marin made history by dying, and the oath urged them to follow their example.

After the oath, a procession was formed in order to take the two bodies to the “Sfântul Ilie Gorgani” Church where they would be kept until the burial. The procession was lead by the legionaries who carried the crosses of the two dead leaders, followed by the students’ representatives with their flags, and then by the garlands of flowers sent by Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. A large group of priests followed. The procession was continued with a legionary squad that formed a cross with their own bodies. They were followed by the mortuary cart, dressed in green and decorated with the national flag and pulled by legionaries.

¹⁴⁶ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Trans. by Keith Botsford, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 78.

¹⁴⁷ Vasile Christescu, “Jertfa lui Ion Moța și Vasile Marin în lumina istoriei”, *Cuvântul Studentesc*, 12, 1 – 4 (January – February 1937): 45.

Behind the cart there were the families of Moța and Marin, and the legionary leaders followed by the impressive crowd.¹⁴⁸

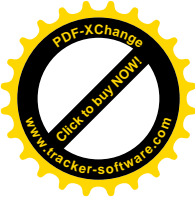


V. 4: Legionaries in uniforms, forming a cross with their bodies during the Moța-Marin funeral procession



V. 5: The Moța-Marin mortuary cart during the procession on the streets of Bucharest

¹⁴⁸ *Universul*, LIV, No. 43 (February 13, 1937); *Curentul*, X, No. 3245 (February 13, 1937).



In the next day, on February 12, many citizens came to the church to pay their respects to the two bodies. As a continuation of the initiation ritual, Codreanu took the initiative of forming “The Moța and Marin Order”, an elite group which was supposed to contain no more than 10 000 members willing to die at any time.¹⁴⁹ Codreanu used this momentum to make a step further, that is, the multiplication of Moța and Marin to 10, 000, the “new men” of tomorrow, ready to die for what he perceived as the rebirth of the country.

The burial of the two bodies took place on February 13, 1937. Codreanu decided that the two leaders should be buried near the “Green House”, the headquarters of the movement, in order to serve as an inspiration for future legionaries. By being buried near the headquarters, they could participate in the leadership of the Legion even after their death.¹⁵⁰ A small mausoleum was built in order to provide the resting-place for the bodies of Moța and Marin. The funeral procession resembled the one from the arrival of the bodies with the notable exception of the increased number of priests (sources mention between 200 and 400 priests).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *Curentul*, X, No. 3247, February 15, 1937.

¹⁵⁰ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 177.

¹⁵¹ *Curentul*, X, No. 3248 (February 16, 1937); *Universul*, LIV, No.45 (February 15, 1937).

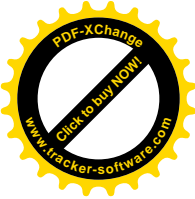


V.6: A group of priests during the Moța-Marin funeral procession

At this point, the five surviving legionaries were playing an important role. They were at the centre of the procession and they were dressed in the Spanish combat uniforms. In front of the mausoleum from the 'Green House', Alexandru Cantacuzino talked to the crowd. The climax of the ceremony was the roll call: Prat y Soutzo, the top diplomatic representative of Franco's Spain in Romania, called the names of the legionary team and for Moța and Marin everybody answered "Present!"

The roll call was common to other fascist movements as well. It was also the central point at the 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations in Italy, when, as historian Claudio Fogu pointed out, the 'fascist mass subject' answered '*Presente!*' for Anita Garibaldi, thus 'highlighting its own presence as a *maker of history*'.¹⁵² According to Emilio Gentile, the roll call became 'the supreme rite of fascism' as it

¹⁵² Claudio Fogu, "Fascism and Historic Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations" *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (1996): 335.



'gave life to the sacred bond between the dead and the living, joined together in the faith'.¹⁵³

The Public Impact of the Moța-Marin Funeral and the Role of the Orthodox Clergy

The entire ceremony had a powerful impact among the public opinion in general and the legionaries in particular. The ultra-nationalist press kept on emphasizing the bravery of the two legionaries, portraying them as martyrs and fighters for Christianity and Latinity. The exaggerations became obvious and comparisons tended to get further away from reality.

Thus, well-known economist and theoretician of corporatism, Mihail Manoilescu compared Ion Moța, the preferred martyr from the two, to Lord Byron,¹⁵⁴ while others did not shy away from placing him in line with La Fayette and Garibaldi.¹⁵⁵ The highest point of this comparative game was reached when Moța and Marin were considered the "two Romanian contemporaries of Jesus", by Dragoș Protopopescu.¹⁵⁶ Taking things to another extreme, poet Dan Botta considered the death of the two as "the sacrifice through which an entire people expiated",¹⁵⁷ thus elevating them to the position of Saviours.

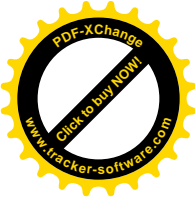
¹⁵³ Gentile *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Mihail Manoilescu, "De la Lord Byron la Ion Moța" (From Lord Byron to Ion Moța), *Buna Vestire*, I, 3 (February 24, 1937).

¹⁵⁵ N. Batzaria, "Pentru creștinism și latinătate" (For Christianity and Latinity), *Universul*, LIV, No.23 (January 24, 1937).

¹⁵⁶ Dragoș Protopopescu, "Contemporanii lui Isus..." (The Contemporaries of Jesus), *Buna Vestire*, I, 1 (February 22, 1937).

¹⁵⁷ Dan Botta, "Jertfa care ne-a mântuit" (The Sacrifice that Saved Us), *Buna Vestire*, I, 3 (February 24, 1937).



The funeral was considered by some as a useful event for the city of Bucharest. The nationalists perceived Bucharest as an orientalist, dirty city, with no spirituality. The funeral of Moța and Marin “spiritualized” the city, especially because of the unprecedented sense of discipline.¹⁵⁸

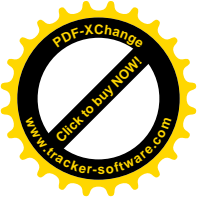
Police reports also testify about the profound impact that the whole event had in the public opinion, highlighting the fact that the religious rituals, combined with elements of legionary rituals (such as the oath) contributed immensely to create that effect: “The religious ceremonies that took place in the main railway stations, the pomp displayed while the legionaries took the oath, the intensity of those moments / everything taking place in front of the coffins draped with Romanian colours / generated within the audience a sense of mysticism that deeply impressed even those that were not members of the ‘All for the Fatherland’ party, and a part of them also took the oath”.¹⁵⁹

The overwhelming presence of the clergy, with different ranks in the Church, exemplified the close connection between the Iron Guard and the Orthodox clergy which went against the official line of the Orthodox hierarchy, especially that imposed by Patriarch Miron Cristea. This politicized religious moment showed the genuine popularity enjoyed by the Iron Guard among Orthodox priests across the country.

