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The Path to the Holocaust

Fascism and Antisemitism in Interwar Romania

Abstract

This article outlines the principal directions of my research: It focuses on the interplay of antisemitism and fascism in the ideology of the legionary movement in inter-war Romania as well as on the virtual consensus on antisemitism that was established in the 1930s as a result of the support for the movement received from most of the representatives of the 'new generation' of Romanian intellectuals. This consensus was pivotal in desensitising the general population towards the plight of Romanian Jews and making it possible for the discriminatory measures to gradually escalate into outright policies of extermination. Thus my research demonstrates the responsibility held by the legionary movement even though they were not directly involved in the Romanian wartime Holocaust perpetrated by the Antonescu regime: The legionary movement nevertheless promoted an antisemitic discourse that was much more extreme than that of all its predecessors and contemporaries, advocating a radical exclusion with genocidal overtones. Moreover, while being as ideological and abstract as its Nazi counterpart, legionary antisemitism posited religion rather than race as the basis for the exclusion of the Jews in line with the ideology of a movement that presented itself as 'spiritual' and 'Christian'. The legionary exclusion based on religion proved as violent and murderous as the one based on race, both before and during the movement's time in power. As such, the evidence from the Romanian case study can serve to nuance and even challenge existing interpretations that identify only racist antisemitism as genocidal.

In the study of the Holocaust, perspectives from the 'periphery' can contribute significantly to bring nuance into a discourse that, albeit benefiting from probably unparalleled academic attention, more often than not tends to focus almost exclusively on the case of Nazi Germany and its extermination policies. As this brief paper aims to show, such nuance can come not only from bringing into the discussion new data that sheds more light on a relatively under-researched case study, but, hopefully, also from showing the relevance of apparently 'peripheral' developments concerning the situation of a "marginal group on Europe's margin"¹ in a comparative perspective. Eventually, this may lead to a more nuanced and qualified understanding of antisemitism in general. This is all the more important since the association between antisemitism and racism is quite commonplace, as is one of its corollaries, the postulation (despite considerable historical evidence to the contrary) that antisemitism only became genocidal in its racist manifestation.² The analysis of the Romanian case study can offer a clear-cut counterargument to such theses – as Raul Hilberg

1 Raul Cârstocea, A Marginal Group on Europe's Margin? Anti-Semitism in Romania from the Congress of Berlin to the 'Legion of the Archangel Michael', in: Silviu Miloiu et al. (ed.), *Europe as Viewed from the Margins. An East-Central European Perspective. From World War I to Present*, Târgoviște 2008, 189-201.

2 See e.g., Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge 2000, 56-82; William W. Hagen, *Before the 'Final Solution'. Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Antisemitism in Interwar Germany and Poland*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996), 351. Hagen states: "It was German anti-Semitism alone, in the racialised status it acquired under National Socialism, that resulted in genocide."

noted, “No country, besides Germany, was involved in massacres of Jews on such a scale”.³ The systematic deportation and killing of Jews was carried out by the Romanian army mostly independently of the Nazi *Einsatzgruppen*, with the responsibility for a number of victims estimated between 280,000 and 380,000 falling “squarely on the Antonescu-led Romanian state”.⁴ Yet, although the Romanian native fascist movement, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, enjoyed great popularity as the third-largest fascist movement in Europe and was the only one to have gained power without direct support from Germany or Italy,⁵ and although this legionary anti-semitism was both virulent and radical, it was primarily informed by cultural-religious arguments and deviated to the point of outright opposition from the racist pattern of Nazi anti-semitism. Although the organisation played only a minimal role in perpetrating the genocide, having been banned and itself persecuted by the government of Ion Antonescu following the failed legionary coup of January 1941, I argue that its extreme antisemitic rhetoric contributed considerably to the radicalisation of anti-semitism in inter-war Romania, not least through the immense popularity it enjoyed among the intellectuals making up the so-called ‘new generation’. These were in turn extremely influential in shaping public opinion and eventually establishing an antisemitic consensus in Romania.⁶ This consensus was pivotal in desensitising the general population towards the plight of Romanian Jews and making possible the gradual escalation of discriminatory measures into outright extermination policies. While it would be far beyond the scope of this short article to cover such a vast argument and explore its implications for our understanding of the path to the Holocaust, I intend to provide here a brief summary of my research on this topic, which I will in the future be published in the form of a monograph.

