

Women and Politics in the Romanian Legionary Movement

Anca Diana Axinia

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilisation
of the European University Institute

Florence, 13 January 2022

European University Institute
Department of History and Civilisation

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6 October 2021

a Claudia e Patrizia,
le professoresse che hanno cambiato la mia vita

Abstract

This thesis examines women's participation in the Legionary Movement or Iron Guard, a far-right, anti-Semitic movement active in interwar Romania. Over four chapters, I analyze how the participation of women changed over time, the different forms this participation took, and how these different forms shaped and redefined political relations within the movement.

The first chapter focuses on women's participation in the student activism that characterized Romanian universities throughout the interwar period. University politics played a major role in the origins, development, and self-image of the Legionary Movement. The chapter follows the evolution of the movement's use of university politics through the lens of increasing female participation. The second chapter is entirely devoted to the exploration of family relations in the Legionary Movement's ideology and experience. In the third chapter, I analyze the open support or sympathy for the Legionary Movement held among the intellectual elites of Bucharest, the aristocracy, and, finally, among some feminist circles. Gender and class dynamics are inseparable in the analysis of the political beliefs and activity of the women protagonists of this chapter, whose support of or sympathy for the Legion complicates the notion of membership and opens different perspectives on the intersection of gender and class within the movement. Finally, the fourth chapter explores the adoption and adaptation by some legionary women and, especially, by the more formal feminine section, of violence as a form of political action.

What emerges from this study is the experimental nature of women's participation, the constant redefinition of its forms and limits. Moving in an ideological framework designed for them by men, women found their space(s) of agency at the interplay of discourse and practice, through the opportunities for political action offered by the complexity of lived experience.

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Abbreviations

Organizations

ASC	Asociația Studenților Creștini (the Christian Students' Association)
CML	Corpul Muncitoresc Legionar (the Legionary Workers Corp)
LANC	Liga Apărării Național Creștine (the National Christian Defense League)
UNSCR	Uniunea Națională a Studenților Creștini din România (the National Union of Christian Students of Romania)
SONFR	Societatea Ortodoxă Națională a Femeilor Române (National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women)
CNFR	Consiliul Național al Femeilor Române (National Council of Romanian Women)

Archives

AN	Romanian National Archives – County Branches
ANIC	National Historical Archives of Romania, Bucharest
DGP	Direcția Generală a Poliției
IGP	Inspectoratul General de Poliție
MI-D	Ministerul de Interne – Diverse

Introduction

Several histories of the Legionary Movement have already been written.¹ In June 1927, five young men, led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael in the city of Iași.² The founders of the movement were all former members of the National - Christian Defense League (Liga Apărării Național - Creștine – LANC), an ultranationalist, anti-Semitic political party founded in 1923. The young founders of the Legion started their political activity in the turmoil of the violent student protests that had spread throughout Romanian universities in the early 1920s. These riots, characterized by strong nationalist and anti-Semitic feelings, were centered around the requests for a *numerus clausus* of Jewish students and general improvement to the universities' infrastructural conditions. The protests reached their peak in December 1922, but a general atmosphere of unrest lasted for several years in the university centers of the country.³

In spring 1927, a series of ideological and strategic conflicts within the LANC led Codreanu and some of his followers to leave the party and found a new movement. The two distinctive feelings that had characterized the protests, strong nationalism and virulent anti-Semitism, were incorporated into the Legion's ideal of a different and stronger Romanian nation, free from political corruption and the "threat" supposedly represented by Jews and other minorities to the economic and social development of the "authentic" Romanian

¹ Among the works on the Legionary Movement to date, the most extensively used in this dissertation comprise: Armin Heinen, *Die Legion "Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien: soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1986) (my references are from the Romanian edition, *Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail". Mișcare socială și organizație politică. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998); Traian Sandu, *Un fascism roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer* (Paris: Perrin, 2014); Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the "Archangel Michael" in Inter-war Romania* (Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004); Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2015); Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017). For a discussion of several works on the Legionary Movement published before 1989 see Traian Sandu, *Introduction. La question fasciste en Europe centre-orientale: l'entre déchirement des droites*, in Catherine Horel, Traian Sandu, Fritz Taubert (eds.), *La périphérie du fascisme. Spécification d'un modèle fasciste au sein de sociétés agraires. Le cas de l'Europe centrale entre les deux guerres* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2005), pp. 7-28.

² The use of the name "Legionary Movement" instead of "Iron Guard" has become increasingly prevalent in the most recent literature. However, the designation "Iron Guard", as well as "the Legion" (implicitly referring to the movement's first name, "the Legion of the Archangel Michael"), are still used interchangeably by scholars in the field. The different names were originally related to different periods of the movement's political life, but they tended to be conflated and used indistinctly from the second half of the 1930s.

³ See Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 245-296.

population. Opposition against the political system and attempts to destabilize it through extra-legal and violent actions became a distinctive feature of the Legionary Movement. While nationalism and anti-Semitism were feelings shared by the entire interwar political spectrum, with very few exceptions, the Legion's position against the established authorities represented a "revolutionary" and innovative stance.

The novelty represented by the Iron Guard in the Romanian interwar political landscape is exemplified by the use of new means of propaganda. The diffusion of the movement was related to a wide range of communication strategies, which presented a combination of different features. Firstly, the legionary members were often used as tools of propaganda themselves owing to their physical appearance. They made their affiliation visible by using uniforms, in their case green shirts, or other distinctive pieces of clothing, among which a special role was played by traditional costumes. Secondly, the most common and highly valued means of spreading the legionary ideology was through personal relationships. These included primarily ties between family members and friends but also extended to the networks established among peasant communities, urban neighborhoods, and artisans, students, and various kinds of associations. Lastly, the Legion made extensive use of the press. At the point of maximum growth in the mid-1930s, the Legion relied on a certain number of newspapers that sustained the movement and contributed to its expansion at both local and national levels.

The steady growth of the Legionary Movement during the 1930s culminated in the results of the December 1937 national elections, when the Legion's political party "Everything for the Country" was confirmed as the third largest political force in Romania. This result is considered as one of the most remarkable political events of the Romanian interwar years. Indeed, the path of the movement towards its electoral success is intertwined with the general context of this period. The creation of Greater Romania after the First World War started a process of nation-building which often took aggressive forms. In the newly acquired territories of Transylvania, Bukovina, Bessarabia and the Banat, the state tried to impose a widely resisted cultural homogenization and fostered a gradual replacement of local bureaucratic cadres and professional categories with ethnic Romanians.

For these reasons, the authorities held ambiguous positions with regards to the Legionary Movement; while they supported the movement's strong nationalism and anti-Semitism, they also tried to control its violence and redirect it towards their own purposes. Moreover, the democratic system was internally vitiated by chronic party conflicts, corruption and clientelism. This situation gradually worsened from 1930 onwards. The newly

coronated King Carol II cultivated authoritarian ambitions and contributed to the weakness of the parliamentary system by exacerbating party divisions and factionalism. The Legionary Movement benefited enormously from the general atmosphere of fervent nationalism and from the ambiguous reactions of the authorities to its actions. The accommodating position of the state was reflected by the acquittals or light sentences given against legionary members, even in some trials for political assassinations.

This climate of impunity offered the movement an excellent opportunity to capitalize on the impact of its violent actions and to gain political legitimacy. In the end, facilitated by these contextual elements, the movement managed to attract a wide range of followers across the entire country, from intellectuals and steel workers in Bucharest to peasants in remote areas and Romanian university students in Transylvania and Bukovina. The surprising results of the 1937 elections and the increasing opposition of the Legionary Movement to the authorities transformed the previous ambiguities into open confrontation. The king, supported by the interior ministry and the police, started a gradual but relentless repression of the movement, through *ad hoc* legislation, mass arrests and assassinations. During the following years, most of the Legion's important figures were killed or imprisoned, including its leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and other prominent members. In September 1940, with the backing of Nazi Germany, the Legion came to power alongside General Ion Antonescu. At that stage, however, it was already divided by internal conflicts and completely unprepared to govern. After four months of chaotic and murderous activity, the Legionary Movement was definitively outlawed in January of 1941, at which point its leadership fled into exile and Romania became a military dictatorship.⁴

In this dissertation, I will tell another history of the Legionary Movement, one still unwritten, a history of women's participation and gender relations within the movement. When I started my research, the knowledge I had on this subject was made up of scattered and episodic pieces of information.⁵ I knew that one of the most "innovative" aspects of the Legionary Movement was the presence of an active and organized feminine section. The Legion's rhetoric, tinged with militarism and violence, was certainly more appealing to men

⁴ On Ion Antonescu and the military dictatorship, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For an account of the so-called "legionary rebellion" of January 1941, see pp. 52-68.

⁵ For a brief account of women's participation and gender relations in the Legion, see Maria Bucur, *Romania*, in Kevin Passmore (ed.), *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 57-78. However, since the early 2000s, the more recent monographs on the Legionary Movement, though not engaged in a systematic analysis, have nevertheless significantly expanded the knowledge on women and gender in the Legionary Movement; and they have opened, as we shall see, new avenues of research and have inspired deeper and more nuanced inquiries.

and in fact its membership was overwhelmingly male. Nevertheless, the movement was open to female membership and recognized the importance of attracting women and including them in its activities. The feminine section was structured in small organizational units called “fortresses”, composed of a maximum of thirteen members. Each “fortress” had its own leader and, following a pseudo-military hierarchical order, each of the fortress leaders were under the rule of a national “chief commander”, the rank held in the mid-1930s by Nicoleta Nicolescu.

The creation of a feminine section, however, did not imply the physical separation of men and women, who often shared the same associative spaces and participated together in various activities. The tasks performed by the women of the feminine section mostly included so-called “traditional” feminine work, such as cleaning, cooking, sewing and childcare. However, women also engaged in more overtly “political” actions, such as distributing copies of legionary newspapers, raising money for the movement, and running legionary canteens. More rarely, some women wore uniforms and took part in paramilitary training and action.

In the course of my research, many of my questions sprang from pieces of information I gathered about women’s participation and gender relations contained in the histories of the Legionary Movement. In Armin Heinen’s account, I read that in a certain region women made up only 8% of the Legion’s membership. In addition, two of the three “fortresses” active in that region were composed exclusively of unmarried women.⁶ Many research questions emerged from these two brief lines: what did it mean for a woman to be a party member? Was membership different along gender lines? Is it possible that other women took part in the movement’s activities in a more informal fashion? And, additionally, what role did marital status play in shaping feminine participation? Was it possible for unmarried women to engage more freely in political activity? Was marriage expected from legionary women? And, if the answer was yes, were they expected to marry other legionary members?

In Traian Sandu’s history of the Legion, I found a much more detailed description of women’s presence in the movement. In an extraordinary statement, he suggested that the Legion attempted to build a “parallel civil society”, based on the creation of “legionary families” and their cohabitation in legionary houses and, for shorter periods, at the various work camps established by the movement throughout the country.⁷ This statement and the few pages of analysis that follow it triggered more research questions, and as a result I

⁶ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea “Arhanghelul Mihail”*, p. 360.

⁷ Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain*, p. 277.

devoted an entire chapter of this dissertation to an analysis of family relations, of their conceptualization in legionary ideology and their lived experience. Overall, the descriptions, the suggestions and the hints surrounding women's presence and actions in the movement, all inspired questions, reactions, and ideas. These questions guided my research through unexplored paths and led me to interrogate the sources for insights that have not yet been unveiled.

I collected most of the archival material used in this dissertation at the National Archives of Romania, mainly in Bucharest, but also at the local branches in Iași and Cluj-Napoca. My research has covered only a relatively small portion of an enormous number of files, produced by the police and the Ministry of the Interior throughout the interwar period. The indices rarely contain explicit references to women's participation, thus I had to read carefully through all the files on the Legionary Movement I was able to consult. Sometimes, I chose the files by following hints contained in the indices, such as well-known events in the history of the movement, specific years or months marked by interesting developments, names, geographical locations, and other such intuitions. Other times I picked random files, and in certain cases I followed the chronological order of the indices. In the end, the combination of all these methods has produced an incredibly rich and fruitful collection of archival material.

A second, crucial set of primary sources was collected at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest. My research experience there has been invaluable, even if, again, I could only scratch the surface of the library's collection of interwar press, books, and photographs. The main focus of my research at this library was on newspapers and magazines. Some of them were directly affiliated to or published by the Legionary Movement, while others were (more or less) openly sympathetic toward it. Most of this press was based in Bucharest, but I also consulted newspapers and magazines from Transylvania and Moldavia, and, when it was possible, I tried to include publications from smaller towns. Not all of this material has found its way into the dissertation, but it has helped me to become more familiar with the context in which this history is set. Indeed, intricate detail of the period can be gleaned from many sources, whether from the apparently "marginal" information about movies screened in Bucharest theaters in the 1930s, or from advertisements and opinions on heated debates of the time such as those surrounding women's suffrage or the living conditions of the rural population. All of this information opened windows for me, not only on life in the interwar period, but also on how life was

presented on a newspaper's page (in this case, of mostly conservative, right-wing, or far-right newspapers).

The main thread running through my analysis of women's participation and gender relations in the Legionary Movement is *politics*. What counted as political action in the movement and in the broader context? How did the concept of politics change over the Legion's many years of activity, if it did change at all? Was politics gendered and if so, how? How was political activity conceptualized and practiced by men and women? How did women's involvement modify, enrich, and expand the category of politics? All these questions guided my research and my analysis of the sources. As it will be clearly visible in each chapter, my analyses are shaped by and benefitted enormously from a wide range of literature, ranging from feminist theory and studies on gender and fascism, to intellectual history.

Among all the literature I relied upon in my work, the most recurrently quoted and, perhaps, my main source of inspiration, is the work of Carole Pateman on the relationship of women to Western political thought and political systems.⁸ The philosophical exclusion of women from the realm of politics and, conversely, their centrality for the sustenance and reproduction of political systems are themes that become central to my reading of women's participation in the Legionary Movement. This phenomenon of simultaneous exclusion and centrality has helped me to overcome the trite concept of "contradiction" in relation to women's roles and to their clumsy (to use a euphemism) integration into ideologies and practices designed by men for men.

The concept of "disorder", used by Pateman (and borrowed from Rousseau) is, in my opinion, a much more productive metaphor of the ideas and opinions surrounding women's political roles, and, to some extent, women's very existence as individuals and as subjects.⁹ Through a re-reading of social contract theories, from Rousseau to Freud, Pateman retraces the historical development of the belief that women are "a permanently subversive force within the political order".¹⁰ While "civilization" is the work of men, women, because of their "nature", are tied in a net of biology and affection. Their realm is not the conventional

⁸ The main works by Carole Pateman extensively used in this dissertation are: Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); and Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988). See also, Terrell Carver, Samuel A. Chambers (eds.), *Carole Pateman. Democracy, Feminism, Welfare* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁹ The expression "the disorder of women" is taken from Rousseau's *Politics and the Arts: A Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758): "never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women", quoted in Carole Pateman, "'The disorder of women': Women, Love, and the Sense of Justice", *Ethics*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Oct., 1980), pp. 20-34, p. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

world of politics consented upon by free individuals (i.e., men), but the supposedly apolitical or pre-political realm of the family. As Pateman shows, in these political theorizations, women, and what they are thought to represent (nature, private interest, love, sexual passion), pose a constant threat to the political order based on convention, justice, and the preservation of public good.¹¹

These tensions, between the “public” and the “private”, “nature” and “culture”, “love” and “justice”, are impossible to overcome without a different conceptualization of the relationships between men, women, and politics. In my analysis, I read through the lens of “disorder” the political participation of women in the Legionary Movement as it emerges from discourse, practices, and the space between the two. As we shall see, the presence of women was a “question”, an issue that required constant ideological conceptualization, negotiation, redefinition. The perception of this “disorderly” presence is reflected not only by the discrepancies between ideological statements and their translation into practice; but, also, by the ideological statements themselves, which envisaged for women multiple and seemingly “conflicting” roles. In the discrepancies, gaps, and interstices created by the “disorder” lies, however, a space for women’s political agency. The analysis of this space of action, and of its limits, constitutes the backbone of my research.

This history of the Legionary Movement simultaneously overlaps with and diverges from those already written on this subject. A gender analysis often “suggests alternative chronologies to conventional periodisation”, while in other cases it opens different windows onto the events, even when the conventional periodization is maintained.¹² These two approaches are both present throughout the dissertation, for the “general” history of the Legionary Movement is often recounted in its chronological development, while on other occasions it is not. Events and aspects considered to be of “minor” impact may acquire a far greater importance for the understanding of gender relations and women’s political activity. Conversely, some central events in the Legion’s history, such as the assassination of prime minister Ion G. Duca in December 1933 or the legionary rebellion of January 1941 are also widely present throughout the chapters. I consider these “major” events as prismatic because their impact on the movement’s “general” development is also reflected (though not always in straightforward ways) in the Legion’s gender politics and policies.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

¹² Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker, *Gender, change and periodisation*, in Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker (eds.), *Gender and Change: agency, chronology and periodisation* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.6.

The first chapter focuses on women's participation in the student activism that characterized Romanian universities throughout the interwar period. University politics played a major role in the Legion's origins, development, and self-image. In the first half of the chapter, I attempt to analyze the years surrounding the movement's foundation in June 1927 from the perspective of women's involvement in this early student activism. The university of Iași was the setting of this activism, a setting marked by chronic poverty, severe infrastructural deficiencies, and an ever-growing number of students, and, central to this analysis, of women students. In the second half of the chapter, I follow the evolution of the Legionary Movement's use of university politics in the 1930s through the lens of increasing female participation, in particular in Bucharest. While trying to avoid a teleological narrative that links the Legion's origins in student activism to its popularity among university students in the mid-1930s, the chapter shows a more nuanced picture of this success, at times fragile and often fraught with internal (let alone external) conflicts. What emerges powerfully from the analysis of feminine participation is the difficulty for legionary women students to find an independent (from male leadership) space for political action; but, also, their increasing awareness of the difficulties they faced and of the ways to challenge or overcome them.