The Moța and Marin funeral was a very salient moment for the history of the relationship between Romania’s most important fascist movement, i.e. the

¹⁵⁸ N. Crevedia, “Bucureștiul, pe barricade” (Bucharest, on barricades), in *Porunca Vremii*, VI, No. 659 (February 17, 1937).

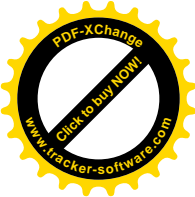
¹⁵⁹ Report signed by General Pârâianu - ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 4 / 1937, p. 15.



Iron Guard, and the clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It was the moment when, using the emotional state produced by the death of Moța and Marin among the public opinion, the Church comes out in an impressive display of support for the Iron Guard. The priests present throughout the country were not only conducting a religious service but, through some of their most important representatives (in Cluj or Sibiu) openly praised the two legionaries as “heroes”. This clerical display of support is all the more significant when one takes into account that state authorities were not at all content with the situation. In the same time, the Iron Guard itself profited from the religious presence for this moment, pushing, as police reports from the archives also revealed, for a “fascistization of the masses”, i.e. the showcasing of their version of “sacralised politics” that advocated the need for a “new man” and a “new country”, even with the price of self sacrifice, as the Moța-Marin episode showed.

The “bystanders,” the public opinion, were also deeply impressed by the aesthetic and ritualistic devices employed by the legion. The huge crowds that greeted the two dead bodies in various railway stations across the country showed that they have identified with the persons of Moța and Marin. The population of Bucharest that joined the ceremonies in great numbers also signaled the increasing popularity of the movement.¹⁶⁰ The dead bodies of Moța and Marin generated such intense emotions because they were attributed the importance of being the bearers of selfless supreme sacrifice for a spiritual cause (i.e. the perceived struggle between Christianity and atheism as a prelude to the resurrection of the nation). Their “concreteness” (Katherine Verdery), their

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 27.



presence throughout the country and the public display, carefully staged by the Legion, only added to the fascination.

V. 2. Fighting Against the State: the Legion's Quest for Electoral Success in 1937

After February 1937, the public opinion, as well as the official authorities realized the growing appeal of the Legion. If in January 1937 the Legion had 96 000 members, by the end of the year the number grew to 272 000.¹⁶¹ This growth had its origins in the period immediately after the burial of Moța and Marin. The Parliamentary elections from December 1937 would certify the ascending trajectory of the Legion. An analysis of the activity of the Legionary Movement throughout 1937 may provide crucial insights for explaining the success of Codreanu's organization.

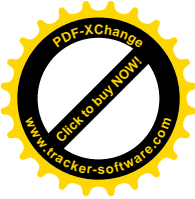
On the Offensive: "The Legion Conquers the Country"

Codreanu began the 1937 political year by announcing the change of all leading positions within the party, a principle set up, he argued, in order to prevent abuses by local leaders, and also to offer to as many legionaries as possible the chance to learn true leadership skills.¹⁶²

After the show of strength proven by Codreanu's movement with the occasion of the Moța-Marin funeral, state authorities started to change their

¹⁶¹ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 366.

¹⁶² Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 114–5.



policy regarding the Legion. If for the three years prior to the event they have been lenient towards the development of the movement, and in some cases, discretely encouraging it, after seeing the potential mass-appeal garnered by the legionaries, their positioned changed. With the approval of King Carol, several well-known adversaries of the Legion, such as Gabriel Marinescu (former chief of Bucharest Police) were placed in key positions within the government, having the mission to act firmly and irreversibly against Codreanu and his closest collaborators.¹⁶³

Aware of this situation, Codreanu told his followers that after the Moța-Marin funeral, the authorities were surprised by the orderly manner in which the whole event was staged. That is why, Codreanu said, provocations against the legionaries will be launched in the following months.¹⁶⁴ Knowing that his organization could be deeply hurt by a direct confrontation with the government, Codreanu specifically tried to prevent any actions that would be interpreted as menacing against the state. Thus, he openly stated that his movement will never resort to a *coup d'état* or a plot in order to achieve victory:

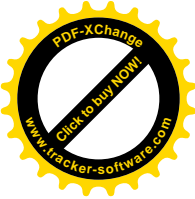
The Legionary Movement can only achieve victory when an inner process of consciousness of the Romanian nation will be accomplished. When this process will include the majority of Romanians and it will come to an end, victory will also come, without any plot and *coup d'état*.¹⁶⁵

Indeed, the tactic adopted by the Legion would emphasize the idea that they were conducting another type of politics, based on inner transformations and the

¹⁶³ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*, 299.

¹⁶⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 123–4.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.



desire to regenerate the decaying body of the nation. Once this project was showcased in such a powerful way with the occasion of the Moța-Marin funeral, it was very difficult for the authorities to efficiently act against it, without causing popular unrest.

More and more individuals and social groups were drawn by the movement, and this became quite obvious for everybody. The flirt between the young generation of intellectuals and the Legion, which began in the early 1930s, was now a reality. Mircea Eliade, the undisputed leader of this young generation of intellectuals, reached the peak of his attachment for the Iron Guard in this precise political and historical moment. Some of Eliade's most engaging, pro-legionary articles are written under the spell of the revolutionary regenerative project proposed by the Legion who was, in their vision, proven by the deaths of Moța and Marin. Commenting on the Moța-Marin oath, Eliade basically outlined some of the most salient traits of the Legionary project, succumbing to its appeal:

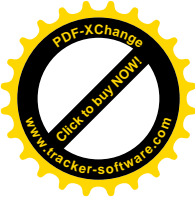
The meaning of the revolution desired by Mr. Codreanu is so mystically profound – that its success would mean once again the triumph of Christianity in Europe.

...