A Legacy of Exclusion: Antisemitism in 19th Century Romania

The roots of modern anti-semitism in Romania can be traced back to the second half of the 19th century, emerging roughly at the same time as in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. However, whereas many authors explain the emergence of modern anti-semitism as a reaction to Jewish emancipation,⁷ the case of Romania shows a scenario where it accompanied and developed alongside the legal discrimination that effectively barred the Romanian Jews’ participation in public life.⁸ Jews were legally identified as ‘foreigners’ in the Organic Statutes, a legislation imposed by General Pavel Kiselyov, the Russian governor of the Romanian principalities during the Russian occupation that lasted from 1829 until 1834. This status of the Jews in Romania was confirmed in the Constitution of 1866, the first constitution of the

3 Cited in: International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, Final Report, Iași 2005, 382.

4 Ibid., 381-382.

5 Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison 1995), 275-7; Armin Heinen, *Legiunea ‘Arhanghelul Mihail’: o contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, București 2006, 357.

6 See Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, trans. Charles Kormos, Oxford/Jerusalem 1991; Zigu Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right: The Nineteenth Century Legacy of Exclusion: Antisemitism in 19th Century Romanian Thirties*, trans. Eugenia Maria Popescu, Boulder/New York 1999; By the late 1930s, the exceptions to this pattern, i.e. non-Jewish intellectuals who remained at least neutral to the ‘Jewish issue’, were very few indeed, notable among them the case of Eugen Ionescu.

7 See e.g. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933*, Cambridge 1980, 258; Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary. History, Culture, Psychology*, Detroit 1996, 453.

8 See Raul Cârstocea, *Uneasy Twins? The Entangled Histories of Anti-Semitism and Jewish Emancipation in Romania and Hungary, 1866–1913*, in: *Slovo* 21 (2009), 64-85.

country following the unification of the two principalities of Moldova and Wallachia in 1859.⁹ Furthermore, Article 7 of the Constitution stated that “only foreigners of Christian rites may become Romanians”,¹⁰ thus preventing the naturalisation of Jews. In spite of international pressures at the Congress of Berlin, where the recognition of Romania’s independence was made conditional upon the granting of full civil and political rights to all its citizens irrespective of religious affiliation, the Romanian state made recourse to a subterfuge, invoking the Jews’ legal status of ‘foreigners’, and merely modified Article 7 of the Constitution of 1866 to allow for (but not guarantee) the naturalisation of Jews.¹¹

In the meantime, the debates surrounding the (failed) emancipation of Jews witnessed the emergence of antisemitic discourse in Romania, at this time largely inspired by similar developments in Germany and Austria-Hungary – Romanian antisemites borrowed extensively from the panoply of antisemitic stereotypes employed in these countries – and furthermore linked with the suspicions raised by international pressure, which was viewed as foreign interference in the internal affairs of the newly independent state. Before World War I, Romanian antisemitism developed two major lines of reasoning. Firstly, in the context of Romanian nationalism’s shifting focus away from independence and towards “the union of all Romanians into a Greater Romanian state”,¹² the nationalist-xenophobic argument emphasised the ‘foreign’ character of the Jews, their alleged refusal to assimilate, as well as their loyalty to Romania’s foreign ‘enemies’, the latter especially with regard to the renowned Hungarian patriotism of Jews in Hungary.¹³ The second line of reasoning was socio-economic, oscillating between the extremes of an emphasis on the ‘backwardness’ of recent Ashkenazi immigrants in Moldova (always juxtaposed to the long-standing, largely assimilated, ‘modern’ Sephardic community in Wallachia) to the common trope of Jews as an epitome of capitalism, particularly salient in a country undergoing a process of rapid modernisation at the expense of the majority peasant population.