The second chapter is entirely devoted to the exploration of family relations in the Legionary Movement's ideology and experience. The important role played by kinship, personal relations, and marriages in the movement's social structure has been underlined many times. In this chapter, I analyze the impact of family ties on gender relations and women's participation in the movement in addition to the many important roles played by personal relationships in the legionary world. In my opinion, the ideologies and practices surrounding the concept of family were among the most defining, challenging, and central features of the Legion's political project. Throughout the chapter, I analyze the relationship between marriage and politics, the Legion's awareness of the eminently *political* nature of the so-called divide between private and public, and, finally, the legionary concept of family, with its "revolutionary" traits and their many limits.

In the third chapter, I analyze the open support or sympathy for the Legionary Movement among the intellectual elites of Bucharest, the aristocracy and finally, among some feminist circles. In particular, the exploration of the feelings held toward the Legion by the circle of intellectuals that comprised renowned personas such as Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran inevitably led me into the thorny (and at times sterile) debate on the "depth" or "authenticity" of these feelings. Similarly, the legionary sympathies of women who identified as feminists triggered questions on what feminism meant. Gender and class dynamics are also

inseparable in the analysis of the political beliefs and activity of the women protagonists of this chapter, whose support or sympathy for the Legion complicates the notion of membership and opens different perspectives on the gender and class interactions within the movement.

The fourth and final chapter explores the adoption by some legionary women, in particular, by the more formal feminine section, of violence as a form of political action. This violence, expressed in language, exclusionary practices, and actual physical acts (including assassination) was part of the Legionary Movement's ideology and practice. While this violence was mostly described in masculine terms, the monopoly of violence within the Legion did not always belong exclusively to male members. However, the inclusion of legionary women in the discourse on violence was a difficult endeavor, fraught with contradictions and afterthoughts. The chapter's introduction analyzes the figure of the woman fighter, which the Legion constructed and promoted. While the image of the woman fighter had a more metaphorical sense in legionary discourse, within the feminine section it was sometimes interpreted in more literal ways as well. Finally, in the last sections of the chapter I explore the involvement of some legionary women in the movement's final spiral of violence, from 1938 to 1941, with tragic outcomes.

The main purpose of this dissertation is not only to shed light on an under-researched topic in Romanian and European history and women's history; but, also, to contribute to an understanding of gender and politics as mutually constitutive in a broader sense. I hope this work will be a first step in this direction and that it will trigger more questions on the relationships between gender and politics; and on how women's "disorderly" political participation may change the meaning of what counts as "politics". My aim was to explore and analyze the relations of women and men to the political sphere, and how the relationship between men and women changed through politics. This endeavor, in the end, has led me to even more difficult questions about what politics is, and these questions animate my efforts as a researcher and a feminist.

Feminine Student Activism

Introduction

“In these times, the madness of the world is reflected more obviously than anywhere else in the University”.¹³ With these words Ilie Imbrescu, a priest and a prominent figure of the Legionary Movement, remarked on the sensational and almost baffling role played by Romanian universities in the interwar period. While the priest’s observation dates from 1941, his words retrospectively captured the surprise, the concerns and the interest raised by Romanian universities in politicians, journalists, and observers for more than two decades. What did this “madness of the world” truly consist of? Which elements transformed Romanian universities into great laboratories of social and political upheaval?

Soon after the creation of Greater Romania in the aftermath of the First World War, universities became particularly important places in the process of nation-building. Violent measures of nationalization were taken especially in the former territories of the Habsburg empire, Transylvania and Bukovina. Here, the universities of Cluj and Cernăuți respectively, went through rapid and radical changes, with the imposition of the Romanian language and the replacement of “foreign” professors with ethnic Romanians.¹⁴ The universities of the Old Kingdom, in Iași and Bucharest, registered less spectacular transformations but the early post-war period saw an intensification of students’ complaints concerning the infrastructural conditions of their universities. However, the most visible phenomenon was the exacerbation of the long-term anti-Semitism that characterized the Old Kingdom’s universities, especially in Iași, that had existed in some form or other since their foundation in the second half of the nineteenth century.

These ongoing tensions reached an unprecedented point on December 10, 1922, when several thousands of students from all over the country met in Bucharest and declared a general strike. Their demands were centered around the improvement of students’ living conditions and most importantly, the introduction of the *numerus clausus*, which in principle

¹³ Quoted in Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle*, p. 245.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-231.

was intended for all minorities but targeted most aggressively Jewish students.¹⁵ The student unrest continued for several months, accompanied by a wave of increasing violence toward the Jewish population perpetrated by Romanian students. Local and national authorities reacted in ambiguous ways, by sustaining on the one hand the nationalist *élan* of the students, while on the other hand, trying to mitigate the explosions of violence. Eventually, the situation normalized over the following year, although an atmosphere of unrest persisted throughout the universities until the outbreak of the Second World War.

The great unrest of December 1922 displayed some of the most visible ingredients contributing to the university “madness”. An ever-increasing number of students denounced the chronic infrastructural inefficiencies of the universities; concurrently, they channeled their anger and dissatisfactions towards the most targeted “internal other”, the Jew. However, this picture oversimplifies the entanglement of different motivations, beliefs, backgrounds, and expectations of the students. The interference of professors, ministers, politicians, and the police, are further elements that contributed to the complexity of the picture. While the anniversaries of December 10 marked with precision the rhythm of the most spectacular student protests, other events and activities characterized the universities’ daily lives throughout the years. A proliferation of student associations, organizations, cultural circles, meetings, lectures, gatherings, and talks in the over-crowded dormitories, all contributed to the creation of a highly politicized *milieu*.

The redefinition of what politics meant and the extension of this concept toward social, economic, infrastructural, and even personal issues, was one of the most important processes that characterized the student activism of the interwar years. Triggered by the introduction of universal male suffrage, politics entered young men’s lives in an unprecedented way. Despite limits to the implementation of the democratic ideals stated in the new Constitution of 1923, politics in Greater Romania reached a mass dimension. The students, through their everyday institutional contacts, experienced firsthand this new mass dimension, its limits, and its contradictory and sometimes chaotic outcomes. These tight and prolonged contacts within the institutions and between them raised a new awareness among students: the suspension of a grant, the appointment of a professor, the lack of books or the quality of the food at the canteens were all *political* issues. The deficiencies of the state, engaged in the titanic effort of nation-building, were often experienced in a direct way by students. Economic and infrastructural problems were part of the students’ daily lives, and

¹⁵ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 28-29.

the seeds of unrest and political polarization found a fertile ground within the universities.

The expansion of the category of politics towards new actors also followed gender lines. Women, despite their participation in the war effort, did not gain full civil and political rights with the new Constitution of 1923. The Constitution ideally recognized gender equality, but postponed women's full emancipation to further *ad hoc* legislation.¹⁶ However, the presence of women in the public sphere became more and more visible. Alongside a more defined feminist movement inspired by suffragist movements elsewhere, an entire constellation of women's associations developed during the interwar period, mostly along confessional lines and, sometimes, characterized by nationalist goals.¹⁷ Moreover, the ambitious reforms of the education system, designed to decrease the extremely high rates of illiteracy, led to a general improvement in women's education too. Despite the ambivalent reactions and the suspicions surrounding women's education, their presence at every level of study increased steadily from the end of the First World War.¹⁸

Within the universities, the redefinition of politics was accompanied by the inclusion of women in the student movement and unrest. In the 1920s, women were not an entirely new presence in Romanian universities, but their numbers reached unprecedented levels.¹⁹ This numerical rise was accompanied by a widening of the students' social backgrounds and geographical origins. Girls from lower classes represented in most cases the first generation of their families to have had access to universities, as a result of grants and other financial aid provided by the state or directly by universities. Moreover, the territory of Greater Romania was poorly urbanized, thus most of the students came from small towns, villages and even remote countryside or mountainous regions, slowly but increasingly connected by new or extended railways. For most of these young women, going to university represented a new personal, social and intellectual experience, far from their families and their hometowns. The

¹⁶ See *Constituția României din 1923*, Monitorul Oficial, nr. 282/29 Martie 1923. The text of the Constitution is available on the website of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania. Article 6 stated that "special laws [...] will determine the conditions under which women will exercise their political rights. Civil rights for women will be granted on the basis of the equality of the sexes". See also, Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică* (Bucharest: Oscar Print, 2016), pp. 107-108 and 289-290. On the impact of the First World War on gender divisions and roles in Romania see Maria Bucur, 'Between the Mother of the Wounded and Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War', in *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 2000, pp. 30-56.

¹⁷ Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, pp. 100-106 and 279-299. For a detailed history of women's emancipation in interwar Romania, see Ghizela Cosma, *Femeile și politica în România: evoluția dreptului de vot în perioada interbelică* (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002).

¹⁸ Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, pp. 113-142.

¹⁹ The first national census of Greater Romania, undertaken in December 1929, showed that the number of women students tripled during the 1920s, from 3.077 in the academic year 1921/1922 to more than 9000 in 1929/1930. In the same period the number of male students increased by 40% (from 15.000 to 20.000), see Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, p. 136.

political ferment of the period and the constant atmosphere of unrest among students drove some young women toward political activism and new forms of political participation, often completely divergent from the more established and predictable path of women's battles for civil and political emancipation.

The importance of universities in the political life of the Legionary Movement is extensively remarked upon and analyzed in most of the secondary literature on the subject.²⁰ The role of student unrest in the early 1920s is central in the pre-history of the movement. Its leaders, primarily Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Ion Moța, began their political activity as students at Iași and Cluj universities, respectively. The connection with the student movement represented one of the central elements of the self-image of an independent political force that the Legion fabricated for itself from its foundation in June 1927. The Legion's roots in the university protests of the early 1920s were strongly remarked on by its founders, through their personal backgrounds and from the pages of their first magazine *Pământul Strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land). An article written on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the 1922 protests established a direct connection between the Legion and the great student uprising. The new movement presented itself as the natural continuation of the protests, the only political force able to restore its "purity" and original spirit.²¹ This natural linkage with the so-called "generation of 1922" became one of the Legion's ideological backbones and would intensify during the years of its most spectacular expansion in the mid-1930s.²²

The appeal exercised by the movement among students grew rapidly and constantly during the 1930s. Its success overshadowed most of the attempts to gain student affiliations undertaken by other political parties. The national student congress held in 1936 became *de facto* a legionary congress, and the event marked one of the highest levels of expansion in membership and followers among university students.²³ However, the path toward this political success was far from straightforward. The uneven expansion of the Legionary Movement, its crises, its internal tensions, and its battles within the nationalist and anti-Semitic front influenced the sympathy of the students toward legionary activity. Moreover, the unstable political scene of Greater Romania, with its party rivalries, widespread

²⁰ Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer*, pp. 43-60; Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 28-77, Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the "Archangel Michael" in Inter-war Romania*, pp. 26-38.

²¹ Corneliu Georgescu, "Dupa cinci ani", *Pământul Strămoșesc*, 15 November 1927, I, 8, p.7.

²² Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, pp. 245-246.

²³ Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer*, pp. 285-286; Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 107-111.

corruption, clientelism, and, from 1930 onwards, the heavy interference of King Carol II further influenced the development of the Legion and forced its leadership to constantly reconsider its strategies.

The complex and non-linear history of legionary student activism can be traced back to the beginning of the 1920s, when Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was already a well-known nationalist and anti-Semitic activist.²⁴ Then, throughout the mid-1920s, the first future legionary nucleus expanded its notoriety and its following through its militancy within the National-Christian Defense League (Liga Apărării Național-Creștine, LANC), a virulent anti-Semitic party founded in 1923. Finally, the foundation of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in June 1927 transformed the previous activism into a pre-history, at which point the movement created a new image and fabricated a different political profile. The early years of the Legion were a period of experiments and endeavors, in terms of ideological framework, organization and practices.

The place where this story begun is Iași, the capital of the Moldavia region and an important cultural and university center. Here, in this city and at the university, the paths of the student movement entangled with those of the legionary pre-history. After the foundation of the Legion in 1927, Iași was its center and home for the first three years. The political activity of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion Moța, Ilie Gârneață and other future legionaries started in the early 1920s and developed gradually. This expansion occurred through the creation of an extensive and diversified network of people. On the one hand, connections with rich entrepreneurs and noblewomen as well as well-known and respected professors at Iași University offered these young activists visibility, protection and material support; on the other, the tight relationships with students and student associations, both locally and nationally, expanded support for the movement across the universities and among students of different regional and social backgrounds.

The rising following among students, first around Codreanu's activities and, from 1923, in the ranks of the LANC, also attracted a small number of women. Their activities were generally less spectacular and less visible, but they nonetheless participated in various ways in the development of a new form of political activism. While in 1923 Codreanu asked women students at Iași university to sew flags bearing swastikas, a more systematic

²⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, pp. 46-53; Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919-1941. Mistica ultranaționalismului*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), pp. 41-64; Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer*, pp. 39-46.

involvement of women developed in the following years.²⁵ This expansion of female support followed, during this initial period, the interwoven lines of student activism and personal relationships. Family ties, friendship, and love affairs opened a path toward increasing politicization to some of these women, which was further amplified by their experiences as university students.

In this chapter, I will explore firstly the participation of women, mostly young women, in the political activism led by Codreanu within the LANC in the early 1920s, and from 1927, the involvement of women in the legionary political project. Scattered and unsystematic archival sources, newspapers, writings of (male) legionary leaders and members and episodic accounts from secondary literature will be combined and analyzed in order to illuminate the complex inclusion of these women into the masculine realm of politics. The aggressive and intransigent nationalism professed by legionary ideology led inevitably to the inclusion of women as an integral part of the nation. At the same time, however, the preservation of the gender order, both within the movement and in its envisaged projects of an ideal Romanian nation, produced unsolvable contradictions. These contradictions are nevertheless revelatory as they expose the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, of centrality and marginality; dynamics which are integral part of the relationship between women and politics in general and women and nationalism in particular. Closer insight into the legionary pre-history and its early years could enlighten the multifaceted forms of women's participation, suspended between student activism and family ties, between new public roles and the redefinition of private choices.

After an analysis of women students' first steps into political activism during the 1920s, the chapter will follow the expansion of the Legionary Movement during the following decade, which opened the road to more organized forms of participation. The transfer of the Legion's center to Bucharest and the steady growth of its supporters throughout the country brought into the ranks of the movement students from the other major universities, Bucharest, Cluj, and Cernăuți. The University of Bucharest in particular became the Legion's main organizational center of student life, not only as a consequence of physical proximity, but also due to a growing presence of legionary sympathizers among the university's professors and lecturers. The legionary student associations in Bucharest became, especially during the mid-1930s, the centers of legionary university politics and the major

²⁵ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 35-36.

organizers of national student congresses. This however did not happen without conflicts and ruptures with other student associations, especially those from the University of Cluj.

During this growing legionary success, the participation of women students expanded as well, and their organization was taken over by the first emergent women leaders within the university legionary life.²⁶ The intensifying political activism of women students started to follow different paths. While family ties and kinship continued to represent a major channel of recruitment, the legionary student associations in Bucharest represented a far more varied and composite group of people in comparison to the early years in Iași. Yet personal ties did not lose their capital importance and central ideological role; rather they were redefined and reimagined in more inclusive terms. The expanding network of members and sympathizers was accompanied by a general reconceptualization of personal relationships, in which friendship and “camaraderie” represented central elements, and these were also applied, although not always in easy and straightforward ways, to women members.

Legionary women students were involved in various kinds of activities, from propaganda work to acting as couriers and messengers; from joining their male colleagues in work camps to campaigning for the election of legionary candidates within student associations. University elections were the only space where women could exercise the right to vote, and the importance of these elections for the university politics of the Legion was an integral part of its program. Legionary women campaigned for legionary candidates among their networks and within the girls’ student houses, overcoming both the physical sexual segregation imposed by university regulations and the gendered division of area studies. The participation in student congresses of an increasing number of women was another important phenomenon. The gradual “legionarization” of student congresses was accompanied by a growing visibility of legionary women students, who rallied, sometimes in uniforms, alongside their male counterparts and took active part in the discussions.

²⁶ The debate on the use of “woman” or “women” as adjectives instead of “female” is still ongoing. As underlined by Katy Waldman in an article for Slate, this debate “leaves the politically conscious English speaker in a bind. There’s *female*, grammatically correct and yet sullied by an othering, clinical coldness (on one hand) or rank misogyny (on the other). There’s *woman*, which, in refusing to cede the floor to the noun it modifies, insists on its own regularity” (emphasis in the original), see Katy Waldman, ‘Is Hillary trying to Be the First Woman President, Female President, or Lady President?’, in *Slate*, 18 February 2016, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/02/when-you-should-use-female-woman-or-lady-as-an-adjective-a-guide.html>; see also, Mary Norris, ‘Female Trouble: The Debate over “Woman” as an Adjective’, in *The New Yorker*, 30 May 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/comma-queen/female-trouble-the-debate-over-woman-as-an-adjective>. In this text, “women” instead of “female” is more prevalent, when gender specification is necessary (for nouns such as “students” and “leaders”). The use of “women students” was already in place in the 1970s, see Adrienne Rich, ‘Taking Women Students Seriously’, in *The Radical Teacher*, March 1979, No. 11, The Academic Profession, 1968-1978 (March 1979), pp. 40-43.

However, the many important activities undertaken by legionary women students at the rank-and-file level were generally not mirrored by a greater feminine presence in leadership positions. While legionary student associations were ruled by an overwhelmingly male leadership, a close analysis of the legionary activity and “career” of some women who reached leadership or important positions could shed some light on the options available to women and on the inevitable intertwining of political activity and personal choices. Women who joined the Legion during their university years and became important figures within the movement, such as Nicoleta Nicolescu, Anastasia “Sica” Popescu, or Elvira Ionescu, among others, followed different paths and lived and experienced their political engagement in different ways. Alongside them, a significant number of other women, from the more well-known to those who remained anonymous, combined their university studies with support for the Legion, and contributed to the movement’s activities at various levels.