This oath, which so clearly expresses the thought of Mr. Codreanu proves how far the Legion is from an ordinary 'national revolution'. This is not about getting the power at any cost – but, above all, about a new man, a man for which spiritual life would indeed exist...¹⁶⁶

Earlier that same year, philosopher Nae Ionescu, Eliade's mentor and legionary sympathizer, attempted to reconcile, in a conference held at "St. Anton Church" in Bucharest, the sacralised, nationalist project of the Legion and the

¹⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade, "Comentarii la un jurământ" (Comments to an Oath), *Vremea*, X, No. 476 (February 21, 1937).



traditional Orthodox faith. The conference, entitled “Our National Orthodoxy”, was attended by 200 legionaries, and attempted to answer the accusation that the Legion’s politics was in fact developing a new faith that placed it outside the Orthodox Church.¹⁶⁷

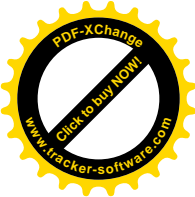
According to Nae Ionescu, for the young generation the nation represented life itself. In the Romanian case, nationalism and faith represented one and the same thing. Catholics cannot accommodate religion and nationalism, Ionescu argued, because religion is universalized and abstract, while nationalism belongs to nations. In the Orthodox case, faith represents a reality like life itself; there is a total resemblance between nationalism and faith, “both containing people from the same community of ideals and love.”¹⁶⁸

This type of discourse, carefully employed by intellectuals sympathetic to Legionary politics, helped the movement in gaining and retaining an influential position among Orthodox clergy, who, in turn, provided legitimacy for the Legion among believers.

Due the unprecedented political momentum gained in the aftermath of the Moța-Marin funeral, the Legion became an appealing movement for many politicians who wanted to ride the wave of fascist politics, also encouraged by the offensive conducted on the European political scene by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

¹⁶⁷ Report regarding legionary activities – ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10 / 1937, pp. 4 – 6.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.



Faced with this trend, Codreanu warned his followers that these politicians, even if they now swear allegiance to the legionary creed, will not be accepted within the movement. He argued that the kind of inner transformation required for becoming a true legionary, takes place over a long period of time. Thus, they will only formally acquire the legionary status, but will not be able to really integrate in the movement. The only place suitable for them, said Codreanu, was the 'Friends of the Legionaries' association.¹⁶⁹

Some important public political figures became supporters of the Legion. Mihai Manoilescu provided decisive financial and intellectual support for the publication of the *Buna Vestire* daily newspaper, starting on February 22, 1937.¹⁷⁰ This newspaper, although not officially belonging to the Legion, would become the most important media outlet for Codreanu's movement throughout the electoral battle of 1937, by having on its staff openly legionary journalists and intellectuals such as Mihail Polihroniade, Dragoș Protopopescu or Toma Vlădescu. In continuation of his new attitude towards the Legionary Movement, Mihai Manoilescu also held conferences that praised the political project of the Legion. Thus, at a conference organized by the Student Center in Bucharest, Manoilescu gave a talk entitled "The Synthesis of Romanian Corporations" in front of 400 students, praising the Legion as a future state party:

Our student body and the other social classes are organized in a specifically Romanian corporatist system, under the care of the one and only party, that we call the legionary party.

¹⁶⁹ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 130–1. The 'Friends of the Legionaries' association grouped, under quasi-anonymous circumstances, important supporters and sponsors of the Legion who were not official members of movement but sympathized with its politics.

¹⁷⁰ ANIC, Fond Directia Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10/1937, pp. 21–2.



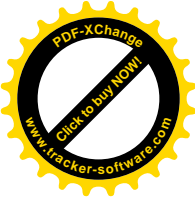
Corporatism is the future of the country and it will only be accomplished by this party that we call legionary.¹⁷¹

But the Legion did not attract only young intellectuals and politicians. Aware of the potential power of the movement, representatives of big industry and the banking sector started paying more attention to Codreanu and some of them even became silent supporters of his, a new reality for the movement, who only four years ago was on the fringe of politics and lacked proper financial means. A police note dated April 22, 1937 stated that big industrialist Dumitru Mociorniță, although a member of the National Liberal Party (the party in power at that moment) developed strong connections with members of the Legion, 'helping them with footwear, money, employing them in his factories or recommending them to other persons for gaining various favours.'¹⁷² Another note, dated May 15, 1937 described that well known banker Grigore T. Coandă, president of United Banks of Romania and member of the 'Friends of the Legionaries' association was enrolled as a legionary and on November 8 would become a member of the Legionary Senate. However, as historian Armin Heinen stated, representatives of big industry did not transform the Legion into a tool of their own, but rather financed most of the parties with a fair chance of acquiring power, just to have a safety net.¹⁷³ This argument might well explain why the Legion managed to get some support from such persons only when they started being regarded as real contenders for political power.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 103.

¹⁷² ANIC, Fond Directia Generală a Poliției, Dosar 264/ 1937, p. 280.

¹⁷³ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelu Mihail*, p. 325.



This cross-class appeal of the Legion proved the key towards electoral success in 1937, and marked the characteristic of the legionary offensive. The undeniable growing popularity of the movement later made some of the leaders to brand year 1937 as the year in which ‘the Legion conquers the country’.¹⁷⁴

The Legion and the Electoral Battle

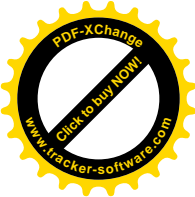
The legionary offensive in the electoral year of 1937 did not take place only in the realm of politics. Posing as a movement that would radically transform and regenerate the decaying nation, through the creation of a “new man” and a “new country”, the Legion targeted other important fields, such as sports or culture, among others.

Writing for the newly founded *Buna Vestire* daily, journalist Virgil Popescu focused on the issue of sports and how this field can and should contribute to the consolidation of true Romanian virtues, thus arguing for a “national sport” with Romanians and for Romanians.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, in his view, every success to what he perceived as Romanian teams against teams that also included minorities was an eloquent example of Romanian supremacy. Commenting on a routine victory obtained in a football game by Venus Bucharest, a team he considered Romanian, against Ripensia Timișoara, a team that included many players that were of Hungarian origin, Popescu claimed that this event:

...managed to convince even the last of the doubtful that the superiority of our race is not just an empty word spread at

¹⁷⁴ Hora Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, p. 168.

¹⁷⁵ Virgil Popescu, “Sport național” (National Sport) *Buna Vestire*, I, 1 (February 22, 1937).



the crossroads by false prophets, but a reality, a great and happy – for us – reality. We know that our enemies or those of our own blood who are sell-outs to foreigners have no reason to be happy. Even if they do not say it they admit, through this reality, their ultimate defeat.¹⁷⁶

This discursive attitude complemented the practical emphasis placed by the Legion on sports and physical education, especially in the work camps that it organised and also through the military-style education that it perpetrated.