Interestingly, when viewed in light of later developments during the interwar period, religious arguments were almost completely missing at this time, as were associations of Jews with socialism, which were limited to sporadic statements merely reproducing stereotypes ‘imported’ from foreign antisemitic publications. In a context of widespread legal discrimination reminiscent of Tsarist Russia but without the violent pogroms that were characteristic of the plight of the Russian Jews, the picture that emerges from a synoptic assessment of pre-World War I Romanian antisemitism is that of piecemeal, ‘pragmatic’ attempts to limit the Jews’ role in the economy and society, with arguments targeted more towards specific discriminatory policies rather than projecting a coherent ideological structure that would emphasise the Jews’ radical Otherness. The antisemites were sensitive to and keen on highlighting the differences between the various Jewish communities in the country, and the gen-

9 Carol Iancu, *Jews in Romania 1866-1918: From Exclusion to Emancipation*, New York 1996, 25, 39.

10 Constituțiune, in: *Monitorul Oficial*, 1 June 1866.

11 The naturalisation was to be carried out individually rather than collectively (with the exception of the Jewish war veterans), following an extremely complicated procedure – eventually, each individual case of naturalisation had to be approved by Parliament with a two thirds majority of the vote. Royal Decree Law no. 2186/1879, *Monitorul Oficial*, 25 October 1879; see also Constantin Iordachi, *The Unyielding Boundaries of Citizenship: The Emancipation of ‘Non-Citizens’ in Romania, 1866–1918*, in: *European Review of History* 8 (2001), 157-86.

12 Stephen Fischer-Galați, *The Legacy of Anti-Semitism*, in: Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, New York 1994, 1-28 (9).

13 See Jacob Katz, *The Identity of Post Emancipatory Hungarian Jewry*, in: Don Yehuda and Victor Karady (ed.), *A Social and Economic History of Central European Jewry*, New Brunswick/London 1990, 13-31 (22-3).

eral approach to the 'Jewish issue' was a paternalistic one, focusing on their 'usefulness' to the Romanian state, a feature that led William Oldson to speak of "a providential antisemitism".¹⁴ At the same time, however, antisemitism in Romania was widespread before World War I, hardly moderate (although it appears as such when compared to the inter-war period), and it acquired considerable 'prestige' due to the fact it was espoused by some of the most prominent politicians and intellectuals in the country. In addition, antisemitic discourse simultaneously fed into and received confirmation from the legal discrimination that the Jews in Romania were subject to: between 1879 and 1913, more than two hundred laws and decrees with a discriminatory, anti-Jewish character were passed.¹⁵ To sum up, Romanian antisemitism appears to belong to neither category in the often invoked distinction between an 'Eastern' and a 'Western' type of antisemitism: it was supported by and developing against a background of non-emancipation as in Russia, yet at the same time it had a political, elite-driven character and displayed much less popular hostility or cases of violent attacks on the Jewish population as well as lacking that "ideological and abstract" quality that William Hagen associates with German antisemitism.¹⁶ The situation would change significantly after World War I.

The Interwar Period: The Radicalisation of Antisemitism and the Rise of Fascism

Greater Romania, as the inter-war state came to be known, was a clear victor of World War I. Both its territory and population doubled, and the borders of the enlarged state would have fulfilled even the wildest aspirations of Romanian nationalists. In spite of the initial crippling defeat of the Romanian army, the ensuing German occupation of most of the country and the humiliating peace accord signed with Germany in May 1918 (the symbolic effects of which could be compared to those of the Italian defeat at Caporetto) and the enormous human and material losses resulting from the war, the final outcome was nothing short of a complete victory for the Romanian state, and could not have been interpreted otherwise.¹⁷ As such, structural interpretations that account for the rise of fascism by relating it to the effects of a disastrous defeat in the war (in the case of Germany) or of a 'mutilated victory' leaving nationalist aspirations unfulfilled (in the case of Italy) cannot account for the Romanian case. In Romania, the third-largest fascist movement in Europe