The final part of this chapter will analyze the capital importance of women in moments of crisis, when underground networks continued to operate with discretion and among multiple dangers. At various times, in 1933, 1938-1940, and after the legionary rebellion of 1941, the Legion reacted to outlawing and persecutions by beating a hasty retreat, and by restricting its activities to a smaller network composed of devoted members. In these contexts, personal relationships regained their centrality and offered the basis for underground operations. Young women, especially students, acted as couriers between different legionary hubs, in light of the supposedly minor attention paid to them by the police. Similarly, legionary propaganda at the universities after the rebellion, especially in Bucharest, seems to have been kept alive by groups of legionary women students, largely as a consequence of the mass arrests and imprisonment of their male colleagues.

The University of Iași and its Student Environment

The first decade after the First World War represented a period of intense and rapid transformation for Iași and its university. While the union of the two principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia into the so-called Old Kingdom (1881) had created an ambiguous relation of dependence and resentment towards the increasingly centralizing Bucharest, the

new territorial outset of Greater Romania placed Iași in a new geo-political dynamic.²⁷ As the site of one of the country's four universities, Iași became a key outpost of the nation-building effort undertaken by the new Romanian state, especially towards neighboring Bessarabia, a vast, rural, highly-Russified territory.²⁸ The University of Iași, founded in 1860 from the national and modernizing ideals of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, started to be overwhelmed by an ever-increasing wave of students, which reached the number of 4700 in 1927.²⁹

Because of the rising number of students, the university reached the edge of infrastructural collapse almost every year. Overcrowded dormitories, inadequate libraries in different faculties, and scant supplies of foodstuffs and firewood, were all constant problems faced by the University Senate and the Commission of Dormitories and Canteens.³⁰ The absolutely vital construction, renovation and extension of buildings and locales were usually among the most discussed issues during the meetings of the committee, which had to adjust the projects to the fluctuating funds provided by the Minister of Education in Bucharest. Extensive and significant infrastructural works were undertaken at the end of the 1920s, meeting some of the students' demands and facilitating the overall administration of the university during the 1930s.³¹

The numerical growth of the students was also accompanied by an expansion in the social and geographical spectrum of their backgrounds. A considerable number of students from Bessarabia started to arrive at Iași University soon after unification, as did young men and women from different rural areas of the Moldavia region. The access to higher education for students from peasant backgrounds was possible mostly through an extensive program of grants offered by national and regional authorities. Moreover, students from the lowest classes were eligible for the university's dormitories, for which they had to pass an exam of

²⁷ The first union of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia took place in 1859 under Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza. For the history of Romania from the first union to the proclamation of the Kingdom in 1881, see Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians, 1774-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 273-318 and Keith Hitchins, *Romania, 1866-1947* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 11-54.

²⁸ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, pp. 231-234.

²⁹ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 55. For a general history of the University of Iași, see Gheorghe Iacob, Alexandru-Florin Platon (coord.), *Istoria Universității din Iași* (Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2010).

³⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 1, 38, 70, 73-74; dosar 1000/1922, f. 424; dosar 1078/1924, f. 67-68; dosar 1081/1925, f. 406; dosar 1164/1927, f. 23; dosar 1248/1928, f. 1.

³¹ AN - Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 70; dosar 1078/1924, f. 40, 44-46, 94, 109, 123-124; dosar 1091/1925, f. 583; dosar 1115/1925, f. 33, 119, 144; dosar 1155/1925, f. 40; dosar 1179/1927, f. 62, 67; dosar 1209/1927, f. 44.

admission and provide, among other documents, the so-called “certificate of pauperism” (certificat de pauperitate).³²

From archival evidence the university emerges as an institution that provided a wide range of what can be called welfare services for its students. As an outpost of the state, the university of Iași represented, in the words of its rector Traian Bratu, a mirror reflecting the expectations and dreams, as well as the hardships and the countless challenges of Greater Romania as a whole.³³ In this sense, the image of the university as a dispenser of welfare services paralleled the state’s efforts to implement educational, cultural, health and recreational services. On their side, the students were well aware of what they often perceived as their legitimate rights, and the university’s administration was submerged by a high number of demands.³⁴ The university provided, within the limits of its sometimes-scarce funds, basic health care and material support for needy students who were not admitted at the dormitories and the canteens and who had to cope with the skyrocketing prices of rents and meals in Iași. Additional funds were devoted to recreational activities, such as excursions, summer camps, and trips to localities of “national interest”.³⁵

Particular requests from students were evaluated on a personal basis. In general, students from very poor families received some material support, as did orphans and students from very remote regions, who were usually allowed to spend their holidays at the dormitories although they were officially closed.³⁶ Besides these more basic aids, students received free or reduced tickets for theaters, free or half-price train tickets and sometimes also financial support to print their theses, which was expensive in comparison with other services.³⁷ In a nutshell, the university became a clear extension of the state for the students, from which they received benefits and support; concurrently, students were also all too ready to criticize and protest against any of the university’s deficiencies and unfulfilled promises.

³² AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 64-65; dosar 1078/1924, f. 37; dosar 1115/1925, f. 90.

³³ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 526. This was part of the inaugural speech for the new academic year given by rector Traian Bratu on 8 November 1922, in which the rector offered an account of the achievements and the difficulties of the previous year, together with future projects and expectations. The entire speech was pervaded by strong rhetorical references to the fulfilment of the Romanian nationalist dreams with the creation of Greater Romania.

³⁴ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 22, 358 and ff., 376; dosar 1081/1925, f. 28 and ff., 248, 380; dosar 1164/1927, f. 26.

³⁵ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 70; dosar 1081/1925, f. 248

³⁶ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 70; dosar 1078/1924, f. 96, 102-103, 182; dosar 1081/1925, f. 343, 406; dosar 1155/1925, f. 124.

³⁷ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 302, 782; dosar 1078/1924, f. 105-106; dosar 1081/1925, f. 591; dosar 1164/1927, f. 408.

Besides the welfare provisions, the university as an institution also appears to have performed quasi-parental functions, in representing for its students the surrogate of a familial, if not paternal, role. On various occasions, the moral aspects of higher education were underlined as an integral part of the university's duties towards its students.³⁸ Moreover, the university was sometimes considered as directly responsible for the actions of its students. When students caused damage to public or private goods, the university was asked for reparations, showing not only that families were excluded from this relationship, but also that students were often considered as minors under the university's custody during the years of their studies.³⁹ In some meetings of the University Senate, whose members were all well-known male professors, the discussions about students, especially on the occasion of unrest and protests, often carried the nuances of an ambiguous balance between rebuke and condescension. In adopting a fatherly role and language, the university's authorities tried to maintain a balance between punishment and pardon, acknowledging also the "natural" restlessness and the spirit of rebellion of youth.⁴⁰

The paternal role of the university emerges even more powerfully in the case of women students. Women had been enrolled at Iași University since the final decades of the nineteenth century, but still in small numbers and almost exclusively from the highest ranks of society.⁴¹ The growth of the number of students and the widening of the social spectrum after the First World War also boosted the enrollment of women, which grew steadily year after year. Around the end of the 1920s women students outnumbered men in the Faculties of Letters and Philosophy, almost equaled them in Medicine and Pharmacy, while Law and to a lesser degree Sciences remained prevalently male domains.⁴² Aside from this not uncommon "feminization" of specific faculties, men and women shared the same infrastructural deficiencies and the problems of overcrowding, lack of books and materials, firewood supplies and other everyday-life problems. The main women's dormitory, named "Regina Maria" after Queen Marie of Romania, hosted in the 1920s around two hundred students. The administrative records of the dormitory show the careful and humble account of all the expense, of any little item, from spoons to towels, from apples for the winter to needles, all

³⁸ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1209/1927, f. 53.

³⁹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 30.

⁴⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 60, 72-73; dosar 1078/1924, f. 91; dosar 1081/1925, f. 23, 64, dosar 1155/1925, f. 17-19, 24, 30-31, 37, 115.

⁴¹ On the first women students at the Faculty of Letters at Iași University see Leonidas Rados, *Primele studente ale Universității din Iași. Facultatea de litere și filozofie (1879-1897)* (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2010).

⁴² AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 284; dosar 1078/1924, f. 17-22, 34; dosar 1164/1927, f. 104-111, 116.

listed conscientiously.⁴³ However, this relatively poor *ménage* was shared in equal measure with their male colleagues and the university administration did not make any visible or recorded difference based on gender for allowing funds, providing books or free tickets for theaters, which were equally divided between the men's and women's dormitories.⁴⁴

Despite the generally equal treatment of boys and girls, a marked difference can be noticed in the concerns shown by the university authorities toward women's "morality", specifically their sexuality. Attempts to regulate the imagined, supposed, or actual sex lives of women students seems to have been taken by the university as a "paternal" responsibility, in which respectability and decency represented the cornerstones of its interventions. Women's dormitories strictly regulated the girls' opportunities to go out into the city. They were allowed to go to the movies and the theater only on Sundays and other festivities, only in groups, and they had to sign a register with the time of their return to the dormitory.⁴⁵ A potential scandal erupted when rumors about "dubious morality" and misbehavior in the women's dormitory reached the Minister of Education in Bucharest. The university immediately set up an inquiry commission, and the general practitioner of the women students, Doctor Alexandrina Nastase, was called to make sure that no cases of venereal disease or pregnancies had been registered among the girls. The directress of the "Regina Maria" dormitory, Aneta Cosmovici, ultimately clarified the possible origins of the "scandal": some women students were married, and when their husbands came visit, they used to meet in hotel rooms in the city. The origin of the rumors, and the why and by whom the girls were reported on for meeting men in the city, are not clear from the records, but the university authorities felt the urgent need to clarify the situation, especially given that the rumors had reached the minister in Bucharest.⁴⁶

The question of married women emerges as a pressing concern for the university's authorities when these women resided at the dormitories. From the overwhelmingly masculine and paternal standpoint of the senate and the committee, a married woman student represented a blatant exposure of the latent connection between women and sex. The university's role as a surrogate familial institution for the students was very likely felt more

⁴³ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1020/1922, all the file contains administrative records, inventories and payment receipts of the "Regina Maria" dormitory; dosar 1116/1925, also this file contains only administrative records from the "Regina Maria" dormitory, as well as the reports of the dormitory's committee meetings. The file is archived under the year 1925 but contains documents from 1925 to 1937; dosar 1155/1925, f. 40.

⁴⁴ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 70; dosar 1000/1922, f. 302; dosar 1078/1924, f. 104.

⁴⁵ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1043/1923, f. 17; dosar 1078/1924, f. 55.

⁴⁶ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1043/1923, f. 16-17.

strongly by girls, distant from their families and experiencing different and in all likelihood previously unknown freedoms. In the case of married women students, the university found itself in an ambiguous position, on the one hand it tried to maintain a clear and polished image of respectability, while, on the other, acknowledging the legitimacy, if not the duty (especially for women), of sex after marriage. On one occasion, the authorities reached the point of forbidding married women from residing in the dormitories; as a compromise, the university provided these women with the corresponding amount of money.⁴⁷ Soon after, however, the decision was revoked, on the grounds that respect of the dormitories' regulations should be sufficient to avoid the potential disorder caused by the women's double status as students and wives.⁴⁸

The desire to keep women under surveillance, literally under the university's eyes, also emerges from two suggestions made at the meetings of the Committee for Dormitories and Canteens and of the University Senate. At the senate meeting, a professor proposed to devote a smaller feminine dormitory, Casa Miculescu, only to medicine students, as the building was close to the home of the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. In this way, the professor would have had a direct eye on the dormitory and on the movements occurring there, also owing to his familiarity with the students.⁴⁹ On a different occasion, a professor underlined the precarious conditions in which women students found themselves by renting a room in the city. Given that the university had the responsibility to offer a morally suitable *milieu*, he suggested renting a new building to host the students who had not received a room at the existing dormitories.⁵⁰

In conclusion, the picture of the University of Iași in the 1920s shows an expanding and ambitious institution, engaged in the challenging task of providing a decent higher education to an unprecedented number of students. In his inaugural speech for the new academic year in 1922, Rector Traian Bratu declared the University of Iași to be one of the most important laboratories where “national consciousness” and “spiritual unity” were forged for and among its students.⁵¹ This highly rhetorical assertion encountered countless material difficulties in its implementation. The inadequacy of buildings, the lack or deficiencies of libraries and laboratories, the difficulties in providing at least heating and electricity to all its premises, were constant challenges. Moreover, as a laboratory of “national consciousness”,

⁴⁷ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1209/1927, f. 14.

⁴⁸ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1248/1928, f. 12.

⁴⁹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1155/1925, f. 81.

⁵⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1209/1927, f. 53.

⁵¹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 526.

the university represented one of the state's vital institutions, an outpost of its nation-building efforts. The educational offer of the university was thus accompanied by a wider range of provisions and activities, aimed to build the image of a reliable and supporting institution, mirroring, at a smaller scale, the parallel endeavors of the state. In this context, the waves of student unrest that shook the universities throughout the 1920s, in Iași and in other towns, displayed the reactions to and the dissatisfactions with the state's projects, carried on by a part of the student population. A closer analysis of the protests can also enlighten the complexities, the contradictions and the internal conflicts within the different groups that led the protests at various times. Far from being unified and undisputed, the so-called "student movement" exposed nevertheless the most aggressive face of nationalism and the growing anti-Semitism of a considerable part of youth of interwar Romania.

Student Unrest and Feminine Participation

The great student upheaval of December 10, 1922, was not a bolt from the blue. Despite its unprecedented violence and number of participants, signs of exacerbating tensions and of growing anti-Semitic feelings were already visible, together with mounting dissatisfaction with the universities' infrastructural and organizational deficiencies. At Iași University, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu had already started his virulent nationalistic and anti-Semitic activism in 1920, within the Guard of National Consciousness (Garda Conștiinței Naționale) led by the young agitator Constantin Pancu. As a student at the Law Faculty, Codreanu soon brought his activity to the university, disseminating propaganda among the students and promoting spectacular actions, like the blocking of the university's entrance to protest the decision to not celebrate the ritual Orthodox mass at the beginning of the academic year.⁵²

Codreanu's political activism led the university authorities to declare his expulsion, a decision that occasioned a heated political debate within the University Senate.⁵³ The political views of Codreanu and his followers were also shared by some professors, primarily

⁵² Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919-1941. Mistica ultranaționalismului*, pp. 51-53; Traian Sandu, *Un fascism roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer*, pp. 39-43; Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, pp. 57-58.

⁵³ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 60.

by Alexandru C. Cuza, professor of Political Economy at the Law Faculty and Codreanu's godfather and political mentor.⁵⁴ Very close to the Codreanu family, Cuza had been a fervent nationalist and anti-Semite since his early political activities in the last decades of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ In his position as a respectable professor and well-known politician, Cuza offered young Codreanu his protection and support. Cuza was not isolated in his sympathies. Professors Ion Găvănescu from Letters and Corneliu Șumuleanu from the Medicine Faculty were among Codreanu's protectors, and they continued to support Codreanu after his embittered personal and political split from Cuza and the foundation of the Legion in 1927.

Without this support from within the university, the hesitations around Codreanu's expulsion, which was never formally implemented, would not be understandable.⁵⁶ However, other voices emerged to counter the nationalist and anti-Semitic tendencies within the university. At a meeting of the University Senate in March 1922, professor Ion Simionescu underlined the "pure spirit of anarchy" that reigned over the university. In his opinion, the most preoccupying aspect of these seeds of unrest was the direct involvement of professors.⁵⁷ For this reason, the ambiguous position held toward the disorder became a constant feature during the following years. Disciplinary measures tended to be slow and loosely implemented, and the harshest decisions, namely expulsions, were sometimes revoked by subsequent decisions.⁵⁸ In this atmosphere, the students organizing the protests or provoking disorder did not feel particularly endangered, and even Codreanu was ultimately allowed to attend courses and take his degree in Law in June 1922.⁵⁹

On the eve of December 10, the university authorities saw an intensification of anti-Semitic feelings and actions among certain groups of students, inside and outside the university. At the beginning of November, a group of fifty to sixty students disturbed a show at the National Theater in Iași, by erupting with boos and hisses when a Jewish actress stepped on stage. The police, who reported the events to the Rectorate, identified the leaders

⁵⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ For an overall picture of Alexandru C. Cuza's political activity from the standpoint of his antisemitism, see Horia Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A.C. Cuza în politica românească* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012). See also Gabriel Asandului, *A.C. Cuza. Politică și ideologie* (Iași: Fides, 2007).

⁵⁶ At the meetings of the University Senate, the discussions about Codreanu's expulsion did not reach any definitive decision, especially because of the strategic absences of the delegates from the Law Faculty, see AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 5, 26-27, 72-73. Despite the supposed expulsion, the admission of Codreanu at the university's dormitories was discussed the following academic year, see AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 521-522.

⁵⁷ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 997/1921, f. 60.

⁵⁸ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1043/1923, f. 3-4, dosar 1155/1925, f. 37.