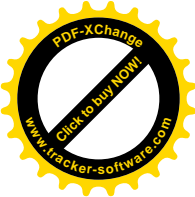
In the realm of culture, legionary intellectuals were also convinced that a genuine, revolutionary way of writing emerged and that the regenerative project of the Legion will deeply transform this field as well. Writer Mircea Streinul, one of the founders of the Cernăuți based cultural journal *Iconar*, argued that what he called ‘the legionary phenomenon’ also reached the field of culture and that the intellectual, legionary youth managed to create a unitary autochthonous culture that will served the state. He contrasts the youthful legionary writing to those of the old, arguing for the emergence of a new spirituality:

Take everything that that has been written by and for the legionaries. You’ll see that a new spirituality has already been created, a spirituality that meets under a single banner the ancient devoutness, the impetuosity of the present and the tendency for Romanian imperialism that would belong to the future.

Legionary writing, simple and majestic in form, true and ravishing in content, addressed to all the readers of the country, abolishes intellectual categories by totalizing them in a single community that will be able to grasp everything that is created in the spirituality of the country.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ The chronicle of the game was published in *Buna Vestire*, I, 3 (February 24, 1937).

¹⁷⁷ Mircea Streinul, “Scrișul legionar – piatră de început în învierea culturii românești”, *Cuvântul Argeșului*, II, No. 33, May 1, 1937.



The beliefs expounded by Streinul were also shared by the vast majority of students and young intellectuals, who would form one of the most active and restless groups taking part in the 1937 electoral battle.

The growing power of the Legion was also noticed abroad, and there was a steady increase in the coverage of Codreanu's movement by foreign media. Important Soviet newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestia* published in April 1937 articles that referred to the increasing power of the Iron Guard, branding the movement a "Hitler subsidiary in Romania" and underlined the importance of the country in the European plans of German fascists.¹⁷⁸ Other foreign journalists came to Romania in order make interviews with Codreanu, who became a well-known figure. Mark E. Ravage was one such journalist. He interviewed Codreanu in Bucharest and published the outcome in *Ce Soir* on May 5, 1937. Codreanu's appearance left an intense impression to Ravage, which is detectable from his article's introductory remarks:

What strikes you and puzzles you at this 'condottiere', especially when one knows his past, is his extreme apparent kindness, in his gaze, his voice and gesture.

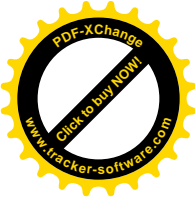
Everyone knows that in 1924, when he was 24 years old, he assassinated Manciu, the prefect of Iași. And still has such a peaceful gaze! Is he an adventurer, an illuminate, a thug? If he is just an actor, than he is a drama artist with an exceptional talent.¹⁷⁹

One may analyze Ravage's remarks taking into consideration Codreanu's charisma,¹⁸⁰ an asset recognized even by his fiercest enemies. The dialogue

¹⁷⁸ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 1/1937, pp. 16 – 17; 28 – 31.

¹⁷⁹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 1/1937, p. 77.

¹⁸⁰ For more on charisma, Codreanu, and the Legion, please see Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: the Legion of the Archangel Michael in*



between the two is revealing in what Codreanu's political standpoints were on several important issue. Asked about his anti-Semitism, Codreanu replied in few words, as he usually preferred, that "the Jewish swamp has to be dried out" and, with unusual, probably contextual, moderation, he suggested doing this by making it hard for them to do commerce, and not through violent means. On the issue of foreign policy, Codreanu summed up his credo in two words "against communism" and then went on to define communism as "what is going on in Russia and Spain. Communism is Jews. All Jews are Communists are allies of Communists, even when they are not openly members of this party."¹⁸¹

All these issues also played a pivotal role in the electoral struggle that ensued in 1937. The Legion had the political momentum in comparison with its direct competitors on the extreme right, especially the National-Christian Party. This situation was acknowledged among other sources by the secret police reports, and was, in part, explained by the overwhelming presence of the young generation within the ranks of the Legionary movement:

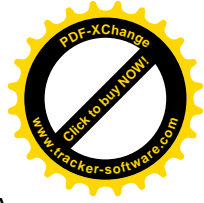
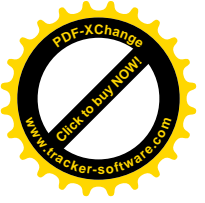
The National-Christian ideology echoes less among the young generation than the legionary one, which is more spectacular; because of this, the National-Christians lack the disinterested propaganda impetus given by the intellectual youth, recruiting only among people of elder age.¹⁸²

State authorities closely monitored the activity of the Legion, and, as the elections were approaching, they intensified their censorship of legionary

Interwar Romania, Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures & Societies, 2004.

¹⁸¹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 1/1937, p. 79 - 82.

¹⁸² Confidential report regarding population morale written by the Cernăuți Regional Police Inspectorate - ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 10/1937, pp.135 -139.



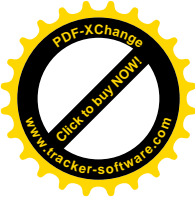
publications and also started to report in detail Codreanu's political moves. A police note dated May 30, 1937 stated that Codreanu completed the second volume of his work *Pentru legionari*, containing his account of the Legion's activity since prime-minister Duca's assassination in December 1933. The note also reported that he wanted to publish the volume without being subjected to censorship.¹⁸³ The fact that Codreanu never managed to publish the second volume of his book proved the determination of state authorities to terminate from the very beginning any propaganda move conceived by the Legion. This was a radical change of attitude, given the fact that Codreanu managed to publish the first volume of his work only a year before, in 1936, by avoiding the censorship of the state.

To show their determination to stop the Legion's influence among the youth, state authorities passed legislation that made impossible for the legionaries to organize their work camps the same way they could in previous years. This move turned out to be huge blow to the movement, depriving it of one of the most efficient propaganda tools. In a circular letter dated June 13, 1937, Codreanu announced that no work camps were to be organized that year and only two "rest camps" were established, which complied with the new regulations issued by the authorities.¹⁸⁴

Codreanu's obsession with achieving social harmony and creating and educating a "new man" was translated to other projects set up in order to boost the Legion's popularity, such as legionary restaurants. Codreanu personally

¹⁸³ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 264/1937, p. 224.