14 William A. Oldson, *A Providential Anti-Semitism. Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth Century Romania*, Philadelphia 1991, esp. 102-109, 140-152. The argument Oldson makes is that remnants of this paternalistic approach to Romanian Jews led the Antonescu regime to discriminate between the 'foreign' Jews who constituted the bulk of the victims of the Holocaust in Romania and the Romanian Jews who the general consistently refused to deport in spite of Hitler's insistence. This resulted in a much higher rate of survival among the Jewish community in Romania than in neighbouring countries. For a more comprehensive argument incorporating this view but outlining the other motives for Antonescu's refusal to deport the Jews, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania 1940-1944*, Basingstoke 2006.

15 Carol Iancu, *Emanciparea evreilor din România (1913-1919)*, București 1998, 37.

16 Hagen, *Before the 'Final Solution'*, 360. While Ezra Mendelsohn's assessment that "prewar Romania had a well-deserved reputation for being, along with Russia, the most antisemitic country in Europe" is backed up by considerable evidence, his identification of a "tradition of violent popular antisemitism" in the Old Kingdom of Romania is much more difficult to support. See Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Bloomington 1987, 174, 175; for a refutation of the latter argument, see Raul Cârstocea, *Students Don the Green Shirt: The Roots of Romanian Fascism in the Antisemitic Student Movements of the 1920s*, in: *Alma Mater Antisemitica: Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, Vienna 2016; forthcoming.

17 For a brief overview of Romania's involvement in World War I and at the Paris Peace Conference, see Keith Hitchins, *Romania: 1866-1947*, Oxford 1994, 262-291.

emerged in a victorious country, one that was completely satisfied with the international status quo and did not contemplate any revisionist or expansionist plans.

However, the provinces that Romania acquired at the end of World War I were far from being as ethnically homogeneous as the Old Kingdom of Romania had been, and they bordered on revisionist countries that contested the new international order. Furthermore, these regions former ruling elites had been made up of significant minorities who were understandably loyal to the aforementioned revisionist neighbours. Where the Romanian state internationally positioned itself as a peace-loving firm defender of the status quo, it simultaneously embarked on aggressive domestic politics of internal colonisation with the purpose of strengthening national homogeneity, using the promotion of national culture as its main vector.¹⁸ One of the effects of this nationalist project was the unprecedented expansion of the higher education system, with fateful consequences for the development of native fascism.

In a country where a 'native' left was virtually non-existent but where the threat of socialist revolution loomed large as a result of the revisionist intentions of the neighbouring Soviet Union and, briefly, Hungary, a plethora of right-wing parties and organisations vied with each other over the nation-building project. Furthermore, the country's extensive antisemitic legacy meant that the 'Jewish issue' was always at the foreground of political programs. This was exacerbated by the belated emancipation of the Jews in Romania, which was ironically enough first decreed under the wartime German occupation and eventually enshrined in the new Constitution of 1923.¹⁹ The first political party with an explicitly antisemitic platform, the Nationalist-Democratic Party established by Nicolae Iorga and Alexandru C. Cuza in 1910, had remained a fringe political formation before the war, an unfortunate import, as its very name suggests by emulating the Polish *Endeks*. The new political organisation established by Cuza in the wake of the vote on the new constitution, however, the League of National Christian Defence, epitomised the new developments characteristic of inter-war politics. No longer limiting its antisemitism to parliamentary action, the new organisation (purposely avoiding its identification as yet another 'party') was from the outset involved in acts of antisemitic violence. Its youth organisation, which largely consisted of students, was involved in organised beatings, burnings of left-wing publications, large-scale destruction of Jewish property and even murders.²⁰ The League, heavily inspired by the Fascist takeover in Italy (which had prompted the emergence of countless other minute radical groups in Romania as self-styled imitators of Italian Fascism), did, however, stop short of becoming a fully-fledged fascist organisation and remained committed to parliamentary democracy throughout the inter-war period even while borrowing extensively from the arsenal of fascist practices and symbols (a common feature among conservative authoritarian and radical right organisations in inter-war Europe).²¹ The League's youth organisation, led by the student leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, was its most radical section and already notorious as an "electoral bully".²² Out of this section, a

18 For an excellent analysis of this process, see Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation-Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*, Ithaca 1995.