⁵⁹ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 61; AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 171.

of the group, all students, and order was established with great effort at the end of the act by expelling the students from the theater.⁶⁰ After this, the General Association of Jewish Students sent a letter to the Rectorate to communicate their decision to stop attending the shows at the National Theater and to return their free tickets because of the atmosphere of aggression created by the anti-Semitic student agitators.⁶¹

Within the university, tensions were also rising. At the end of November 1922, a dormitory student meeting became an opportunity to organize a protest that ultimately reached the house of the Rector. However, most of the students residing in the dormitory wrote and signed a letter to the Rectorate to dissociate themselves from the protest. Although they acknowledged the difficult material conditions of the dormitories, especially the lack of firewood, they also underlined how the agitators were using these material deficiencies for their own political goals. These goals, which they called “demagogic”, were not shared by the “healthy and hard-working students”.⁶² On December 8, 1922, amidst the increasing waves of unrest, the university authorities made an appeal to the “humanity” of the students, and they urged them to cease their acts of “brutality”. The appeal was not meant to disclaim the “patriotism” of the students but underlined that an “enlightened patriotism” required Romanian students to also accept the development of “other nations”, who were educated together in the same “national spirit” at the university.⁶³ The students were thus invited to mitigate their excesses of violence in the name of a “healthy” nationalism, of which the protests represented a brutal degeneration.

Nevertheless, no appeal to humanity was sufficient to stop the wave of protests, which culminated in a national student meeting at the University of Bucharest on December 10. In the rooms of the Faculty of Medicine, delegates from all four universities of the country gave a more formal and programmatic dimension to their ideological stances and requests. A few days earlier, at a meeting in Iași, in the university’s main hall, the students demanded the introduction of a *numerus clausus* and the expulsion of Jewish students from the dormitories.⁶⁴ The students were supported by professor Corneliu Șumuleanu, from the

⁶⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 508-509.

⁶¹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 474.

⁶² AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 643-644.

⁶³ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1000/1922, f. 715.

⁶⁴ Corneliu Ciucanu, ‘Mișcările studențești din anii 1922-1923. Constituirea și activitatea Ligii Apărării Național-Creștine în primul deceniu interbelic’, in *Cercetări Istorice*, XXIV-XXVI, Iași, 2010, p. 328.

Faculty of Medicine, where student protests, mostly on anti-Semitic positions, had already started at the beginning of December.⁶⁵

Ultimately, the manifesto of the student movement that resulted from the meeting in Bucharest sought to legitimize the requests of the nationalist students in the name of a “superior national and cultural problem” posed by the so-called “Jewish element”. The students marked their distance from “racial and religious anti-Semitism” and claimed their battles were directed only toward promoting the “primacy of the Romanian element” within the universities.⁶⁶ By appealing to what was deemed as a “just” nationalism, the leaders of the student movement proposed a hollow justification of the moral and physical violence perpetrated against their Jewish colleagues. Moreover, nationalism also served the purpose of legitimizing the actions of the students in the eyes of the public, as the rhetoric of nationalism was extremely pervasive in the public discourse.

The great protest of December 1922 is generally considered to be the foundational moment of the national student movement, its protagonists belong to the so-called “generation of 1922”.⁶⁷ As a historical label, the expression tends to homogenize and unify a complex phenomenon and masks its internal differences, contradictions and inconsistencies. Within the universities, however, the events of December 1922 inaugurated a different phase of political organization and activism. Moreover, the mobilization of vast numbers of students inspired an innovative and more inclusive political discourse able to attract the young sector of the population. The interwoven concepts of “generation” and “youth” became increasingly common in the language of the student movement. Echoes of romantic ideas about the regenerative and transformative political energy of the young generation resounded in the new rhetorical style shaped by the university protests.

In Iași, one of the most important political outcomes of the great December protest was the revitalization of the activity of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. In the spring of 1923, while the university was slowly restarting its normal activity after the unrest, Codreanu militated as

⁶⁵ The protests that eventually led to the national student upheaval of December 10 had been ignited by increasing tensions and anti-Semitic violence at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Cluj, which spread throughout the other university centers, where nationalist students (and professors) solidarized with their colleagues in Cluj, see Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 30-31. See also the archival documents of the University of Cluj reprinted by Lucian Nastasă in his work on the interwar university antisemitism in Romania, Lucian Nastasă (ed.), *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919-1939). Mărturii documentare* (Editura Institutului Pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale – Cluj-Napoca: Editura Kriterion, 2011), pp. 205-208, 211-217.

⁶⁶ Corneliu Ciucanu, ‘Mișcările studențești din anii 1922-1923’, p. 329.

⁶⁷ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, p. 245; Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 54; Corneliu Ciucanu, ‘Mișcările studențești din anii 1922-1923’, p. 329.

an agitator among the students. Codreanu, along with his followers, occupied the university and raised a flag bearing the swastika at the main university entrance.⁶⁸ At that time, his actions were starting to acquire a different meaning and a general reorientation towards more organized goals. In early March 1923, his mentor Alexandru C. Cuza founded the National-Christian Defense League (Liga Apărării Național-Creștine – LANC), giving a formal political and organizational structure to the nationalist and anti-Semitic beliefs and actions of various segments of society.

The group at the head of the LANC represented a sample of the older generation of nationalists, primarily Cuza, whose ideological positions had radicalized toward the anti-Semitic front. In this context, the well-known doctor and professor at the University of Bucharest Nicolae C. Paulescu introduced racist and biological nuances to the LANC's anti-Semitic language. In the official newspaper of the LANC, *Apărarea Națională* (The National Defense), the party's line for the solution of the "Jewish question" was the total expulsion of Jews from Romania.⁶⁹ The leading Committee of the Party also included Ion Zelea Codreanu, father of Corneliu and long-time friend and supporter of Cuza's political activity.⁷⁰

While this older generation of nationalist politicians was active at the head of the LANC, Corneliu Codreanu was entrusted with the organization of the youth section. His activism during his university years and his connections and following within the student movement made him the right man for Cuza to rely on in order to attract nationalistic students to his new party. Codreanu had already started to organize the students in the months preceding his graduation by founding, in May 1922, the Association of Christian Students (Asociația Studenților Creștini – ASC).⁷¹ In the aftermath of the December protests, the Association gained a new *élan*, mostly as a consequence of Codreanu's tireless activity and personal engagement. Moreover, the 1922 unrest had left as one of its most important legacies the development of increasingly stronger connections among the four universities of Greater Romania. This encouraged the development of personal and political relationships among the various local activists. During his frequent trips through the country, Codreanu

⁶⁸ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 69. The swastika was chosen by Alexandru C. Cuza as the emblem of the National Christian Union, a party he founded in 1922. According to Cuza, the swastika was used as a religious symbol by the Pelasgians, an ancient population he considered the ancestors of modern Romanians. The swastika, adopted in the same period by the German National Socialists, symbolized the Aryan race and it clearly had, as it was the case for Cuza's party, anti-Semitic connotations, see Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Corneliu Ciucanu, 'Mișcările studențești din anii 1922-1923', p. 335.

⁷⁰ For an account of the life and the political activity of Ion Zelea Codreanu, see Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, pp. 22-31; see also Tatiana Niculescu, *Mistica rugăciunii și a revolverului. Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), pp. 11-18.

⁷¹ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 61.

started to establish some of his most important connections, which would shape his political and personal life in the years to come.

The intersection between politics and personal relationships in this period helps us to understand the participation of some young women in the activism of Codreanu and his followers. Corneliu's sisters, Silvia and Iridenta, were raised, like their brother, in a strongly nationalist *milieu*, with a militant father actively involved in politics.⁷² During the intensification of Corneliu Codreanu's activity in 1923 and 1924, his sisters probably felt encouraged by their education and their familial ties to participate more actively. Their presence in Codreanu's closest circle of followers and friends does not seem to have appeared inappropriate or disturbing. The distance between women and politics, which had characterized the Romanian political landscape before the First World War, appeared to be questioned and narrowed in this group, although not as a result of a deliberate decision. At this stage, the inclusion of women did not appear to be part of a general political project, but more related to informal connections, relationships and shared experiences.

Among these shared experiences, the university environment represented one of the most significant political catalysts. In Iași, students of both sexes shared similar life conditions, witnessed the same inefficiencies and coped with similar problems and difficulties. From this point of view, social background worked often as a unifying element, partially overcoming gender divisions. In the lively world of student associations active at Iași University in the 1920s, women were generally well represented in the membership. These associations were organized along different lines, such as by Faculty, specific courses, and geographical provenance. Although the most common goals of these associations were not deemed directly political, they conveyed a more inclusive form of participation and engagement.⁷³ The possibility of more direct forms of political activism was surely not automatic but was facilitated by this general tendency to belong to associations.

While a faculty, regional or cultural association did not openly expose its members to conflicts with the authorities, the militancy within or the support for the most extremist wings of the student movement had more visible and serious consequences for the students' everyday lives and careers. In Iași, the Association of Christian Students (ASC) founded by Codreanu promoted open confrontation with the university authorities and the police,

⁷² Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, pp. 36-42.

⁷³ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1217/1928. The file only contains documents on the student associations, mostly their correspondence with the rectorate. The most common communications include statutes, lists of members, elections of committees, fundraising activities of the various associations, and requests for permission for meetings and events.

positioning its supporters and sympathizers on the edge of legality, disciplinary measures, and punishment. In the years following the student protests of December 1922, the ASC presented itself as the natural continuation of the spirit and the demands of that protest, as the true heir of the “generation of 1922”. Despite the ambiguous position of the university authorities toward the nationalist and anti-Semitic wing of the student movement, there were also genuine attempts to mitigate their most aggressive and violent tones and actions. In this sense, the Association of Christian Students often operated as an unauthorized association, and its members faced the threat of expulsion and other disciplinary measures.

The attraction of women students to such extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic activism was often related to a complex interaction between personal relationships and an increasing awareness of the possibility to emerge as engaged, active women in the realm of politics. The beliefs and rhetoric of the nationalist student movement also played a role in shaping the opportunities for women to participate. The appeal to a generational upheaval and to participation as Romanians made age and especially nationality more decisive factors than gender. The language of exclusion and violence was mostly directed toward the Jewish population, inside and outside the university. Moreover, the absence of overly masculinist tones or misogynist accents from the language of the nationalist students gave space for the potential involvement of non-Jewish women, who did not feel excluded or attacked. The absence of programmatic gender issues was at this stage also related to the informal and experimental nature of the student movement.

In this context, in the group of political activists led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in Iași, young women became increasingly visible. Codreanu’s sisters, Silvia and Iridenta, both enrolled as students at the Faculty of Law, became known to the university’s authorities for their activities. On the evening of December 10, 1924, Iridenta Codreanu was involved in an incident at the university canteen, during which she slapped a girl from the Faculty of Letters, Moruzi M, in the face. Both girls were summoned by the Commission of Dormitories and Canteens in order to clarify the causes of the clash and hand down the necessary disciplinary measures. Iridenta Codreanu declared that her violent gesture was provoked by Moruzi’s offensive words directed at her family. From the account given by the director of the canteen, during a conversation Moruzi had called the nationalist students “thugs”.⁷⁴ Since the discussion took place on December 10, the anniversary of the great student protests, the comments were connected to the riots with which the nationalist students marked the

⁷⁴ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 26-27.

anniversary of the event. The offense to Iridenta Codreanu's family was very likely related to the girl's remarks on Corneliu's activity, who, although not a student anymore, was leading the nationalist student movement in Iași and had also intensified his violent actions since 1923.⁷⁵

Although the incident resulted only in admonishment for Iridenta Codreanu, the episode sheds light on some aspects of her involvement in and engagement with her brother's activities. Iridenta, four years younger than Corneliu, was a student at the Faculty of Law, a predominantly male domain, and a very politicized faculty. Her enrollment in Law suggests a desire to emerge in an environment where the presence of women was very limited. Moreover, her physical aggression was very likely perceived as particularly inappropriate for a young woman. While clashes and incidents were relatively common among men, women were very rarely reported as active participants in episodes of violence. Her choice of faculty and her readiness to use physical aggression can be read as a tendency to emulate the actions of Corneliu, who was becoming, in those years, a well-known figure, not only in Iași and the Moldavia region, but at a national level too.

However, it can also be argued that Iridenta Codreanu developed her choices and actions at the intersection between what was socially acceptable for a young woman and the innovative elements rooted in her family's background and relationships. University provided an intermediate environment between family and the wider public sphere. The highly politicized atmosphere of the university seems to have justified a more engaged form of activity, especially in the case of the nationalist student movement. Violent methods, spectacular actions and open confrontation with the university authorities were an integral part of the students' political strategy. Iridenta Codreanu used all three methods, - violence, visibility and clashes with the authorities - in the same way her male colleagues (or her brother) would have done.

Shortly after the incident in the canteen, Iridenta Codreanu, together with her sister Silvia and several other students (of both sexes), were expelled for one year from the university. This serious disciplinary measure was taken by the authorities in January 1925, in the aftermath of the riots that took place on the anniversary of December 10. Among other things, a big flag bearing a swastika appeared on the façade of the main university dormitory that day, which created a certain tension at one of the meetings of the Commission of

⁷⁵ On Codreanu's activity in this period, see Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, pp.71-82; Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer*, pp. 47-54; Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, 42-49.

Dormitories and Canteens. The director of the dormitory, professor Mihail David, was accused of not having appointed a commission to identify who had brought the flag into the dormitory and then raised it, thus conveying an impression of tolerance toward the most turbulent students.⁷⁶ In January 1925, after the Christmas break, several students were expelled for one year, and a list with their names hung at the entrance of the main canteen. Besides Iridenta and Silvia Zelea Codreanu, the only two women expelled from the Law Faculty, other women found themselves expelled as a consequence of their supposed involvement in the turbulence of December 10, 1924.⁷⁷

The different reactions of the expelled students to this disciplinary measure shed light on the complex and uneven patterns of participation in the actions of the nationalist student movement. Most of the expelled students sent letters to the Rectorate to distance themselves from the protests and especially from the Association of Christian Students, pleading, on this ground, for the revocation of the disciplinary measures and their readmission to the university. From the letters it emerges that a memorandum drafted by the Association of Christian Students was sent to the Rectorate on the occasion of December 10. Since the ASC was an unauthorized association, the university's authorities decided to take measures against the students who had signed the memorandum. The letters sent to the Rectorate show a range of different relations of these students to the ASC, expressing the positions they decided to assume towards the ASC and their participation in its activities.

Natalia Tomaziu, from the Faculty of Letters, admitted having signed the memorandum of December 10, but after the expulsion she wanted to withdraw her support and asked the authorities to consider her signature as revoked. She attributed her participation to the "impetus of the moment" and had not thought about the possible consequences of her actions. The expulsion left her without a place to live and without the means to sustain herself in Iași. Facing an endangered future, she realized the meaning of her impulsive gesture and asked the university authorities for a pardon, arguing that she had not taken an active part in the protests of December 10, or in any other student demonstration. Eventually, the Rectorate decided to revoke her expulsion and she was readmitted to the university.⁷⁸

Ruxandra Stan, a first-year student in the Faculty of Letters, declared her complete dissociation from the events and from the ASC. She explained that she was not even aware of what was happening, and she did not know that her name had appeared on a list drafted by

⁷⁶ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 27-28.

⁷⁷ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1081/1925, f. 23-24.

⁷⁸ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1081/1925, f. 64.

the ASC. She declared that she was a poor girl, who had come to the university to study and did not want to lose her time with students who did not “think rationally”. She was also readmitted to the university following her letter of explanation.⁷⁹ Maria Irimia, another first-year student in the Faculty of Letters, justified her signature on the ASC’s memorandum by the fact that she had been persuaded to join the ASC without being informed that it was an unauthorized association.⁸⁰ Several similar letters were sent to the Rectorate. Although they are in form and content less personal, they seem to have followed a template required by the Commission of Dormitories and Canteens to clarify the position of each student before their readmission.⁸¹ In a meeting held in the same period, the commission, in evaluating the requests of some women to be admitted to the main dormitory, decided to inquire into their situation, especially their possible membership in the ASC.⁸² While the harshest measures were in general mitigated, university authorities tried nevertheless to limit and hinder the diffusion of the ASC’s activism among the students.

The various reactions of women students to the disciplinary measures taken against them in January 1925 and the explanations they gave for their involvement reveal some of the patterns of participation in the nationalist student movement, together with its limits and its uneven outcomes. While appeals to the generational upheaval and the defense of the rights of Romanian students could have inspired approval, the transformation of beliefs into practice was a much more difficult decision. If participation had been inspired by the “impetus” of a moment, the consequences could have easily discouraged a more direct and active form of involvement. The disciplinary measures taken by the university authorities used the same material difficulties that were the object of the student protests. The risk of losing one’s place in the dormitory or access to the university canteen was a serious and sometimes vital concern. While these considerations were shared among students of both sexes, women may also have considered as an additional concern the potential reactions of their families to their “unruly” behavior. Moreover, having a place in the dormitory represented for many of them the only opportunity to attend university and to experience some kind of freedom far from their families and villages and, at the same time, to pursue a career. In this sense, engaging in such risky activities could have seemed “irrational”, as the student Maria Irimia labeled the nationalist student movement, and perhaps even compromised their hard-earned opportunity to study at the university.

⁷⁹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1081/1925, f. 76.

⁸⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1081/1925, f. 77.

⁸¹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1081/1925, f. 86-87, 89, 153.

⁸² AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 31.

Overcoming these hesitations and transforming potential sympathy for the nationalist student cause into more direct forms of political activism required a combination of various factors. Social stability, support and approval from a student's family and circle of friends played, to some extent, a role in the engagement of these young women. For the Codreanu sisters, their expulsion from the university for nationalist activism was in line with their education and their family beliefs and political engagement. Like their brother a few years earlier, they faced the consequences of their apparently uncompromising behavior, surely encouraged by the general tendency of the university authorities to revoke the harshest disciplinary measures. Nevertheless, Silvia and Iridenta Codreanu did not send any personal request for a pardon, nor any other declaration of dissociation from the activities of the Association of Christian Students nor, in general, from the political activism of the nationalist student movement, with which they had strong personal ties.