¹⁸⁴ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 185–6.



addressed the beneficiaries of the restaurants through a manifesto meant to showcase the higher goals of this rather mundane endeavour:

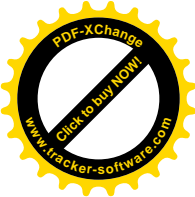
To accomplish within this restaurant the social legionary harmony. In this restaurant a university professor can come, and so can waggoners or any other worker. They can sit at their tables with their families. Wives and children. The university professor will not look down on him, but regard him like a brother, like his working brother.
... in this restaurant I would like to create a true school of good behaviour, elegance and warm legionary comradeship, with a feeling of brotherhood among the nation's sons.¹⁸⁵

Although the elections took place in December, the Legion spent the whole year campaigning, precisely to bypass the effects of the measures taken against them by state authorities. However, their actions increased in intensity starting with the month of September. This fact is also acknowledged by police reports, who documented a growing activity and mass base for the Legion in various regions of the country. If until then the police managed to keep a close eye on every important actor within the movement, the recent increase in popularity made this impossible. For example, a note sent by the Prahova Regional Police Inspectorate on September 30, 1937 stated that the Legionary Movement in Prahova was in full expansion, and that 'the number of nests and members is constantly growing, nearly doubling in comparison to past months.'¹⁸⁶ Due to this unprecedented growth, the police encountered serious difficulties in their attempt to identify the new members of the movement.

In the same time, a report sent by the Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate stated that the Legionary Movement began its electoral activity, the

¹⁸⁵ ANIC, Fond Direcţia Generală a Poliţiei, Dosar 254/1937, p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ ANIC, Fond Direcţia Generală a Poliţiei, Dosar 19/1937, p. 24.



first sign being the republication of the newspaper “Romania Creștina” (Christian Romania). This newspaper, under the editorship of journalist Sergiu Florescu, had served earlier in the past as a platform for promoting the Legion’s political message across the province of Bessarabia, using violent anti-Semitic overtones. The report also talked about the Legion’s propaganda teams, set up in order to give a strong impetus for political activity in the region. According to the report there were 20 propaganda teams across the region, and they marched through the counties contacting priests and school teachers in order to set up new nests and find new recruits. Furthermore, a ladies committee was put together in order to organize women’s clubs. What is also interesting is the social composition of the group formed by the legionaries who were leading the 20 propaganda teams: 5 priests/theology students, 2 graduates in Agronomical Sciences, 2 school teachers, 1 painter, 1 legal court intern, and 9 workers.¹⁸⁷ Once again, the Legion counted on the dynamic effect put forth by students, young intellectuals and workers.

An important political act that left its mark on the electoral campaign was the unprecedented “nonaggression electoral agreement” signed by Codreanu and two other political organizations: Iuliu Maniu’s National Peasant Party and Gh. Bratianu’s liberal party (a faction that dissented from the ruling National Liberal Party). The agreement was conceived as a mean to put pressure on the government in order to assure free elections end to prevent any “strong-arm tactics during the elections.”¹⁸⁸ It was not an electoral alliance, and each party

¹⁸⁷ ANIC, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, Dosar 19/1937, pp. 25 – 26.

¹⁸⁸ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866 - 1947*, 419.



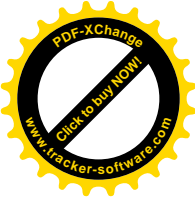
conducted its own autonomous campaign, supporting its own candidates. Iuliu Maniu was a committed democrat who argued against dictatorship and was faithful to a Romanian foreign policy centered on the alliance with the main European democracies, France and Great Britain. Codreanu advocated the exact opposite of those principles, and still the two leaders considered the threat posed by a potential government intrusion in the election process as bigger than their differences. This agreement sparked huge debates at that time, and was also a conundrum for historians for decades to come.¹⁸⁹

Because everybody wondered how such opposites can come together, Codreanu felt the need to explain the agreement more than once. In a public political statement made on November 30, 1937 explained the meaning of the agreement in his vision, stating that its aim was “the defence of freedom and conducting a civilized electoral confrontation”¹⁹⁰ while the signing parties would maintain their own separate ideological views. As a continuation of these remarks, Codreanu embarked on a series of statements aimed at clarifying his party’s position on several key issues that Iuliu Maniu previously addressed. Thus, Codreanu, as expected, expressed totally different viewpoints on issues such as foreign policy and democracy, arguing for an alliance with Rome and Berlin, and alliance that he would set up “within 48 hours from the Victory of the Legionary Movement.”¹⁹¹ Codreanu concluded with a vicious attack on former minister of foreign affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, a member of Maniu’s party, whom

¹⁸⁹ One of the more recent contributions on this topic is by Rebecca Haynes, “Reluctant allies? Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu against Carol II of Romania”, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 85, 1 (2007): 105 – 134.

¹⁹⁰ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, 220.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 221.



Codreanu said that the Legion would oppose “with the utmost violence”, stating that with him, the Legion “can only conclude an aggression pact.”¹⁹²

However, Codreanu was still the subject of fierce attacks from “fellow travelers” on the anti-Semite extreme-right, who accused him that the pact actually defended Jewish votes. Codreanu, fearing similar reactions in his own party, replied promptly, reinforcing his anti-Semitic stance:

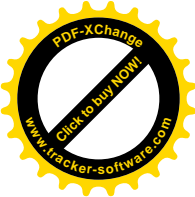
For 17 years, me and my comrades never set foot in a Jewish store, although we have lived in Iași, we have never set foot in a Jewish house, we have never talked to a single Jew, because I considered them as enemies of my nation. [...] I am asking for free election for my people, for the youth of my nation who four years ago, during the last elections, at the order of the Judaic power and under ruthless terror, ended up, in part, in hospitals and in part, over ten thousand, ended up in prisons. [...] The historic mission of our generation is to solve the Jewish problem.¹⁹³

In the end, this electoral campaign proved to be less violent than the previous one, from 1933, but the legionaries still managed to get into several brawls with political opponents.

However, the Legion used all the firepower it could get from its dynamic component, i.e. students and young intellectuals, managing to get its regenerative message across, also by using the still fresh memories of the Moța-Marin funeral. Journals such as *Rânduiala*, *Însemnări Sociologice* or *Iconar* published numerous contributions by important intellectuals who were also

¹⁹² Ibid., 223.