19 See Cârstocea, *Students Don the Green Shirt*.

20 E.g. ANRM, Fund DGP, File 103/1933, 225; CNSAS, Fund P, File 13207, Vol. 2, 317; *Excesele de la Cluj*, in: *Aurora*, 2.12.1922; *Acțiunea studenților naționaliști*, in: *Lumea*, 9.12.1922; Constantin Mille, *Fascismul român*, in: *Pressa*, 14.6.1923; *Antisemitism și terorism*, in: *Viitorul*, 7.11.1924.

21 For the distinction between these three 'faces of authoritarian nationalism', see Payne, *A History of Fascism*, esp. 14–19. I follow the established practice of capitalising 'Fascism' when referring to the Italian party / regime, and using lower-case 'fascism' when referring to the generic phenomenon.

22 *Teroarea haimanalelor din Iași*, in: *Aurora*, 21.5.1922.

splinter group of five students who had been involved in an assassination plot detected in 1927 to establish the Legion of the Archangel Michael, Romania's fascist movement.

It was, more than any previous or contemporary antisemitic political organizations in the country, the Legion that introduced to Romanian antisemitism the ideological, abstract counterpart of the NSDAP's projection of the 'Jew' as archenemy. Marking a complete break with pre-war antisemitism, the legionary movement put forth a composite antisemitic discourse making up an image of ultimate evil, displacing all the economic, social and cultural problems confronting Romania (and Europe) into one comprehensive enemy image. This condensed representation of the 'Jew', ever more abstract and remote from the reality of the Jewish communities in the country, was made responsible for the discrepancy between the glorious dream of the nationalists about Greater Romania and the multiple failures of inter-war Romanian reality to correspond to that ideal. While the scope of this article is too limited to elaborate on the diverse associations that made the representation of the 'Jew' into the ideological articulation of an archenemy of an equally imaginary 'Romanian',²³ a brief summary of these associations provides a clear idea of their comprehensive nature: In legionary discourse, the Jews were made responsible for Marxism, communism, democracy, liberalism, individualism, corruption, poverty, alcoholism, social inequality, cultural backwardness, immorality, atheism, rationalism, cosmopolitanism, pacifism, militarism, and even ecological issues.²⁴ Where pre-war antisemites had drawn attention to the differences between Jewish communities in the country, a diversity that had become even more poignant after World War I (Ezra Mendelsohn identified "at least five distinct Jewries" in inter-war Romania),²⁵ Codreanu saw no differences at all between the Jews either within the country or even throughout the world: "between the Jews of Tirgu-Cucului and the ones in Strasbourg I did not find any distinction: the same face, the same manners, the same jargon, the same satanic eyes in which you could read and discover, under the courteous look, the desire to rob you".²⁶ In Codreanu's formulation above, one can easily grasp the power of prejudice to discard reality altogether: as in Slavoj Žižek's paradigmatic example of the 'Jewish neighbour' whose goodwill is viewed by the antisemite as masking his real nature, as yet another example of his duplicity, antisemitism can only be said to be established as an ideology at the point "when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience of reality itself".²⁷

This was certainly the case with legionary antisemitism, and in its centrality within the structure of Romanian fascism it closely resembled Nazi antisemitism.²⁸ Its murderous intentions were never fully and explicitly formulated, as that would have clashed with the alleged 'spiritual' and 'Christian' character of the movement. However, the comprehensiveness and radicalism of the legionary representation of the 'Jew' leaves no doubt that any envisaged 'solution' would have had to be much more radical than the mere reversal of Jewish emancipation, the expressed objective of all the other antisemites, including Cuza and other members of his political organisations, the League of National Christian Defence and later National Christian Party,

23 I have dealt with this issue extensively elsewhere: Raul Cârstocea, *The Role of Anti-Semitism in the Ideology of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (1927–1938)*, (PhD thesis, University College London, 2011).