While the political involvement of the Codreanu sisters was to some extent connected to their family relationships, another student started to become more and more visible soon after the unrest occasioned by the anniversary of December 10, 1924. Elvira Ionescu, a student in the Faculty of Law, was expelled definitively from Iași University in January 1925.⁸³ The severity of this disciplinary measure suggests her direct involvement in the action of the nationalist student movement, but the records of the Rectorate do not explain the causes of this definitive expulsion. In January 1925, while still expelled from the university, a police report signaled the presence of Elvira Ionescu at an important meeting held by a very restricted circle of nationalist students and activists in the Transylvanian town of Orăștie. Here, at the house of priest Ion Moța, some of the central figures of the most extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic wing met to discuss their future political strategies. Ion I. Moța, Ilie Gârneață and Radu Mironovici, all three among the future founders of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1927, decided to pursue the “anti-Semitic battle by any means possible”, especially by expanding support from university students to high school pupils, the peasantry and the press. Elvira Ionescu was the only woman present at the meeting. She was a committed member of the student movement and, although the police report did not mention it on this occasion, was probably already the fiancée of Ilie Gârneață.⁸⁴

⁸³ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1081/1925, f. 24.

⁸⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 29/1925, f. 14-15. Ion I. Moța and Ilie Gârneață were members of the restricted political nucleus led by Codreanu. In the fall of 1923, they were arrested and imprisoned after a plot to assassinate important political personalities and members of the Jewish community was uncovered by the police. The following year all the conspirators were acquitted, see Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, pp. 70-79.

While no member of the Codreanu family was present at this meeting, the personal and political relationships among these young activists were tight enough to form a small but resistant network, which already started to have ramifications at a national level. In the aftermath of the expulsions of nationalist students from Iași University, protests of support and solidarity were held by students in Bucharest and Cernăuți.⁸⁵ Similar to other occasions, the university's authorities rarely imposed the most severe disciplinary measures, hence Elvira Ionescu, although expelled definitively in January, was readmitted in the fall of 1925, when she started her second year at the Faculty of Law.⁸⁶ The following year Ionescu changed her Faculty to Medicine. In 1929 she defended her doctoral thesis and became a well-known gynecologist at the maternity hospital in Iași, where she often offered free consultations to Romanian women to dissuade them from paying Jewish gynecologists.⁸⁷

Elvira Ionescu's intransigent nationalism and anti-Semitism accompanied her throughout her brief professional life as a doctor, until her death in November 1935. Her years as a student at Iași University shaped her involvement in the political activism of the nationalist student movement and her personal relationship with Ilie Gârneață, a close member of Codreanu's circle, brought her to the center of what would later become the Legionary Movement. While still a medical student, Elvira Ionescu stood out as an extremely visible and exceptional figure. On two occasions, she was the only woman from the delegation of Iași to participate in nationalist student movement meetings. The first, held by leaders of the movement in January 1925, and again at the general student meeting in Bucharest in February 1927.⁸⁸ Several months after this second meeting, she and her fiancé Ilie Gârneață were involved in a verbal and physical altercation with a Jewish couple on the train from Iași to Bucharest.⁸⁹

While Elvira Ionescu emerged from these episodes as a well-known figure to the police, she was always identified together with Ilie Gârneață. Very likely, her actions were evaluated as having political value and public relevance in the more general, male-dominated context of the nationalist student movement. Her personal relationship with a notorious student agitator put her under the eye of the police, and her beliefs and actions as a nationalist, anti-Semitic student acquired a seemingly different importance because of her private choices. The union of Elvira Ionescu and Ilie Gârneață exemplifies one of the

⁸⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 11/1925, f. 6, 8-9.

⁸⁶ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 78.

⁸⁷ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 125; Lucian Nastasă (ed.), *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919-1939). Mărturii documentare*, pp. 443-444.

⁸⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 44/1927, f. 41.

⁸⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 44/1927, f. 157.

interrelations between personal relationships and political involvement, filtered through the experience of university, that characterized the earliest phases of feminine presence within the Legionary Movement.

Legionary Women Students

The period preceding the foundation of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in June 1927 was characterized, on the one hand, by a general decline of the most acute phase of student unrest, and, on the other, by the radicalization of a wing of the national student movement. At the university of Iași, violent incidents became rarer, although still spectacular, and at times the university's main canteen and the halls were patrolled by armed guards to guarantee order.⁹⁰ However, a decline in participation in the most extreme demonstrations is also suggested by the involvement of persons from outside the university in many riots and actions. This became a serious concern for university authorities and different measures were taken to prevent the entrance of external persons on university premises.⁹¹ Nevertheless, in the spring of 1927, the Rector acknowledged a general decrease in student activism, inside and outside the university, originating from internal divisions and ongoing conflicts within the nationalist student movement itself.⁹²

The internal divisions of the nationalist student movement had already started to become more visible after the general student congress held in Iași on November 28-30 – December 1, 1926. According to the police report on the event, the National Union of Students of Romania (Uniunea Națională a Studenților din România) was divided into two major currents. On one side, the students from Iași, mostly under the influence of the National-Christian Defense League (LANC), supported general affiliation of the student movement to the party of Alexandru C. Cuza. On the other side, the Student Center in Bucharest and the leading committee of the Union sustained a line of non-affiliation with any political party. The main question at stake was represented by the virulent anti-Semitism of the LANC, which, according to the second student current, could have compromised the activity of the Union. The student movement supported an “integral, intransigent

⁹⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1155/1925, f. 19, 27; dosar 1081/1925, 313-314.

⁹¹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 94; dosar 1115/1925, f. 106; dosar 1125/1926, f. 7.

⁹² AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1155/1925, f. 120.

nationalism”, but the manifest and violent anti-Semitism of the students affiliated with the LANC posed a threat to the public image of the union.⁹³

Internal conflicts and different currents not only divided the national student movement, but they also split the LANC, which was beset by problems and tensions that had emerged during the spring of 1927. In the history of the Legionary Movement, the separation between Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and his mentor Alexandru C. Cuza is generally identified as the turning point in the former’s political activity, a moment that led him to found the Legion on June 24, 1927. This personal and political split between the two figures surely represented a key moment, magnified by the strong relationships of Codreanu with other, more radical exponents of the LANC’s youth section and of the Association of Christian Students. The foundation of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in late June reunited Codreanu’s closest political followers and friends around him. They represented a small but tight group, with a strong basis in Iași and with connections in Transylvania and at the universities of Bucharest and Cernăuți too. However, the first reactions of the nationalist student movement to the foundation of the Legion were mostly negative and suspicious.

Mass public expression of these impressions and feelings first occurred at the general student congress held in Moldavia, at the important religious site of the Neamț Monastery, at the beginning of August 1927 shortly after the foundation of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. The police report on the congress is very detailed and sheds a light upon the situation of the National Student Union in the summer of 1927. One of the major concerns was the ongoing internal tensions and conflicts within the student movement. Since these tensions were weakening the movement, one of the most important aims of the congress was to reach a general reconciliation among the various factions and redefine common views, values, and goals.⁹⁴ During the session held on August 2, 1927, the discussion touched on the issue of the newly founded Legion of the Archangel Michael. One of the speakers declared the Legion to be a “limited company that speculates on the nationalist ideology”, born only from the personal and “sickly” ambition of Codreanu. Moreover, he considered Ilie Gârneață, one of the leaders of the Legion, to be “completely immoral”. Another delegate insinuated the possibility of “immoral activities” at the legionary office in Iași, suggested by the presence of “young couples”.⁹⁵

⁹³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 36/1926, f. 123-124.

⁹⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 25/1927, f. 160-161.

⁹⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 25/1927, f. 165.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu arrived at the congress on August 2, several hours after the discussions about his new movement. That afternoon, he had an open confrontation with some of his opponents, especially those from the Student Center in Bucharest. The following day Codreanu took the floor and, after giving an account of his political activity since the early 1920s, explained his decision to leave the LANC and found a new movement. The decline of the student movement since 1925 and the internal tensions within the LANC had led him to the conclusion that a separation was needed, in order to restore the original, combative spirit of the nationalist movement. Codreanu's speech was pervaded by a strong rhetoric of violence. He declared the Legion to be ready for a climax of physical aggression, "from words to fists, to poison, sticks, daggers and revolvers". This readiness for violence was also performed during the congress, when the following day Codreanu slapped another student in the face for criticizing the activities of Ilie Gârneață and called his gesture only "an appetizer" of what might follow in case of further insults to the Legion.⁹⁶

Apart from this verbal and physical violence, which was very likely ignited by personal tensions between Codreanu and the Bucharest wing of the student movement, Codreanu briefly outlined the general organization of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Among the designated four sections, the movement was supposed to have a feminine section as well.⁹⁷ Codreanu did not give further details on the composition and the purpose of each section, but he did declare the presence of women within the movement to be part of its organizational structure. The participation of women in the Legion's activities and their presence at the Legion's offices had already raised rumours on the supposed "immorality" of the movement. While women were increasingly present at the universities and within the student movement, a more direct and personal form of involvement offered material for rumors and gossip. The allusion to the presence of couples among the legionaries implied a direct connection between the presence of women and sex, which painted the activities of the Legion as potentially "immoral". The participation of women alongside men in the movement had, to some observers, more of a personal, or even sexual connotation, rather than any political meaning.

Almost concomitantly with the general student congress, the Legion of the Archangel Michael started the publication of its first magazine, *Pământul Strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land), on August 1, 1927. The magazine, a bimonthly periodical, was printed at the press shop of Ioan Moța in Orăștie. Ioan Moța, father of Ion I. Moța (one of the founders of the

⁹⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 25/1927, f. 168-170.

⁹⁷ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 25/1927, f. 169.

Legion), was an Orthodox priest and the editor of *Libertatea* (Freedom), one of the most important nationalist voices of the Romanian communities in Transylvania since the early 1900s. The old Moța offered his essential contribution by printing and distributing the first legionary magazine among the readership of his own periodical.⁹⁸ During the first months of its publication, the magazine served as a vehicle for the gradual fashioning of the Legion's self-image. The need to mark its distance from the National-Christian Defense League (LANC), from which it stemmed, guided the general outline of the magazine. In particular, the Legion had to manufacture its own theorization and rhetoric of nationalism and anti-Semitism, combining it with different ideas and ideals about Romania's political, social, and cultural life.

While nationalism and anti-Semitism represented common ground for both organizations, the new movement assumed more radical positions against the political *status quo*. The denunciation of the corrupt ruling parties became a central element of the Legion's ideology and rhetoric and qualified it as an anti-system political movement. The Legion positioned itself outside of and beyond the mainstream political system of parliamentary democracy, which was considered corrupt, incapable of dealing with the real problems of the country and alien to the Romanian spirit and tradition.⁹⁹ The ideal underpinning this ideology was the "regeneration" of the Romanian nation, which required an entirely new set of values and goals for the Romanian people. The rhetoric of the "new" national spirit became inseparable from the role of the "new generation", and the Legion started to present itself as the only political force able to restore the original spirit of the student movement and to reconstruct the "fortress of pure hearts" embodied by the "generation of 1922".¹⁰⁰

Alongside the importance of the student element in the rhetoric of the Legion, the expansion toward other sectors of society acquired a significant role in the movement's self-image and propaganda. This expansion formed an integral part of the political goals discussed among the small circle of student activists in their meeting in January 1925. All the participants in that meeting, Ion I. Moța, Radu Mironovici, Ilie Gârneață and his girlfriend Elvira Ionescu had become central figures in the Legion of the Archangel Michael. All of

⁹⁸ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, p. 66; see also ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 79/1927, f. 6.

⁹⁹ "The political parties, in sustaining foreign interests, covered [...] the decomposition of the national organism with pompous ornaments, upon which they engraved in gold the words 'Humanity', 'Peace', 'Brotherhood among nations'", in Corneliu Georgescu, "Nădejdi sfărâmate", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 August 1927, I, 1, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Scut. [sic], "Rezultatul alegerilor", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 August 1927, I, 1, p. 6; see also Corneliu Georgescu, "După cinci ani", *Pământul Strămoșesc*, 15 November 1927, I, 8, p.7. This article was written in occasion of the fifth anniversary of the 1922 protests and established a direct connection between the Legion and the great student uprising. The new movement presented itself as the natural continuation of the protests, the only political force able to restore its 'purity'.

them, with the significant exception of Elvira Ionescu, were among the contributors to *Pământul strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land), where the Legion elaborated the movement's expansion from student activism towards a more comprehensive and wider political base. According to the organizational structure described in the magazine, the first section would include "every Romanian young man, intellectual, peasant or worker", who wanted to join the Legion and follow its principles.¹⁰¹ This section would have the highest purpose: "to defend, to purify, to liberate our ancestral Land, *rising, working, fighting*, for the love of the motherland".¹⁰²

Although male youth emerged as the backbone of the movement's structure, the Legion also envisaged a feminine section, introduced in the magazine as the "auxiliary" section "of Romanian women". Preceded by the motto "Save the family, religion and the country", the article stated that the "rise and fall of nations depend on the moral strength of the woman, of the mother: she can create *heroes* or *villains*". The issue of motherhood was addressed here for the first time in such highly ideological and rhetorical terms. This section was clearly destined to the organization of mothers, who were automatically considered married women. The basic unit of the section would be the "nucleus", composed of a minimum of three and a maximum of thirteen members. The mothers' contribution to the Legion was more of a "moral" than "material" nature, in that they should support the "moral recovery of Romanian society. "The legionary mother" should raise her children in the Christian faith, in order to avoid the risk of "atheism" in adolescence. Furthermore, she should prevent her daughters from becoming victims of "the Jews of Paris", the "inventors of fashions", "enemies of the family and of morality". However, the authors of the article sustained that "the Legion is not against 'elegance' and 'beauty'", but "*against frivolity*", against "*the nakedness of the body*", which is "dishonorable, ugly and disgusting". Similarly, mothers should fight against "unhealthy and immoral" dances. Lastly, they should fight to prevent young girls from the countryside, "the most beautiful Romanian peasant girls", from becoming housemaids for Jewish families.¹⁰³

The highly symbolic duties of the legionary mothers were to be studied and discussed during the regular meetings of each feminine group or "nucleus". These meetings were characterized in gendered terms as women's reunions for afternoon tea and sewing. However,

¹⁰¹ C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, "Legiunea 'Arhanghelul Mihail'", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 August 1927, I, 2, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰² C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, "Organizarea Legiunii 'Arhanghelul Mihail'", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 September 1927, I, 4, pp. 3-4. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰³ C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, "Organizarea Legiunii 'Arhanghelul Mihail'", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 October 1927, I, 5, pp. 3-4. Emphases in the original.

the new meaning assigned to these ordinary feminine activities reveals the transformation of life that was required by belonging to the Legion. During their tea or sewing meetings, women were to address the problems of the country and their possible solutions, from the standpoint of their duties and of their role in the movement. Discussions, readings, and small lectures were deemed as central activities within women's groups. Therefore, these groups were to become centers of self-education, where the members would share knowledge, experience, and ideas. Ultimately, the Romanian woman should be "*a woman of faith, a woman of work and a woman of action*" and, in this way, fulfill her "religious, familial and social" roles.¹⁰⁴

The highly rhetorical terms devoted to the role and purposes of the feminine section contrasted, at various levels, with the everyday practices of the group of young men and women who composed the initial, small nucleus of the Legion. Its origins within the student movement had produced an informal and spontaneous participation of women, facilitated, as mentioned above, by kinship, friendship, and sentimental relationships. However, the previous undefined nature of the feminine presence seems to have required a more stable, ideological ground at this initial stage of the Legion as a new, independent political movement. The idea of a separate section for legionary women had the aim of establishing some separation between the different groups of possible affiliates, especially in view of a future expansion of the membership. Moreover, the accusations of "immorality" expressed during the general student congress made it necessary to formulate a more ideologically consistent frame for the inclusion of women. The presence of women thus represented a problematic element, which needed a discursive move toward more "traditional" and "natural" feminine roles. Nevertheless, the accent on motherhood, expressed in such powerful terms in the outline of the feminine section, would fade gradually into the background, and other aspects of feminine presence would later emerge as more central and powerful. The involvement of women in the student movement, the role of marriage, the inclusion of women into the legionary "fraternal" experience and the redefinition of customary divisions between public and private spaces are some of the major themes that emerged from the pages of the magazine.

The importance of the university environment as an experience of political training for women was visible in an article signed by an anonymous woman student. While the contributors to the legionary magazine were overwhelmingly men, a few female voices from

¹⁰⁴ C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, "Organizarea Legiunii 'Arhanghelul Mihail'", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 October 1927, I, 5, pp. 3-4. Emphasis in the original.

the student wing found space for expression, although limited and surely dependent on the male leadership's backing and control. In this article, written as a letter to a younger girl, the anonymous author gave a brief account of her friendship with the sender of the letter ever since high school, when the two of them had started to follow the news about the student protests in Iași "secretly" and "enthusiastically". Later, the older of the two (the author of the article) moved to Iași, started university, and joined the nationalist student movement. Now she was part of a "handful of young people", clearly the Legion, and she invited her younger friend to join them if "she decides to serve her country".¹⁰⁵ This brief article retraced what very likely represented a common path toward political activism among university students, and a path the Legion sought to propagandize and exploit to gain affiliations. While, as mentioned above, belonging to the nationalist student movement could have become a source of problems with the university authorities, the Legion wanted to refashion student activism into a highly nationalistic and life-changing engagement. Joining the movement was equated with "serving one's country", a purpose that transcended the contingent material demands of the student protests.