¹⁹³ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, “Un nou răspuns atacurilor dușmane” (A New Answer to Enemy Attacks), *Brațul de Fier*, III, 25 (December 1937).



bearers of the legionary political message.¹⁹⁴ The daily *Buna Vestire* published for the entire duration of the campaign a series of articles under the heading “Why do I believe in the triumph of the legionary youth?”¹⁹⁵ This series featured contributions from prominent intellectuals and public figures that supported the Legion, including Mircea Eliade and Ion Găvănescul.

The result of the vote surprised everybody, and even historiographical accounts qualify them as “shocking.”¹⁹⁶ For the first time in Romania’s interwar history, the governing party could not obtain enough votes to win a majority. In the Romanian electoral system, a party had to gain 40 % of the vote in order to obtain a bonus that would assure the majority in the Parliament. The ruling National Liberal Party gained only 35, 9% of the votes, and the other major party, Maniu’s National Peasant Party, failed to capitalize on this poor showing scoring just 20, 4%. The real winner was considered the “All for the Fatherland” Party, the “electoral face” of the Legion which from a peripheral movement in the early 1930s, became the third political force in Romania with 15, 58% of the votes.

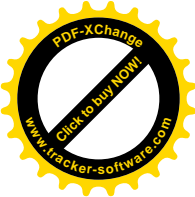
Codreanu treated the results of the elections as a victory. In a circular letter sent to all legionary organizations, he cited in respect the counties with the best results.¹⁹⁷ The Legion gained important votes in Bucharest and regions such as Banat, Oltenia, Bukovina and in parts of Wallachia. This proved that the regenerative political project of the Legion, which thematically surpassed the one

¹⁹⁴ From a long list of names, one can mention Ernest Bernea, Dumitru C. Amzăr, Dragoș Protopopescu, Haig Acterian, Traian Brăileanu, Leon Țopa, Mircea Streinul etc.

¹⁹⁵ ANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Dosar 22/1934, p. 133.

¹⁹⁶ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866 - 1947*, 419.

¹⁹⁷ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări și manifeste*, p. 230.



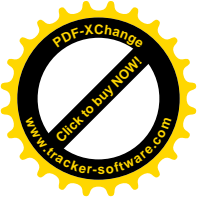
of other far right parties that focused obsessively on anti-Semitism, was adapted also “to provinces with other problems and another mentality.”¹⁹⁸

However, the seemingly good prospects of the Legion were soon shattered. Sensing the danger of a fascist offensive, King Carol put into practice his older desire of an authoritarian regime. As a first step, he named the National Christian Party of Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza to form a government, even though they were the fourth political force after the election with only 9% of the votes.¹⁹⁹ The government proved ineffective and, although new elections were announced for March 1938, in February King Carol installed his authoritarian regime and issued a new constitution that contained supplementary powers for the monarch. Codreanu and his movement were the main targets of the new regime. Arrested in April 1938 allegedly for planning a *coup d'état*, Codreanu was killed by the guards on November 30 the same year while being transferred to another prison, together with the assassins of Duca and Stelescu.²⁰⁰ His followers were devastated by this turn of events, and it can be said that Codreanu's death also represented the end of the legionary regenerative project as it was envisaged by him. In 1938, the authoritarian regime of Carol II proved stronger than all the forces that the Legion could mobilize for its goals.

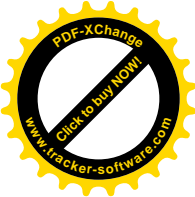
¹⁹⁸ Eugen Weber, “The Men of the Archangel”, 117.

¹⁹⁹ The King explained the decision making process in his daily notes, arguing that since the liberals lost, the peasantist leader Ion Mihalache turned him down, and bringing Codreanu to power was out of the question, he was left only with the National Christian Party as an alternative, King Carol II of Romania, *Însemnări zilnice. 1937-1951* (Daily Notes. 1937-1951) vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Scripta, 2001), 132-5.

²⁰⁰ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, 359.



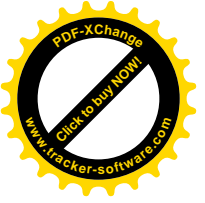
Codreanu's regenerative project ultimately failed, but not without leaving its mark on the social and political scene of interwar Romania.



CONCLUSIONS

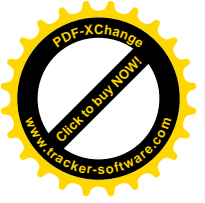
Rewriting and rethinking history in every generation as a way to mediate, like a translator, between past and present represents the function of a historian, as Peter Burke aptly stated. The current dissertation aimed at finding a way to make sense of a past time such as the interwar period, and especially of the emergence and development of fascism in the Romanian context. The interwar years represented for many the period in which all that went wrong with the twentieth century surfaced and evolved in a malign manner, culminating with the horrors of the Second World War. Fascism, even though a “latecomer” (Juan Linz) among the ideologies of the age, contributed greatly to this situation. Rooted in the feeling of revolt that developed around the turn of the century in Western Europe, fascism found its way on the main political stage soon after the “Great War” as it appealed to many who wanted to maintain their wartime camaraderie even after 1918, by perpetrating the “trench mentality.” Just as in the nineteenth century, when it attempted to follow a Western style modernization process, Central and Eastern Europe later borrowed the ideologies that expressed their discontent regarding the disadvantages and failures of modernity, adapting them to the local context. Fascism was projected by its founders as an answer to the postwar crisis, and it did satisfy the need of many people who wanted a replacement of the modern liberal project.

The dissertation outlined an approach to the analysis of Romanian fascism that aimed at grasping it from the inside out. Far from being just a reactionary,



accidental product of history, fascism was a distinct body of ideas, with a project of its own. The fascist regenerative project proposed an exit from a perceived state of crisis and decay by the means of creating a “new man” and a “new order.” The dissertation attempted to understand the mass-appeal enjoyed by fascism in Romania in the 1930s and to explain what were the elements that attracted so many followers to the Legion, especially from the young generation. In pursuing this research agenda, I have placed my undertaking in the proximity of the “culturalist” approach in fascist study, which was initiated by George Mosse in the 1960s and continued in the last two decades in a multifaceted manner by historians such as Stanley Payne, Roger Griffin and Emilio Gentile. As a consequence, my research often focused on ideology, on how the fascists saw themselves, and their use of symbols and rituals. However, I have sought to make my research more complete by also insisting on social and political aspects of the development of Romanian fascism in the 1920s and 1930s.