24 *Ibid.*, 152–188.

25 Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, 173.

26 Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, Sibiu 1936, 267.

27 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London 1989, 49.

28 Aristotle Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe*, New York 2009, 120.

who were bitter rivals of the legionary movement. However, even if one can glimpse the 'eliminationist drive', as Aristotle Kallis has called it, in various veiled or even reversed formulations (e.g., repeated references to the alleged extermination of Romanians by the Jews),²⁹ there is also no doubt that legionary antisemitism differed from that of the NSDAP in its focus on cultural-religious aspects rather than race. Contrary to the arguments put forth by such reputed scholars of antisemitism and fascism as Radu Ioanid,³⁰ and not contesting the fact that some legionaries were indeed racists, I argue that they were marginal figures in the Legion, and that the main ideologues of the movement, as well as a number of prominent intellectuals associated with it often made it explicitly clear that they opposed racism on grounds of its fundamental opposition to Christian doctrine.³¹

In the spiritual character of the movement, legionaries saw not only their distinction from, but also their alleged superiority over both Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Codreanu made this explicit in a statement at his 1938 trial, where he proclaimed "the superiority of the legionary idea over Fascism and National-Socialism", a superiority he believed was grounded in the primacy of the spiritual element in legionary doctrine.³² The fact that this 'primacy of the spiritual' that is constantly reaffirmed in programmatic texts authored by Codreanu and his second-in-command, Ion I. Moța, was no mere propaganda tool but indicative of genuine religious fervour is not only demonstrated by the attested religiosity (albeit heretical in its clear violation of many Christian precepts) of the legionary leadership, but also by the I-criterion for membership in the movement. Unlike the explicitly racist League of National Christian Defence, which stipulated in its statutes that "only Romanians by blood" were accepted in the party,³³ the criterion for membership in the legionary movement was "unlimited faith"; "faith in God" was the first item listed as a legionary principle.³⁴ Members of national minorities were welcome to the movement, and the Macedonian section of the Legion was famous for its fanaticism. Most importantly, baptised Jews were also accepted in a movement that was otherwise as antisemitic as the German Nazis were, and some Jews, like the legionary commander and head of the Arad County chapter of the movement Vasile Noveanu, were even part of its leadership, indicating clearly that the exclusionary drive of the legionary movement was prompted by religion rather than race.³⁵

The paramount importance of religion in legionary ideology cannot be overstated, just as that of its virulent antisemitism, for it constituted the meeting ground with the self-proclaimed 'new generation' of Romanian intellectuals who in turn were pivotal in conferring an aura of intellectual legitimacy and respectability to a movement that had been a fringe group in the first years of its existence, and might well have remained so were it not for the credibility it acquired as a result of the intellectu-

29 Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Cuvântare la mesaj*, Câmpulung-Muscel, 6; Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 18, 103, 169, 345, 467, 472.

30 Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel. Fascist Ideology in Romania*. Translated by Peter Heinegg Boulder/New York 1990; Radu Ioanid, *The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard*, in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004): 419-53. Despite his identification of the legionary movement as racist, Ioanid notes, however, that "Legionary mysticism took on an Orthodox shading, not a pagan one, as in the case of Nazism" and that "the Legionary movement is one of the rare modern European political movements with a religious structure" (435).

31 See e.g. Ion I. Moța, *Correspondența cu Welt-Dienst*, München 2000, 75-6; Ernest Bernea, *Hitlerismul noului tineret*, in: *Rânduiala I* (1935), 480-481.

32 CNSAS, Fund P, File 11784, Vol. 6, 152-153.

33 ANIC, Fund DGP, File 108/1929, 10.

34 Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 295, 302.