When the second article signed by a woman appeared in *Pământul strămoșesc*, the female presence within the Legion had already become more formal and defined. Between the end of 1927 and the spring months of 1928, the appellation *legionară*, "legionary woman", made its first appearance.¹⁰⁶ The integration of women into the general legionary ideology and narrative emerges clearly from an article published in April 1928 and occasioned by the approaching Easter festivities. The author of the article was Maria Vieru, a medical student and legionary member. For the first time, an article addressed to women took the form of an ideological statement and it presented the entire range of legionary *leitmotifs*: romanticized nationalism, anti-Semitism, history, nature, tradition, and religion. The young woman would return home for the Easter holidays, to the "beloved meadows" of her childhood, now "infected by Jewish dirt". The past was "too distant", the memories of its glories, traditions, and dances were almost lost among "the luxury" and "the deafening noise of jazz bands and Charleston music". Nevertheless, hope was still alive, and it was embodied by the Legion, which would realize the dream of a "better, happier, more faithful and more truthful life". Legionary women would fight alongside men, they would be the "honorable heiresses" of the Romanian noblewomen of the past and participate in the foundation of the

¹⁰⁵ Prietena Studentă, "Scrisoare, unei surioare", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 September 1927, I, 4, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 March 1928, II, 5, p. 10.

legionary ideal. For this purpose, women should work for the country united “under the flag of the Legion” and follow its “captain” until the final victory.¹⁰⁷

Maria Vieru had enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine in Iași in 1925.¹⁰⁸ Since then, she had been an active member of her faculty and her dormitory, often participating in the elections of student committees.¹⁰⁹ In January 1928, she was a member of the Association of Romanian Medical Students, which was headed by Ion Banea, an increasingly important legionary figure.¹¹⁰ The denominations of “Romanian” or “Christian” characterized associations which excluded Jewish students, and belonging to such associations was in itself a statement of anti-Semitism. As emerges clearly from the article written for *Pământul strămoșesc*, the violent anti-Semitic language adopted by Maria Vieru was in line with the political stances of the nationalist and exclusive student associations. Her affiliation to the Legion, to which she declared her membership by signing the article as “legionary woman”, very likely marked a further radicalization of her political positions.

In the same period, the magazine also announced the creation of the first formal feminine organization within the movement, the “sisters of the Legion” in Iași. The women of the section, “ladies” and “girls” were to attend weekly meetings to study the principles of the Legion and to “cement their sacred bonds” as a group of “fighting women”.¹¹¹ The creation of this section marked an increasing differentiation, at least in principle, between membership and informal support. The denomination of the section and the concept of sisterhood, which would become increasingly common in legionary language, signaled, not only rhetorically, but also conceptually and in practice, the extension of the bonds of legionary men toward women. One of the central ideological features of legionary life was represented by the relationships of fraternity among the members. They considered themselves as transcending the mere affiliation associated with political parties. Although hierarchy and leadership emerged as the guiding principles of the movement’s structure, these principles were envisaged in a rather distinctive way. The authority of the leader did not derive from tradition, as a father’s power over his sons did, and less yet by election, which was a concept alien to the movement’s spirit. The leader was recognized and followed, but he was more like a kind of “first among equals”.

¹⁰⁷ Maria Vieru, “În preajma sărbătorilor. Apel către surorile legionare”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 April 1928, II, 8, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁸ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1078/1924, f. 70; dosar 1115/1925, f. 88.

¹⁰⁹ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1116/1925, f. 9.

¹¹⁰ AN – Iași, Fond Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar 1217/1928, f. 9, 57.

¹¹¹ “Informațiuni”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 March 1928, II, 6, p. 14-15.

The relationships of the members to the leader were based on the same moral grounds, the same values and ideals, and they shared similar qualities. The legionaries, in this form of “horizontal hierarchy”, were imagined as brothers. As Codreanu stated in one of the first ideological articles published in *Pământul strămoșesc*, the Legion’s place was not beside its “natural” or “spiritual” father, but “beside the mother, which is – the Country.”¹¹² The symbolic role of Romania as the “motherland” of the Legion guaranteed deep ties of fraternity among its members, while the patriarchal principle seemed therefore denied inside the Legion. Within this ideological and rhetorical framework, the extension of legionary fraternity toward the inclusion of women as “sisters”, followed complex and contradictory paths. While political affiliation was grounded in and equated with the members’ fraternal bonds, these bonds were imagined and described as bonds among men. However, women were practically and programmatically involved in the Legion’s political project, and this inclusion required a rethinking of male bonds as well. This rethinking displayed a difficult combination of different but closely intertwined issues: the “spontaneous” participation of women in the movement, their “organic” belonging to the national body, and, at the same time, the preservation of distinct gender roles, based on “natural”, religious, and “traditional” considerations.

With the beginning of the 1930s, the challenges, ideological and organizational, of the Legion became increasingly complex and variegated. The decision to move its center of activity to Bucharest signaled an important shift. As described above, during the 1920s the Student Center of the University of Bucharest was suspicious of Codreanu and his movement. One of the greatest political challenges faced by the reorganization of the Legion as a Bucharest-based movement was to gradually penetrate the capital’s student environment. According to a police report from May 1932, the Iron Guard managed to attract most of the members of the committee of the Student Center, starting with the association’s president Traian Cotigă.¹¹³ Cotigă became a leading figure in the Legionary Movement throughout the 1930s, and in 1931-1932 took his first steps in the organization of its student wing.

The police report goes on to describe the plans for expansion and the further strategies of the Student Center. The student associations in Iași and Cluj were still under the influence of the LANC. Cotigă apparently sent an appeal to the other student centers to reorganize their associations on “nationalist grounds” and to follow Codreanu and his movement, which he

¹¹² Corneliu Z. Codreanu, “E ceasul vostru: Veniți!”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 August 1927, I, 1, p. 5.

¹¹³ At the beginning of the 1930s, the name “Iron Guard” became much more common than “Legion of the Archangel Michael”. In 1930, for electoral reasons, the Legion ideated a new name and a new symbol, which were commonly used until December 1933, when the Iron Guard was officially outlawed.

argued, was the best option for the students to continue their fight. At this stage, the Bucharest Student Center was not yet openly supporting the Legion but was waiting for the other centers to declare their affiliation before making a public statement.¹¹⁴ In the same period, according to another police note, the committees of most nationalist student associations were weak and disorganized. As a result, growth in support for the Legion seemed inevitable, for it was the only political force to show a firm and organized strategy.¹¹⁵

The success achieved by the Legion at the university of Bucharest after less than two years in the city was accompanied by its fast expansion at the university of Cluj. A police report from November 1932, a few months after the reports on the Bucharest Student Center, is rich in observations on the reasons behind this growth and on the strategies used by the Legion. The movement in Cluj had a convinced member, a student named Rebreanu, who oversaw the expansion and the organization of the Legion at the university of Cluj and in the nearby countryside. Rebreanu enlisted a small group of adherents to carry out propaganda tours in the countryside during the summer, presenting themselves to the peasants as part of a “militaristic organization with a nationalist and extremist character”. Moreover, they tried to organize those sympathetic to their propaganda in groups, each with its own leader.

After the summer, attention was largely turned toward the students. Rebreanu gave speeches modelled on those of Codreanu, he started using the appellation “comrade” when addressing other students, and the group of legionaries intervened in every student demonstration. Any occasion was good for propaganda: strikes, demonstrations, assemblies, ceremonies held to commemorate national and regional events. This energetic involvement, the speeches, and self-confidence of the group, seem to have increased the support for the Iron Guard. The number of adherents increased quickly, and the number and intensity of student protests and demonstrations grew accordingly, with legionary students igniting these actions. Legionary propaganda and activity were described as “very original and convincing”. Codreanu’s plans for the future became even greater once he realized his program was “plunging deep roots everywhere”.¹¹⁶

This report is a window into the legionary propaganda style in-the-making, when the movement was experimenting with different strategies and activities. The combination of urban and countryside campaigns, the speeches, the interventions, and the person-to-person contacts were all elements of the legionary experiment. What the police report called “very

¹¹⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 113/1932, f. 17.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., f. 19.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., f. 47.

original” was very likely the combination of many elements and the ability to accommodate them to different environments, audiences, and situations. Summer campaigns through the countryside became increasingly important to the propaganda project. In 1932, propagandistic tours were undertaken not only around Cluj but also in other regions, especially, as another report underlined, in the areas where the Legion was scarcely known or sympathized with.¹¹⁷

All the efforts and strategic plans that had started to bear their fruit during the years of 1932-1933, marked the consecration of the Legion as a major actor on the political scene, at least in Bucharest. The support of the committee of the Student Center was accompanied by a greater wave of sympathy in other sectors of society, especially among intellectuals. The newspaper *Axa* (The Axis) made its first appearance in October 1932, with articles signed by Vasile Marin, Mihail Polihroniade and other intellectuals who had turned towards “legionarism” in this period. Similar to the strategy adopted by the Student Center, the newspaper became overtly legionary only gradually, when the time seemed ripe for public statements of affiliation or support. In 1933, the backing of established university professors such as Nae Ionescu and Nichifor Crainic brought the Legion to the fore as a thriving political force.

The assassination of Prime Minister Ion G. Duca by a commando of three legionaries known as the Nicadori at the end of December 1933 and the subsequent trial revealed the involvement in the Legion of young women, students at the University of Bucharest.¹¹⁸ Their involvement was not solely limited to general support or canvassing activities; rather, women participated at a much higher level, as couriers working directly for the legionary leadership. After the assassination of Duca, several women were arrested because of their supposed participation in the organization of the assassination, even in indirect ways, or because they had been informed about the plot. In January 1934, Anastasia “Sica” Popescu, Maria Bârsan, and Păsceanu Alexandrina, all students and legionary couriers, were arrested along with other prominent members of the legionary student wing, including the student leader Traian Cotigă.¹¹⁹ Nicoleta Nicolescu, a prominent legionary woman and personal courier of Codreanu, was also arrested shortly afterwards.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 18.

¹¹⁸ The name ‘Nicadori’ is an acronym formed by the combination of the initial letters of two of the Legionnaires’ names and one’s surname (Nicolae Constantinescu, Caranica Ion, Doru Belimace). For a more detailed account of this political assassination and its aftermath, see Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, pp. 104-106, 184-186.

¹¹⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 7/1930, f. 17.

¹²⁰ AN-Cluj, Fond IGP, dosar 208/1934, f. 109.

At the trial held in spring 1934, there were 78 persons accused of various forms of involvement in the assassination of the prime minister, with charges ranging from breach of the peace to “moral instigation”. This latter category of “moral instigators” comprised mostly the intellectuals who had supported the Legion, among whom were the university professors Nichifor Crainic, Nae Ionescu, and Dragoş Protopopescu. Among the many students accused, there were also some women. The above-mentioned Păsceanu Alexandrina (now called Alexandra), at only 18 years old was listed not as a student, but as a “freelancer”. Anastasia Popescu, who was arrested in January, was almost surely released before the trial, for her name did not appear in the list of defendants.

The three women accused of participating in the plot were the students Constanța “Tanti” Stănciulea, Nicoleta Nicolescu and Teodora “Dorina” Niculescu. Nicolescu was 22 years old, the “older” of the group, while Stănciulea was only 19. All three were not originally from Bucharest, but were students at the city’s university, though Stănciulea appears to not have been resident in Bucharest at the time of the trial.¹²¹ From the transcripts of the hearings, it seems that the three women were the main couriers of the Legionary Movement, in charge of keeping fast and effective communication between different locations. After the assassination of the prime minister, Codreanu hid for a while from the police to avoid arrest and contact with the rest of the movement in Bucharest was maintained through the couriers. The leader of this information service was Nicoleta Nicolescu, “a very devoted member”, who, according to the hearings, received her first important task in the movement after three years of involvement.¹²²

Most of the “indirect” and “moral” participants in the assassination of the prime minister were eventually acquitted. In May 1934, the Association of Theology Students, led by the legionary Gheorghe Furdui, decided to organize celebrations in honor of their professor Nichifor Crainic, acquitted after the trial. Legionary student Anastasia “Sica” Popescu played a central role in organizing these celebrations. The events planned by the students comprised a series of lectures meant to celebrate the intellectual and political merits of Nichifor Crainic, related in particular to his works on “integral nationalism”.¹²³ Outside the

¹²¹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 15, vol. II/1934, ff. 169-170.

¹²² Ibid., ff. 51, 54-55.

¹²³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 60. For an introduction to the figure of Nichifor Crainic and his role in this context, see Roland Clark, ‘Nationalism and Orthodoxy: Nichifor Crainic and the Political Culture of the Extreme Right in 1930s Romania, in *Nationalities Papers*, 40 (1), 2012, pp. 107-126.

university, celebrations of the acquittals of professors Nichifor Crainic and Dragoș Protopopescu were organized by the circles of nationalist journalists and writers.¹²⁴

The trial and the official outlawing of the Iron Guard made the movement more cautious but did not hinder its plans for expansion within universities. In April 1934, even before the end of the trial, Codreanu was planning a massive propaganda campaign throughout the country's universities. The main goal was to take over the leading committees of the various student associations. Only afterwards was the attention supposed to be turned toward other sections of the urban youth, in particular toward workers.¹²⁵ Thus, the "legionarization" of the students represented one of the first significant steps in the legionary projects of expansion. The years 1934 and 1935 were marked by extremely intense activity in this sense, stimulated by the support gained, especially in Bucharest, among professors, journalists, and intellectuals.

The involvement of women was part of this expansion within the universities, and in Bucharest, as emerged clearly during the arrests and the trial, in just a few years women students had arrived at the core of the legionary organization. In November 1932, a legionary leaflet distributed on the occasion of the upcoming celebrations for December 10 was also signed by the "Sisters of the Legion". December 10, 1932, marked the tenth anniversary of the student protests of 1922. As mentioned above, the legionaries presented themselves as the "true heirs" of the great student upheaval, and they made an appeal to their "comrades" to commemorate that "first cry of battle".¹²⁶

"Sisters of the Legion" was the first denomination used by the legionary feminine groups, and the formation of these groups in Bucharest, particularly at the university, was part of the Legion's gradual "conquest" of university students. The leaders of this expansion within the university were, to a great extent, the same women arrested for their involvement in the assassination of Duca. Nicoleta Nicolescu and Anastasia "Sica" Popescu emerge from the sources as the most active legionary students. Both were followed closely by the police. As will be described more widely in the final chapter, their affiliation to the Legion continued far beyond their university years. At this stage, however, they were involved in various forms of activities undertaken by the legionary students, in different forms and following different paths.

¹²⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 69.

¹²⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 7/1930, f. 205.

¹²⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 113/1932, f. 6.

As already mentioned above, Sica Popescu was a student at the Faculty of Theology in 1934. She had strong ties with the committee of the student association of her faculty, which was gradually turning toward the Legion, and was a renowned legionary member. In March 1934, Popescu attended the national student congress held in Băile Herculane, a notorious spa town in the Banat. At the session held on March 29, she was present together with the leader of the student committee of the Faculty of Theology, Gheorghe Furdui, and probably several other theology students. At the national student congresses, student associations affiliated with different political parties and other independent associations took part. However, during the first half of the 1930s, legionary students became gradually but steadily the main protagonists of the congresses.

This congress in Băile Herculane represented an important step in this direction, for the legionary students managed to monopolize some of the sessions and transform them into legionary events. The session held on the morning of March 29 was a blatant example of this legionary strategy of diverting attention from any other issue toward legionary concerns. The trial against the legionary leaders and sympathizers offered a perfect opportunity for this strategic move, which was led by Gheorghe Furdui. He called for all the students to express their support for those accused of being the “moral” instigators behind the assassination of Duca, especially Corneliu Codreanu and professor Nichifor Crainic. The audience burst into a standing ovation and the students decided to send telegrams declaring their support for Codreanu, Crainic, and other personalities involved in the trial.¹²⁷

A second congress, held in August 1934, became a further occasion for the Legion to spectacularly display its strategies. The congress was supposed to start on August 19 and last for a few days, in Râmnicu Vâlcea, a town located at about 170 km north-west of Bucharest. The congress was not a national one but rather regional, organized by the association of students from the Oltenia region. However, the university senate and the Minister of the Interior rejected the request of authorization for this congress. The legionary students, guided by some leaders, arrived purposefully from Bucharest and decided to profit from the denied authorization to transform the failed congress into a legionary event. Legionary students from the nearby towns were called to join, and Nicoleta Nicolescu received a telegram with the request to send a group from Craiova, her town of activity.

Groups of legionary students arrived thus in Râmnicu Vâlcea, many of them wearing green shirts and greeting each other with the roman salute. Marches and chants were

¹²⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 19/1934, ff. 25, 28-29.

performed on the streets and in parks and other public spaces, attracting the attention of bystanders. According to the investigations on the events, the police was slow in its intervention, surprised by the unauthorized and unpredictable legionary demonstration. A group of around forty students, in military formation, marched through the city. On the front line of the column marched the students Anastasia Popescu, Zoica Stelescu, the wife of the legionary leader Mihai Stelescu, and Tiana Silimon, the fiancée of one of the Nicadori.

When the police eventually intervened to stop the march and arrest the students, the latter laid down on the street and held hands, forming a human chain to hinder the actions of the police. Thus, the students had to be taken away by force and were subsequently arrested. Meanwhile, legionary leader Mihai Stelescu managed to photograph the scene and keep the camera roll from the police, most probably by passing it to other students so as to prevent the destruction of the photographs. According to the reports, the three women left the frontline and were brought to the police station afterwards. Finally, 49 students were arrested, and most of them were sentenced to different periods of correctional detention and to the payment of fines of various amounts. Ten students were acquitted, among them very likely also the women.¹²⁸

This congress, or, better, failed congress, displayed all the most powerful and “original” elements of legionary propaganda strategies. The decision to attend the “congress” despite the rejection of authorization, indeed especially because it was unauthorized, was proof of bravery and of their fearless commitment to the cause of the students. The transformation of the demonstration into a *de facto* legionary event, with marches, songs and green shirts, was another strategy used to give the image of the success and large following of the Legion. In this sense, when it was necessary, students from other cities were called to participate, and, on occasion so were non-student legionaries; a strategy already adopted during the first years in Iași, as already mentioned above.