A large body of primary sources has been analyzed starting from the aforementioned methodological base, ranging from archival sources to newspapers, journals and books published in the 1920s and 1930s. The archival material regarding the Legionary Movement, which is not very present in the English language literature on the topic, provided interesting information regarding the structure of the movement, its internal communication and action plans, as well as the view of the authorities and their measures to contain it, often without success. The newspapers and journals reflected the position of the Legion in various forms, from a rather coarse manner until 1933 to a more refined



approach starting with 1933 and the adherence of young intellectuals to the movement.

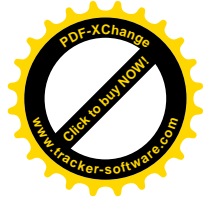
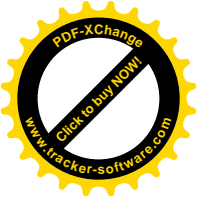
The thesis was structured having in mind the chronological aspect, with 1927 as the founding year of the Legion and 1937 being its most successful one, but also with a focus on certain topics of interest, such as the social and intellectual implications of its development. The first chapter dealt with the “prehistory” of the movement, *i.e.* the period between 1916 and 1927 with the purpose of outlining the roots of the Legionary project. Codreanu’s attempt to take part in the First World War, together with the influence that the military education had on him, helped outlining the profile of the person who later became the leader of the most important fascist movement in interwar Romania.

The “generation of the trenches” did not play an important part in interwar Romanian history the same way “the 1914 generation” did in Western Europe. However, the generation of those who were born in the first decade of the century and could not fight in the war felt the need to find a purpose of its own, at least as important as that pursued by their parents – the making of “Greater Romania.” Their feelings of frustration broke out in 1922 when the wave of student strikes with an anti-Semitic agenda shook the country. Fuelled also by social conditions, the protests soon turned against the state and the generation that accomplished the “Great Union,” with intellectuals such as Nicolae Iorga and Dimitrie Gusti being attacked because they were considered out of touch with the young generation. The 1922 student generation was to become the constant



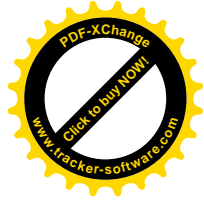
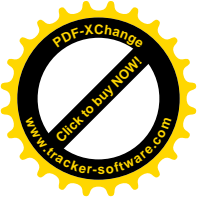
reservoir for Codreanu's political projects, as he managed to tame the revolt (George Mosse) and to channel it towards his own benefit.

Codreanu's activity in LANC, the party of his political mentor A. C. Cuza was based on the energy of young students who sought an organization that would pursue the anti-Semitic and extreme nationalist agenda of the 1922 strikes. If in the beginning Codreanu was satisfied with his political status, starting with 1925 he became to feel constrained by the ossified style of leadership and political practice professed by the rather traditional Cuza. Wanting, in his own words, "freedom of action", Codreanu founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1927 with the explicit goal of not functioning like an ordinary political party, with doctrine and platforms, but to offer another kind of project, one that would bring about the regeneration of a nation through the creation of a "new type of man." This objective, clearly stated later in his work *Pentru Legionari*, was pursued from the first days of existence of the movement, when only a handful of followers stood by his side, among them being Ion Moța, his most trusted fellow traveler. Marked by the scarcity of resources, the first years of the movement nevertheless enhanced the feeling of solidarity among the legionaries. The Legion's journal *Pământul Strămoșesc* was a very important source for assessing the beginnings of the movement. The articles in it testified to the Legion's intention to forge its own political future, stepping out from the shadow of Cuza while presenting the structure of the new organization. Its insistence on the ritualistic foundation of the Legion in November 1927 was also a step in the direction of consolidating the movement's own identity.



Between 1927 and 1932 the future elite of the movement was slowly forming and also several strongholds of the Legion started to emerge. The first “electoral battles”, as Codreanu called them, brought modest successes for the Legion, the most notable being in 1932 when it managed to enter the Parliament. With this, the Legion took another very important step in its development, the decision to move its headquarters to Bucharest and to become a movement with nationwide appeal. With a network of local newspapers in full expansion, and with political activists such as Mihail Stelescu who were good organizers of political events with a public impact, the Legion started to act like a movement that could be a serious contender in the Romanian political arena.

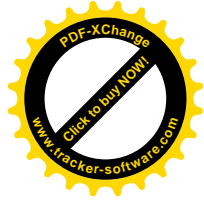
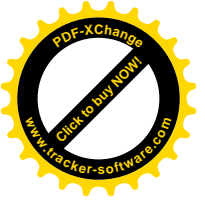
Perhaps the element that strengthened this perception the most was the adherence of the Axa group of intellectuals to the movement in 1933. The core of the Legion from the late 1920s days in Iași could not have been more different than this group of urban intellectuals more used to Bucharest’s universities, and cafes than with regional party politics. Still, the young intellectuals of the day were immersed in endless debates regarding the “historical mission” of their generation, and how they can use the opportunities of “Greater Romania” in order to make history or to make culture at a level that would be meaningful enough to transgress the boundaries of Romania. Some of these intellectuals would find their feeling of belonging to an ideal that lacked until then (as Ioan Victor Voien claimed) in the political project of the Iron Guard. They contributed to the refinement of the Legion’s regenerative project, arguing for a revolution of the young generation that would change the country from the ground, and bring



about an ethnocentric state, more concerned with the masses than with individuals and their freedoms. Anti-Semitic, anticommunist and antidemocratic elements were important parts of the young intellectuals' discourse, and accompanied Codreanu's politics throughout 1933.

The Axa group and its Iron Guard enrolment would pave the way for many more other young intellectuals to join Codreanu's movement in the second half of the 1930s. By becoming more and more immersed in Iron Guard politics, the Axa group would suffer the consequences of their alignment with the movement. Their support for the Iron Guard in the 1933 electoral campaign put them in the same position with Codreanu and other political leaders when, after the assassination of Prime Minister Duca, many members of the group were arrested and the journal was closed down. Most of them continued their allegiance to the Iron Guard in the following years, with some of them meeting violent deaths or else spending long years in political prisons, before, during, and after the Second World War.