35 Cârstocea, *The Role of Anti-Semitism*, 216, 281.

als' support. As Eugen Weber has shown in one of the earliest articles dealing with the legionary movement, antisemitism by itself cannot account for the popularity of the movement: the equally antisemitic League of National Christian Defence and National Christian Party stagnated during the 1930s, "while Codreanu's movement grew sixfold" between 1932 and 1937.³⁶ Where "Cuza's anti-Semitic party could not spread beyond the borders of the region where anti-Semitism answered local problems and realities",³⁷ the abstract, ideological antisemitism put forth by the legionary movement, which was completely indifferent towards real Jews, spread its appeal even to areas with an insignificant or even non-existent Jewish presence. Moreover, as Weber himself noted at a time when such statements went against the dominant Marxist consensus that saw fascism as a reactionary ideology of the bourgeoisie, "the Legion was a popular and populist movement, with a programme which the masses (in the Romanian context of peasants and workers) recognised as radical enough for them, and which the representatives of the established order, from Cuza to the King, recognised as revolutionary".³⁸

Where the representatives of the established order saw in the revolutionary impetus of legionary ideology a threat to the establishment, the intellectuals who joined the legionary cause saw in it a reflection of their own cultural revolution on the political plane. The most significant intellectual debate in inter-war Romania, dubbed the *Great Debate* by Keith Hitchins, author of the most authoritative history of modern Romania, was the one between the 'Europeanists', as they were known, who saw the development of the country in a European framework and argued for the accelerated adoption of the Western developmental model, politically liberal democratic and socio-economically urban-industrial, on the one hand, and on the other the 'traditionalists', who emphasised the country's agrarian character and argued for a model of development that would take into account its specificity.³⁹ Arguing against both these positions, the former denounced as a foreign import and the latter as an antiquated glorification of the past, the 'new generation' of young intellectuals put forth an alternative vision of modernisation, by focussing on national specificity and adopting to some extent the religious drive of the 'traditionalists' (albeit redefined as an existentialist mysticism that deviated significantly from the Orthodox canon) and at the same time calling for a synchronic alignment with contemporary European cultural trends.⁴⁰ The 'European model' envisaged by them, however, was not that of the Western liberal democracies, themselves seen as antiquated, but rather of the new 'national revolutions', more specifically the ones in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.⁴¹

This orientation led them directly into the Romanian fascist camp, their own support for the legionary movement conferring on its discourse a degree of sophistication that its own initial propagandists had most certainly lacked. Where some of them (Mircea Eliade and Constantin Noica being notable examples) had initially refrained from supporting the organisation precisely because of its violent antisemitism, it was the vision of a spiritual revolution put forth by the movement, coupled with increasing disappointment with the failure of the democratic parties in inter-

36 Eugen Weber, *The Men of the Archangel*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966), 101-126 (117).

37 *Ibid.*, 116.

38 *Ibid.*, 118.

39 Hitchins, *Romania*, 292-334.

40 See Keith Hitchins, *Orthodoxism: Polemics over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania*, in: Ivo Banac/Katherine Verdery (ed.), *National Character and National Ideology*, 135-157.

41 For arguments along these lines, see e.g. Emil Cioran, *Conștiința politică a studențimii*, in: *Vreemea*, 15.

war Romania, that explains their eventual conversion to legionary ideology. Once this conversion had occurred, the young Romanian intellectuals' antisemitic statements were no less virulent and aggressive than the general tone of legionary discourse, only lending it more credence.⁴² Furthermore, the Romanian intellectuals' allegiance to the native manifestation of fascism was by no means limited to a few isolated cases, but was rather a mass phenomenon: As Marta Petreu argued in a recent study, by the end of the 1930s, the list of young intellectuals who *were not* legionary sympathisers or members was far shorter than that of those who were.⁴³ As a consequence of their conversion, as Roger Griffin showed in the case of Italy, the intellectuals "were able to project their own schemes for the nation's renewal onto Fascism, ensuring that new currents of palingenetic myth [...] intensified the momentum of the movement".⁴⁴