The legionary leaders also implemented techniques to prevent or hinder the intervention of the police. They organized unauthorized and unpredictable marches and gatherings, with dozens of students arriving unexpectedly in the town. Moreover, they practiced what can be called a form of “civil disobedience”, by laying down on the street and forming a human chain to obstruct the actions of the police. The photographs were very likely used in the legionary press to show the “violent” intervention of the police against “unarmed” and “harmless” students. This combination of elements was the hallmark of what the police

¹²⁸ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 19/1934, ff. 86-91.

report from Cluj called the “very original” and “successful” legionary propaganda style. During these events, the legionaries were able to display commitment, coordination and organization, and excellent control over the outcomes of their actions.

The presence of the three women marching on the first line was also very likely a novelty of this “congress”. While women regularly participated in the student congresses, the quasi-militarization of the student protests practiced by the legionaries assigned different meanings to this participation. Anastasia Popescu had attended the national congress in Băile Herculane, as already mentioned, but the sessions and proceedings of that congress followed more “classic” forms. The demonstration in Râmnicu Vâlcea was a protest event more than a congress, though meetings and talks also took place. On this occasion, the salient moments did not occur in meeting halls but on the streets. Three women marching at the head of a column was very likely an unusual sight and would have attracted the attention of passersby.

Their participation in this form of protest, in many ways different to a proper congress, shows the women students’ familiarity with and involvement in the propaganda of the Legionary Movement. The police report on the event does not mention if other women took part in the demonstrations, which is very likely, but the three women reported were the most prominent, and, above all, they were accompanying the leaders who had arrived from Bucharest. Anastasia Popescu was at that stage a renowned and active legionary member, while Zoica Stelescu and Tiana Silimon were known also because of their personal relationships with prominent legionary members. Their participation in an unauthorized and illegal event was a sign of their engaged commitment, given the risks connected to these actions. However, their leaving the marching column before potential clashes with the police signals some kind of exclusion of women from direct violent action.

These concerns became more explicit on the occasion of the national student congress organized in April 1935. According to a police report on the atmosphere at the University of Cernăuți shortly before the congress, the legionary students were planning to transform the event into a “true legionary congress”. Besides the propaganda strategies displayed at the congresses of the previous year, legionaries were ready this time to use “brute force” against rival associations and parties. As a result, the congress was expected to be marked by “incidents and clashes”. For this reason, the Student Center of Cernăuți did not allow women students to participate in the congress.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Ibid., f. 142.

The congress, held in Craiova from April 17 to 19, 1935, became in fact a legionary event. As an official national congress, the organizers benefited from the support of the state and the use of its infrastructures, with special trains and discounted or free tickets available for the participants. The train trips of hundreds of students from their towns to Craiova became legionary events in themselves. Students got off at many stations and sang legionary songs while the train carriages were marked with legionary slogans and swastikas.¹³⁰ According to the estimates of the authorities, 2750 students attended the congress, with more than one thousand students from Bucharest alone.¹³¹

The list of speakers and the minutes from the various sessions displays an overwhelmingly legionary character. Similarly, newspapers published photographs of the legionary parades and marches, with the legionaries in paramilitary attire performing the roman salute in the main square of the city, in front of the city hall.¹³² The clashes and disorder predicted by the students from Cernăuți were relatively contained. Concerns surrounding order, “decency”, and good behavior permeated the list of regulations issued by the organizers of the congress. The congress represented a significant event for the legionary’s image and propaganda, and it was therefore of great importance to ensure the local population were not given a “degrading spectacle” of the movement.¹³³

Among the great number of participants, about 100 women attended the congress as well, according to police estimates. Most of them wore green cloaks, to mark their affiliation to or support for the Legion.¹³⁴ Since the reports on the various sessions are very detailed, it is almost certain that women students did not intervene directly in any of the meetings. However, Constanța Stănciulea, a renowned legionary member and courier in Bucharest, handed out leaflets to the other women attending the sessions on the role of the “nationalist woman”, issued by the feminine section of the Bucharest Student Center. Moreover, together with Maria Bârsan and other legionary women, Stănciulea sold to the audience booklets of legionary songs and a brochure written by Alexandru Cantacuzino, a prominent legionary member and ideologue, who gave a speech at the congress.¹³⁵

At the 1935 congress, then, women seem to have performed their usual “auxiliary” role, by distributing leaflets, selling books, and raising money. The scant feminine presence at the congress might have several explanations, ranging from the fear of violent clashes to

¹³⁰ Ibid., ff. 143-144, 146, 151.

¹³¹ Ibid., f. 165.

¹³² Ibid., f. 209.

¹³³ Ibid., f. 223.

¹³⁴ Ibid., f. 166.

¹³⁵ Ibid., ff. 206-207.

uneasy feelings about traveling alone to a distant city together with groups of men. The names recorded by the police are already familiar, signaling thus a small but strong group, mainly located in Bucharest, who represented a sort of avant-garde of the feminine presence within legionary student activism. Apparently, the Bucharest Student Center had a feminine wing, engaged in promoting more direct forms of participation.

Between 1934 and 1935, the involvement of women students in the legionary organization in Bucharest developed and intensified. The Legion established its headquarters at the home of General Gheorghe “Zizi” Cantacuzino-Grănicerul, an older nobleman and hero of the First World War. He was a great supporter of the movement and close friend of Codreanu and other prominent legionary members. The general became the formal leader of the new political façade of the dissolved Iron Guard, a party called “Everything for the Country” (Totul pentru Țară). His large house at number 3 on Imprimeriei Street, in the center of Bucharest, functioned at once as a private house and as the headquarters of the Legion. The communal living and the mixture of “private” and political spaces will be analyzed more widely in chapter two.

This peculiar headquarters-house was used for many purposes: for political meetings, as a depository for propaganda material, and was the place from which information and communications were spread to the other legionary “nests” in the city and sometimes in the provinces, by couriers. By the end of 1933, the women students known to be legionary couriers were observed entering and leaving the house very often, sometimes more than once or twice per day. The house of the general was under close surveillance, with police monitoring and reporting the incessant coming and going of many habitués. Anastasia Popescu, Ecaterina “Tiana” Silimon, Teodora “Dorina” Niculescu and other women students were often reported entering the house on Imprimeriei Street.¹³⁶

In December 1934, about one year after the assassination of the Prime Minister Ion G. Duca, the Legion underwent massive reorganization. Aside from its new political structure under the name “Everything for the Country” and several other changes, the feminine section was reorganized and put under the leadership of the prominent legionary commander Nicoleta Nicolescu. The organization and activities of this new feminine section will be widely analyzed in the final chapter. As far as student activism is concerned, the general reorganization and the propaganda efforts undertaken during 1934 gave a new impulse to the presence and activities of women in legionary university politics.

¹³⁶ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, ff. 9-12, 23-24, 29-30, 33-34, 37.

Legionary women students held regular meetings at the legionary headquarters from the beginning of 1935, if not earlier, generally presided over by Nicoleta Nicolescu. On January 18, 1935, the students held a meeting during which Nicolescu communicated the orders received from Codreanu. The meeting was attended by 37 students, while one hundred others were missing. Nicolescu expressed her dissatisfaction at their absence, warning them of the potential disciplinary measures they might incur in case of prolonged and unjustified absence, all the more so because women were called on to support their legionary “comrades” in the take-over of all student associations. For this purpose, each group of legionary men was supposed to be joined by two women, in the effort to gradually penetrate the committees of various student organizations.

Moreover, women students were supposed to enroll in the so-called “Student Office for Education and Control” and become part of the “secret police” instituted by this office. While more details on the purposes of this “office” are not given, it is possible to assume it dealt with some sort of information service. In the legionary plan to take control of the committees of the various student associations, collecting information about affiliations, sympathies, and potential political “enemies” was probably a very important task. Lastly, responding to questions from some students about a future strike, Nicolescu replied that the person in charge of deciding when strikes were called was Traian Cotigă, the legionary leader of the National Union of Romanian Christian Students (UNSCR). Codreanu had given him free reign in the legionary student organization and he was responsible for unifying the legionary prerogatives with the demands of the “student masses”.¹³⁷

The following month, another police report gave an account of the “usual weekly meeting of the legionary women students”. Thus, the meetings were held on a regular basis and the authorities were aware of the involvement and following of the women in legionary activities. During the meeting, several students presented the results of their fundraising campaign. They were collecting money for the erection of a funerary monument on the grave of Sterie Ciumetti, a legionary member who died after a clash with the police. The women were particularly active in the fundraising campaign; aside from the renowned Constanța Stănciulea, a few other names emerged: Nicoleta Sofia, Jojoaia, Ana Georgescu. Since they were mentioned in the report, it is possible to suppose that these women were performing more active roles in the student movement and thus started to be more closely watched by the police.

¹³⁷ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 39/1935, f. 95.

An important issue addressed during the meeting was the organization of their political activity and propaganda among the students enrolled at different faculties. Apparently, legionary women tried to militate alone, independently from male legionary students. However, this strategy “did not produce the expected results”. Thus, the best strategy was to accompany legionary men and create mixed groups. Moreover, the need for a more effective and coordinated activity also emerged from the discussion of the necessity of a national meeting of legionary women students. Nicoleta Nicolescu was the promoter of this idea and, given her personal relations of friendship with Codreanu and Traian Cotigă and her leadership position, she was in charge of convincing them of the importance of a national assembly of women.¹³⁸

While it is hard to establish whether such a meeting ever took place (which is unlikely) the need to have a separate national assembly signals a demand for more independence, and, more importantly, for more space. Women students could discuss political issues, envisage their own strategies and be heard during the weekly meetings of the feminine section. Very likely, they were well aware their voices would have been more than marginalized at a large national congress. The national congress held in Craiova few months later was a blatant example of this danger, as already described above. A separate meeting for women would have given them a chance not only to get to know each other better, but to communicate, exchange ideas and thoughts, and take more independent decisions regarding their own political activities.

If women were more marginalized during the large national congresses, they played a much more active role in the overall strategies of the Legion to “conquer” the student associations. Unlike the electoral political game outside the universities, within universities women had the right to vote for the elections of their representatives, who formed the committees of the various student associations. The student associations were based on two main criteria: faculty of enrolment and geographical provenance. Most students therefore belonged to two associations. For this reason, within universities it was important to have both men and women voting for the legionary candidates. In faculties where women were the majority, like the Faculties of Letters (and the Humanities in general), the support of women students was crucial.

These concerns emerge from a meeting of legionary students from the Dolj county, a district in the Oltenia region, around 200 kilometres west of Bucharest. The county capital,

¹³⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. I/ 1935, f. 414.

Craiova, was an important city with a growing local legionary organization. In light of the forthcoming elections for the committee of the association of students from Dolj, the legionary students decided to involve Nicoleta Nicolescu in their strategic plans. Craiova was Nicolescu's city and one of the centers of her legionary activity. Moreover, she knew the legionary women students from the region very well. For the elections, she was supposed to choose two women candidates among the legionary students to attract the votes of girls.¹³⁹

Eventually, the strategies implemented within the universities led the Legion toward political success among the students. According to a police report from 1935, all the student centers in the country were under legionary control, with different degrees of intensity and devotion.¹⁴⁰ This report deals mostly with the possibility of a national general student strike and analyses the readiness of the various university centers to follow Traian Cotigă and the other legionaries in this kind of action. What emerges is a certain ambivalence toward extreme actions such as a general strike, with a vast majority of the students ready to go on strike only as a last resort. The legionary student leadership seems to have known very well the inclinations of the "student masses". During these years of expansion, the Legion displayed a great ability to read the atmosphere at the universities and the mood of the students. For this reason, they did not engage in great, spectacular actions which could have escaped their control, or even failed, such as a national student strike. The strategies implemented were more gradual, more cautious, but aimed for thorough "legionarization" of the students' demands and expectations.

The success of the movement within the universities was acknowledged by the authorities and transformed by the legionary rhetoric into a momentous "revolution" of the youth. Alexandru Cantacuzino, a prominent legionary member and ideologue, described this "revolution" at an international student congress held in Bordeaux in 1935. In his intervention, he depicted the "deep transformations" occurring in Romanian universities. The "new spirit" embodied by the Legion had permeated "the totality of the student masses", revolutionizing the life of a generation.¹⁴¹ As Gheorghe Furdui, another student leader, put it at the national congress held in Craiova in 1935, the Legion brought the students from a "static nationalism" to a "dynamic mysticism".¹⁴² In the manufacturing of its image, the Legion presented itself as the only movement able to produce this sort of "existential" turn in

¹³⁹ Ibid., f. 386.

¹⁴⁰ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 39/1935, ff. 23-24.

¹⁴¹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 5/1929, ff. 274-275.

¹⁴² ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 19/1934, f. 203.

student activism, in which material demands and achievements were part of a much wider and all-encompassing political project.

In this sense, once a relatively stable support at the universities had been established, the Legionary Movement was able to start a new phase, already envisaged in the long-term plans elaborated by Codreanu in 1934. In 1936, the projects of expansion outside the universities and the student world were implemented with the creation of a section for workers. Alongside the inclusion of followers from different backgrounds, the movement introduced a diversification of activities. The two main projects undertaken by the Legion in this period were the implementation of a series of work camps throughout the country and the opening of several economic enterprises.

The ideological underpinnings, the organization, and the role of these activities in the Legionary Movement will be explored in chapter two. The peculiarity of these new enterprises, launched outside the universities, was their deep interrelation with the student world and the involvement of many students, both men and women, in these projects. This interconnectedness sprung from the idea of the Legion as a complete transformation of society, to be achieved through the gradual incorporation of more and more followers into “legionary life”. Thus, the legionary student wing, after having assured relatively stable support from within the student associations, was able to engage more intensely in other forms of activism.

As will be explored widely in the following chapter, most of the legionaries to participate in the work camps were students. The work camps functioned throughout the country as construction sites, where the legionaries built schools and churches, and repaired roads and bridges, sometimes also helping the poorest peasants in the fields. These projects were generally undertaken during the summer months, and students were the most suitable participants. They were on holiday; they did not have stable jobs and so were able to travel and spend time far from home. A relative majority of them did not yet have family or children. This allowed more freedom of movement, and, most importantly, meant they could afford to do voluntary work for few weeks.

As far as the other activities implemented in this period are concerned, the economic enterprises were more closely embedded in the daily life of the students, especially in Bucharest, where these activities began. The hinge of this economic business was a cooperative, divided into two main wings: firstly, by direct commerce through shops, and secondly, through a network of restaurants and canteens. These operations were very limited at the beginning but developed steadily in 1936 and 1937. In planning the organization of the

cooperative in September 1935, Codreanu thought of employing students from the poorest backgrounds, both men and women, as workers. The salary was supposed to cover their needs, mostly food and clothing. Moreover, the students would have worked in shifts so as to grant them enough time to attend classes and study.¹⁴³

In January 1937, the legionary students were not only working at the shops and restaurants in the city, but they brought this model directly into the university. The legionary leading committee of a student house managed to remove the director and to reorganize the administration. The student house became a legionary independent enterprise, with the canteen ran by the students. The only external worker was the cook, while the foodstuffs were supplied by the legionary cooperative. The students worked in shifts as waiters and their income was raised by opening the canteen to students who did not reside at the student house. Thus, the economic model envisaged and implemented by the Legionary Movement became embedded in the university experience and was based on students' self-management.

The years from 1935 to 1937 represented the heyday of the Legion; a period of great expansion, of the development of a wide range of activities, and, in December 1937, an unexpected and major success at the national elections. The "Everything for the Country" Party became the third party of Greater Romania, taking by surprise not only the legionary leadership itself, but the king and the political establishment as well. The tolerance of the authorities toward the movement, already fluctuating in 1937, ended abruptly. King Carol II proclaimed a royal dictatorship in February 1938 and all political parties were formally outlawed. Legionary members, especially from the higher ranks, were imprisoned *en masse*. Codreanu was also arrested and sentenced to ten years of prison, but he was eventually assassinated under the king's orders during a transfer to a different prison in November 1938.

The outlawing, the imprisonments, and the shock produced by the death of Codreanu, all led to a period of great transformation within the Legion. The movement regrouped as an underground organization, and, after a time of relative chaos, its most devoted members and sympathizers continued to operate under the guide of new and old leaders. The following at the universities, however, decreased, for the risks connected with forbidden political activity were high. Students were particularly vulnerable to permanent exclusion from university and other severe disciplinary measures, not to mention imprisonment or confinement. In May

¹⁴³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 321.

1938, the authorities already registered a general distancing of the “student masses” from the Legionary Movement.¹⁴⁴

This general and gradual decrease in following did not mean, however, a complete disappearance of the Legion from student life. Strong legionary currents were still registered at many faculties, but the activities of the legionary students became much more discreet and concealed. Under new political conditions, legionary students could not trust their colleagues, thus secrecy was of the utmost importance when it came to continuing their underground activities.¹⁴⁵ In January 1939, several networks of legionary students were discovered in Bucharest, despite the attempts of the authorities to eradicate all legionary activity from the universities.¹⁴⁶ In most cases, however, legionary affiliation dated back to the period of 1935-1936, when the movement registered its greatest success. As far as new student followers were concerned, the places of recruitment shifted from universities to high schools.

A section devoted to high-school pupils had existed in the Legionary Movement from the very beginning. These organizations, called “Cross Brotherhoods” (Frății de Cruce), were already envisaged in the first programmatic articles of *Pământul strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land), in the fall of 1927. The “Cross Brotherhoods” were designed for teenagers from 13 to 19 years old and they were supposed to function as a school of legionary education, where future members took their first steps into political activism.¹⁴⁷ While the “Cross Brotherhoods” were organized and active throughout the country during the Legion’s period of success, their role acquired a new importance in the underground movement. From 1938 onward, the main great sections of the Legion, composed of students, workers, and intellectuals, were closely followed by the police and their members were often arrested. In this period high-school pupils became in this period a more suitable target, as potentially already “legionarized” future workers and university students.