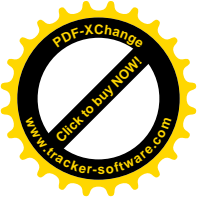
The integration of the Axa group in the Iron Guard was not one without difficulties. The year 1934 and the events following Duca's assassination would test the solidity of the Legion and also Codreanu's leadership skills. Old legionaries such as Ion Moța and Mihail Stelescu expressed their dissatisfaction with the growing influence that the Axa group had on Codreanu in 1933-1934, to the disadvantage of the Legion's "first hour" followers. Caught by surprise by these discontents, as could be detected from archival sources, Codreanu acted swiftly and decided to punish Stelescu, whom he accused of planning a rebellion



in the movement. Stelescu's expulsion from the organization transformed him into Codreanu's most important opponent and his ferocious assassination by a group of ten legionaries in 1936 proved to the public opinion that Legion did carry out its criminal threats.

The years 1934 to 1936 were of major importance for the Legion's regenerative project because its banning following Duca's assassination proved to be a blessing in disguise. Not being able to use conventional means to express itself, the Legion found alternative ways of showcasing its activity. Thus, the work camp model, which was also employed in 1933, has been extended to a fully fledged work camp system, with a countrywide range. These working endeavors grouped legionaries that would do voluntary work for various objectives, from buildings for the use of the Legion to churches, and houses for peasants. This helped the movement to change its image and to pose as a constructive organization that emphasized a new work ethic aimed at educating the bodies and the minds of the youth. The legionary regenerative project gained in concreteness with the help of the work camps, as the legionary propaganda presented them as micro-projection of the future "new Romania", built with the hard, voluntary work of the young generation. The banning of such endeavors by the authorities in 1937 was to prove once more the effectiveness of the system.

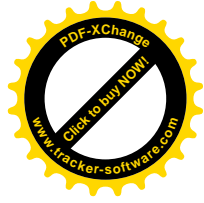
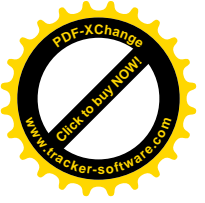
The most dynamic social component of the Legion remained the student body. In the mid-1930s the Legionary Movement gained almost full control over the most important student associations. By constantly claiming legitimacy from the 1922 generation, legionary students openly supported the legionary program



through the student organizations. The climax of this display of attachment was the Târgu Mureș student congress from April 1936. Designed as an annual meeting for students from all over the country with the aim of discussing issues of interest to them, the 1936 congress was completely hijacked by legionary students who imposed an agenda to their liking, with rampant anti-Semitic discourses and open threats to authorities and officials who opposed Codreanu's movement. A certain degree of overexposure and fatigue of the student movement led Codreanu to the decision to expand the social outreach of his organization. Thus, workers were targeted with some notable successes in areas such as Bucharest and Prahova Valley.

In the mid-1930s the presence of women in the movement was also consolidated, especially under the leadership of Nicoleta Nicolescu, the only woman who reached the rank of legionary commander. Women's nests were carefully reorganized under Nicolescu's guidance, and archival documents prove how they were preparing the female legionaries for becoming political fighters just like their male counterparts, with the purpose of aiding the Legion's political project.

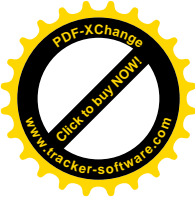
The period of "silent work" from the middle of the 1930s paid off, and in 1937 the Legion became stronger than ever. The departure to Spain of a group of seven legionary leaders in order to take part in the recently started civil war on Franco's side had an unexpected but transforming outcome. Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, two of the members of the team were killed in a battle near Madrid. With an important part of the public opinion regarding the Spanish Civil War as a



confrontation between communist atheism and Christianity, the news of the deaths of the two legionaries had a huge impact. This impact was amplified by the cross-country route taken by the train that brought back the two bodies. The Legion staged a mass funeral in Bucharest praising the event as a supreme proof of the will of the legionaries to self-sacrifice for a higher cause. The massive presence of the priests at this event solidified the connection between the Legion and sizable part of the Orthodox clergy.

Faced with this impressive display of power, the authorities finally decided to act against the Legion, and measures to contain its influence have been taken. Nevertheless, in the elections that took place in December the same year, the legionaries shocked everybody by winning 15% of the votes and becoming the third political force in the country. It became clear for everyone that the Legion had no potential rival among far-right, ultra-nationalist parties. However, in spite of the good result obtained in the elections, the Legion will be contained and repressed during King Carol II authoritarian regime, Codreanu jailed and killed in November 1938 and thus bringing to an end his fascist, regenerative project.

The Legionary regenerative project aimed at allegedly saving the country from a perceived state of decay by creating a “new man” and a “new order” was regarded by many as a viable, albeit radical solution, and also satisfied the need for political activism for a great part of the young generation. Its ultimate failure, together with its violent record and tragic outcome are part of the one of the darkest chapters in twentieth-century Romanian history.



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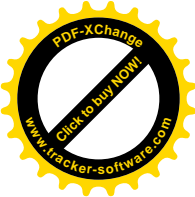
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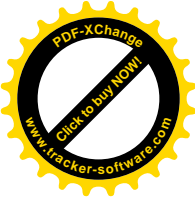
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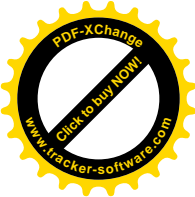
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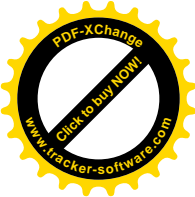
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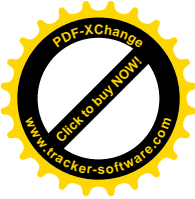
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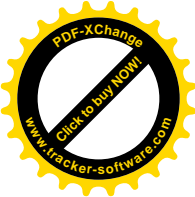
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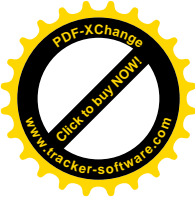
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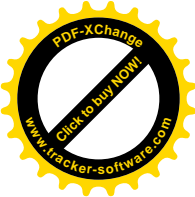
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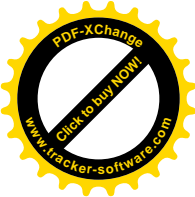
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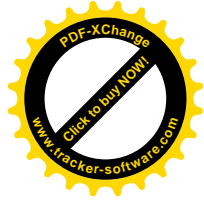
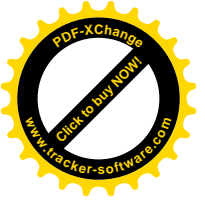
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