Conclusion

Thus, the support of the so-called 'new generation' of Romanian intellectuals for the legionary movement made it possible for a veritable antisemitic consensus to develop in inter-war Romania. Once it had been re-established as in the period before World War I, but in much more radical form, inter-war antisemitism reproduced a pattern familiar from the history of 19th century Romania, eventually feeding into a state policy of legal discrimination, culminating in a revision of citizenship decreed by the Cuza-Goga government in 1938 that effectively deprived almost a third of Romanian Jews of their citizenship.⁴⁵ At the same time, the proliferation of antisemitic discourse and the 'respectability' it gained as a result of its promotion by prestigious intellectuals and politicians helped desensitise the Romanian public to the plight of Jews in Romania, paving the way to the wave of pogroms that ensued during the brief legionary dictatorship of September 1940-January 1941, and eventually to the extermination policies of Ion Antonescu's dictatorship.

Albeit not directly involved in the wartime Holocaust in Romania, which was perpetrated by the Antonescu regime, the legionary movement is nevertheless directly responsible for promoting an antisemitic discourse that was much more extreme than that of all its predecessors and contemporaries, advocating a radical exclusion with genocidal overtones. As ideological and abstract as its Nazi counterpart, completely oblivious to the reality of Jewish communities in Romania and putting forth instead a comprehensive representation of an archenemy, an imaginary construction that was however all too unfortunately real in its consequences, legionary antisemitism posited religion rather than race as the fundamental ground for the exclusion of the Jews, in line with the ideology of a movement that presented itself as

42 E.g. Eliade, *De ce cred*; Constantin Noica, *Între parazitul din afară și parazitul dinăuntru*, in: *Vreamea*, 30.1.1938. One can compare these statements with Eliade's earlier denunciations of the antisemitic nationalism of Nichifor Crainic or his condemnation of both communism and Nazism as "dictatorships of the brute, the imbecile, the incompetent – in Russia as in Germany". See e.g. Mircea Eliade, *Cretinism*, in: *Cuvântul*, 25.11.1932; Ion Plăeșu (Mircea Eliade), *Contra dreptei și contra stângii*, in: *Credința*, 14.2.1934; Mircea Eliade, *Noul barbar*, in: *Vreamea*, 27.1.1935.

43 Marta Petreu, *Diavolul și ucenicul său*. Nae Ionescu-Mihail Sebastian, Iași 2009, 248.

44 Roger Griffin, 'I am no longer human. I am a Titan. A god!' The fascist quest to regenerate time, in: Matthew Feldman (ed.), *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin*, Basingstoke 2008, 3-23 (8).

45 International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report*, 41. For an overview of the antisemitic legislation passed by the Cuza-Goga government, see Paul Shapiro, *Prelude to Dictatorship in Romania. The National Christian Party in Power, December 1937–February 1938*, in: *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 8 (1974), 45-88.

‘spiritual’ and ‘Christian’. Differing markedly from pre-modern notions of anti-Jewish religious-based prejudice, legionary antisemitism fit within the pattern of the religious politics the movement upheld, similar in some respects but different in others (especially in that religion *was not* made subordinate to politics in legionary ideology) from the secular, political religion that the Fascist regime in Italy promoted.⁴⁶ Yet both before and during its time in power, the legionary exclusion based on religion proved equally violent and murderous as the one based on race. As such, the evidence from the Romanian case study could be employed to nuance and even challenge hard and fast distinctions between alleged ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ types of antisemitism or conclusions that would see only racist antisemitism as genocidal. In that, the conclusions to be drawn from this brief summary of my research would point instead towards an understanding of antisemitism as reflecting “innermost fears and fracture lines” in the host society, while at the same time constructing an imaginary, abstract, dehumanised representation of the ‘Jew’ as an “essential Other”, permanently threatened with “expulsion, not from society, but from humanity”.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Emilio Gentile, Fascism as Political Religion, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990), 229-251; Political Religion: A Concept and its Critics – A Critical Survey, in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6 (2005), 19-32

⁴⁷ Henri Zukier, The Essential ‘Other’ and the Jew: From Antisemitism to Genocide, in: *Social Research* 63 (1996), 1110-54, 1119 and 1143.

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