In October 1938, the police discovered a thriving legionary youth organization in Arad. The leader of this network of “Cross Brotherhoods” was Ionel Moldovan, who was a “passionate” legionary engaged in propaganda among the students at an all-boys’ high school. His sister Delia was also involved in this activity. Through her, legionary propaganda was extended to the all-girls’ high school where she was enrolled.¹⁴⁸ The role of the “Cross Brotherhoods” took on even wider proportions during the second period of legionary

¹⁴⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 278, vol. II/1938, f. 115.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., ff. 114-115.

¹⁴⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 252/1939, ff. 119-121.

¹⁴⁷ C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, “Legiunea ‘Arhanghelul Mihail’”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 August 1927, I, 2, pp. 3-4.

¹⁴⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 16/1938, f. 32.

underground activity, after the so-called legionary rebellion of January 21-23, 1941, and the definitive outlawing of the movement by the regime of Antonescu. In this period, as will be described in more detail in chapter four, the feminine and youth sections became crucial to the movement's survival.

According to a police report from May 1941, high-school girls acted as couriers in the underground legionary organization, communicating orders and information between different groups. Moreover, legionary high-school pupils, both boys and girls, were charged with informing their leaders of any aspect of their knowledge in relation to the Legionary Movement, by setting up a sort of information service. The rules of secrecy were very strict, and the members of the "Cross Brotherhoods" did not personally know the leaders of the county or city organization, only maintaining direct contact with their group leader.¹⁴⁹ The central role acquired by the youth organizations was observed by the police in different regions, signalling thus a relatively coherent strategy within the underground legionary organization.

In March 1941, in Constanța, the important port city on the Black Sea, the underground legionary movement followed the "usual" forms of organization, with one distinctive element. The secret orders were now communicated through a network of "absolutely trustworthy" high-school boys and girls. Alongside them, legionaries who had always acted secretly were used as couriers.¹⁵⁰ Secrecy was thus the key word in the underground legionary organization and to this purpose it was vital to recruit couriers previously unknown to the authorities. Eventually, some of them were discovered and arrested anyway. In Craiova, in spring 1941, police arrested Viorica Ignătescu, the leader of the "Cross Brotherhood" of the Orthodox Lycée of the town. From the police interrogations emerged an extensive network of active legionary groups, in particular composed of members from the feminine and the workers' section.

Supported by the courier service of the teenagers and backed by the remaining legionary intellectuals, the groups active in the underground organization were mostly engaged in collecting money for imprisoned legionaries and their families. Moreover, they also tried to boost the morale and the hopes of the members and sympathizers by propagandizing the idea of an upcoming seizure of power. The arrest of other high-school pupils, both boys and girls, from Craiova and other nearby towns, revealed the very intense

¹⁴⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 14/1941, f. 135.

¹⁵⁰ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 30/1941, f. 13.

activity of the youth organization in the region.¹⁵¹ Despite the surveillance of the police and the arrests, the activity in the Oltenia region was still very intense in September 1941. The center of the “Cross Brotherhoods” was in Craiova, where members had close ties with the command in Bucharest. This time, 38 persons were arrested, mostly high-school boys and girls, involved at various levels in the underground organization.¹⁵²

In September 1941, a similar situation was also reported in Bukovina, especially in the Suceava county, though less intense and less organized. What the police noticed, however, was a “stagnation” in the activity of the older legionaries. On the contrary, the youth section was trying to reorganize itself, especially by recruiting new sympathizers throughout the secondary schools.¹⁵³ The new centrality acquired by teenage members in the underground legionary organization was thus observable in many regions, from Bucharest to Bukovina, to the coast of the Black Sea. Presumably, the conditions imposed by secrecy were partially behind this strategic turn toward the youth. Yet the proportions of this phenomenon are not explicable only through the legionary decision to shift their attention and propaganda toward the youth.

The involvement of a conspicuous number of teenage girls and boys in the underground legionary organization would require much longer and more thorough research. The apparent readiness to politicization among pupils, boys and girls alike, surely had several underpinnings. The exploration of this phenomenon would require a deep inquiry into the social backgrounds of the pupils, the degree of “legionarization” of their towns, and the tolerance of professors and school principals towards these forms of political activity. Families might have also played a role, especially the presence of politically engaged older siblings. Despite the scarcity of information at this very early stage of research, it is nevertheless possible to affirm that this political engagement should not be dismissed as “child’s play”. Part of the fascination for the Legion in this period could have been ignited by the secrecy and the sense of importance gained through the involvement in a “forbidden” movement. But the risks faced by the pupils were real and many were arrested. Moreover, despite their young age, boys and girls were entrusted with important tasks, participating actively and directly in the Legion’s underground survival.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., ff. 79-80.

¹⁵² ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 22/1941, f. 242.

¹⁵³ Ibid., f. 224.

Conclusions

The success of the Legionary Movement among the students at Greater Romania's universities and, to some extent, high schools, was achieved after long and complex struggles. Year after year, the movement's ideologues and activists elaborated new strategies, developed and improved their ability to mobilize, and enhanced their communication skills. Two interrelated strategies can be identified as the backbone of legionary university politics: empathy with and monopolization of students' disillusion, dissatisfaction, and demands. Legionary student leaders, and above them, the legionary leadership involved in student activism in their youth, presented themselves as perfect interlocutors for the students, able to listen, to understand, and to find solutions to their problems. To this empathic attitude, the Legion's strategy added to the monopolization of these problems the gradual but thorough transformation of demonstrations and student congresses into legionary events. They did this through the systematic exclusion of different and dissenting voices and ideas, which was not devoid of violence.

Despite many and recurrent disciplinary measures, including arrests and threats of further punishment, the relative tolerance of the authorities, at national and university levels, allowed the Legion to prosper among the students. The state, engaged in its great nation-building process, was eager to benefit from a certain degree of "healthy" nationalism promoted at the universities. Even when this nationalism proved to have crossed the thin and ever-changing line between "healthy" and "unhealthy", the authorities hoped to be able to tame the movement's most extremist features. At the height of the Legion's success at the universities, displayed with magnificence at the student congress held in Târgu Mureș in 1936, there was still no intervention from the state, only strict supervision. Only when things went too far, after the surprising success of the "Everything for the Country" Party at the elections of December 1937, did the state, or rather the king, react. But this reaction, during the two years of the royal dictatorship, threw the country into a spiral of legal abuse, discrimination, and extreme violence.

Alongside the ambivalent tolerance of the state, the support and, in several cases, the open affiliation to the Legion of university professors fostered the movement's success among students. This phenomenon was central in the development of the first nucleus of the Legion in Iași, since the founder of the National Christian Defense League (LANC), Alexandru C. Cuza, was a renowned and respected professor at the Faculty of Law. Codreanu

and his followers took their first political steps as organizers of the youth section of the LANC, and benefited enormously, politically and personally, from the sympathy and backing of part of the university establishment. The phenomenon took on impressive proportions at the University of Bucharest from 1933 to 1937, the period of the movement's steady growth and expansion. The open support of several professors, who were also influential and established personalities of the city's (and the country's) cultural scene, offered the Legion an unexpected intellectual legitimacy, increasing its popularity at the university.

The participation of women in the legionary student activism unfolded in more gradual and complex ways. During the Legion's early experimental years, the involvement of women followed more informal paths, at the conjunction of personal relationships and the encounter with the politicized atmosphere of the university. In Iași, where the first nucleus of the movement formed and developed during the 1920s, the meeting with the university was disappointing for many students. Young students, both men and women, often the first members of their families to have access to higher education, poured into the University of Iași from the smaller towns of the Moldavia region and from the countryside.

What they found was probably very different from what they had expected: a lack of materials and books, and a university that could hardly provide basic services, such as heating and enough room for the students to attend classes. These hardships were experienced in similar ways by men and women alike. Thus, when the students' demands and demonstrations were monopolized by the Legion, women students could also relate to these demands and expectations. As a result of the strong nationalist ideology and the anti-Semitic stances, the LANC and, after the split, also the Legion of the Archangel Michael, had at the core of their propaganda separations along ethnic and religious lines, while the participation of Romanian (and Orthodox Christian) women started to be envisaged as part of their political programs.

The more informal involvement of women in the first nucleus of the Legion, when they were recruited mostly among family and friends, acquired a more defined structure toward the end of the 1920s. The creation of a feminine section was part of the attempt to define, both ideologically and from an organizational point of view, the participation of women in the legionary political project. A major transformation was represented by the movement's move to Bucharest and its steady expansion from 1932-1933 onward, first and foremost among the students at the university. The gradual "conquest" of the universities and of student associations pursued by Codreanu comprised a vital and engaged involvement of women students. Several of them, like Nicoleta Nicolescu, Anastasia Popescu, Cristina

Stănciulea, among others, were entrusted with important roles, as organizers of feminine student activism, as couriers, and as propagandists. Women students held separate meetings, during which they discussed strategies and actions designed to expand the feminine section, within and outside universities.

In the mid-1930s, the presence of women at the universities was no longer a novelty, for their numbers had increased steadily throughout the previous decade. However, the massive enrolment of women was presented, in 1934, as a “social problem of great importance” by the rector of the University of Cluj Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă.¹⁵⁴ This social “problem” consisted mostly in the potential turning away of women from their important social roles as wives and mothers in favor of the pursuit of a career. From within the Legionary Movement as well, almost in the same period, an internal report from the province ferociously criticized the impact of higher education and urban life on young women. According to the author of the report, ninety per cent of women students were immoral and devoted only to fashion and idleness; their souls corrupted by “Jewish” and “masonic” novels and movies. The other ten per cent, “aware of their mission”, meaning marriage and motherhood, were not only less devoted to their studies, which was deemed as a “natural and beautiful” result of their feminine inclinations, but also burdened by material concerns. What emerges from this report is a ruthless and misogynist picture, leaving almost no room for the participation of women in the legionary political project. Or only for a very disappointing one.¹⁵⁵

However, this hyper-critical approach was not very common within the Legion, or, at least, seldom expressed in such extreme forms. On the contrary, in the mid-1930s, the recruitment of women students was part of legionary university politics, especially in light of the “feminization” of some faculties, namely the Faculties of Humanities and Foreign Languages. Altogether, the presence of women was vital to the development of the legionary political project. The movement’s leaders and ideologues were well aware that universities, with their highly politicized atmosphere, were among the most fertile grounds for attracting women. In often contradictory ways, the Legion attempted to create an ideological formula able to reconcile the promotion of women’s education and their “supreme” roles as wives and mothers.

While education and professional life were acceptable for legionary women, the role and the value of personal and social advancement of women, and men, were subordinated to

¹⁵⁴ Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, p. 137.

¹⁵⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 109/1934, ff. 16-17.

the Legion's prerogatives and political projects. A legionary woman could study, become a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, but, at the same time, after the university years, was still expected to marry and have children. A professional career was not deemed necessarily incompatible with family life, as long as both lives, professional and personal, were "legionary" lives. The support of students, both men and women, was vital for the Legion, and not only to maintain the "legionary spirit" alive within universities generation after generation. The legionary leadership also hoped for the students' political engagement to last far beyond the university years. This latter aspect was particularly important as far as women were concerned, for unfamiliarity with politics and activism was still a common feature in women's lives. For this purpose, legionary ideology promoted and actively pursued the formation of legionary families and legionary communities. The role of marriage, private choices and public life, cohabitation and economic cooperation within legionary families and communities constitute the main subject of the following chapter.

The Politicization of Family Networks

Introduction

As Oliver Jens Schmitt has written in his biography of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the history of the Legionary Movement was “a family tale”.¹⁵⁶ The concept of “family” encompasses here a broad array of meanings and definitions. Family can be understood as a group defined by relations of kinship, and, more widely, also as a “community of belief”, whose members share values, activities, and expectations. The so-called “legionary family” constituted one of the movement’s ideological hallmarks. This concept was present in the legionary vocabulary and mindset from the very beginning, but it acquired more complex features and elaborations throughout the years in relation to the Legion’s development. The relationship between “biological” or “nuclear” families and the broader “legionary family” were also composite and constantly reshaped by experience.

As we will see, the concept of “family”, in all its various meanings, was omnipresent in legionary discourse from the very beginning. Since family was considered the basic unit of society, of the nation, and of life itself, its importance in legionary ideology was repeatedly stressed. Behind this ardent concern laid the supposed “threat” to the family posed by the general “moral decay” of the individual, denounced by legionary ideologues from the pages of their magazine *Pământul Strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land). In an article from 1928, Ion Moța, one of the Legion’s founders, analyzed this supposed “moral decay” of the individual of his time, extended, through an ascending climax, to the family and the nation as a whole. The soul of the individual was “lost, wandering, rotten”, “the Christian spirit is nearly extinguished”, and the Antichrist ruled over individuals’ lives. The decay of sexual mores was one of the most visible signs of this “corruption” and the youth increasingly indulged in “fornication”. The consequences of this “sin” were described in apocalyptic terms, as “calamities, tragedies, disasters”, affecting the life of the individual, of society and of the state.

Similarly, Moța analyzed the disappearance of the “honest family”, based on the “severe morality” of past generations. He opposed the decadence of his times to the exemplarity of the ancient Roman family, when “sublime” mothers and fathers were ready and eager to sacrifice their own children for the country’s sake. Lastly, the “corruption” of

¹⁵⁶ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 14.

the nation was inseparably intertwined with the “invasion” of the Jews, legalized and encouraged by the Constitution of 1923. However, the “soul of the nation” was not yet entirely “destroyed”; some exceptions still resisted in this wasted landscape, and the salvation of Romania was possible, although only through a new system.¹⁵⁷

Above the rhetorical commonplaces permeating this article, the idea of “family” emerges as a defining element of legionary ideology. The stress on the role of the family was accompanied by another important ideological underpinning: the concept of defense. The Legion was not only supposed to defend the family, but it also was a family in itself, whose members built a defense against the “threats” posed by the “new times”. Between the lines of these rhetorical sentences, it is possible to read deeper into the concerns about men and women, families, mothers and fathers, the regulation of sexuality and the political meanings attached to all these elements. The Legion, especially at the very beginning, had the urgent need to fabricate an image of itself as capable of legitimizing not only its own existence as a political movement, but also the co-presence of men and women in that movement.

As we have seen, the first nucleus of the Legion sprung from the student movement. The connections between the activists were based initially on relations of kinship and friendship, relations that included the young women involved in political activism. When the Legion became an autonomous movement, the unusually tight contacts with women made their presence not only visible but also the target of attacks and suspicion from rival movements and parties. Thus, during its first years of existence, the movement’s ideologues tailored a sort of legionary “morality”, in an attempt to create an acceptable and legitimate ideological foundation for the inclusion of women. This inclusion was vital from different standpoints. Not only because women were already active and involved when these elaborations took place, but also because women were an essential part of the imagined “legionary family”.

Complex and problematic issues were at stake in these ideological elaborations, and, even more, in the practical experiences of the various types of “families” involved in the legionary political project. The role of marriage, sexuality, motherhood and fatherhood, the separation of private from public, or their conflation, were all issues addressed and lived by the legionary members at various stages of the movement’s development. At times, the overly rhetorical claims on the sacredness of the family, of marriage, or of motherhood signaled a situation of “disorder”, which needed elaboration or clarification. The various

¹⁵⁷ Ion I. Moța, “Răspuns unei întâmpinări”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 September 1927, I, 4, pp. 8-11.

political experiences and experiments carried out by the Legion throughout its history shaped and modified the concepts of family, home, and communal living.

The first section of this chapter is devoted to the relationships between marriage and politics within the Legionary Movement. The capital importance of marriage emerges powerfully from several standpoints. Marriage signaled an important symbolic and political distinction among women, who saw a modification to their status through marriage and entered a different sphere of allegiance to and participation in the movement's political activities. The distinction between married and unmarried women, however, was interwoven with and complicated by other factors, such as their roles within the Legion, the positions of their husbands in the legionary leadership, and, also, personal choices and inclinations. Some legionary women, though wives of leaders, were seldom involved directly in the movement's activities; other women remained unmarried, and several of these held leadership positions; a few others were married but appear to have been more politically active and involved than their husbands. All these situations were present within the movement concomitantly, and these different experiences did not serve as a ground for division into separate groups.

In addition, marriage was one of the most important vehicles for network creation and stabilization. Especially during the Legion's first years of existence, at the end of the 1920s, marriages served to cement relationships, to create strong bonds of trust and affection, and, to some extent, to dissipate the suspicions of "immorality" surrounding the presence of women. However, the role of marriage as a social glue among different legionary groups and networks did not lose its power during the movement's period of expansion. Personal relationships maintained their centrality as a propaganda method, and, moreover, the general instability of the Legion's political and legal position required the careful construction of a safety net. As we will see, families were vital in moments of crisis, and, conversely, close family members were often the most exposed to the risks connected with illegal political activity.

Lastly, marriage constituted one of the basic elements of the "legionary society"; the ideal model of life promoted and at times experienced by legionaries during the movement's history, especially during the mid-1930s. This model was based on a communal way of living, via the attempt to implement households that transcended not only the nuclear family, but also relations of kinship. Nevertheless, despite the legionary desire to go beyond relations of kinship, this community of belief seems to have required, at least at the beginning, forms of preexisting bonds of affection and intimacy, at least among some of the members. For this

reason, marriages among legionary members were strongly encouraged and supported, and their weddings were celebrated as important “family” and “communal” events.

In the following section, I will explore the legionary experience and interpretation of the so-called private/public divide. The analysis of the eminently political nature of this divide, and the way the Legionary Movement in its ideology and practice treated it and experienced it, will constitute the main subject of this subchapter. The problematic interactions between private and public took place inside actual “houses”, which functioned as political headquarters, private homes, offices, and shops, at different times and in different situations. Starting from the first experience of this kind in Iași, the focus of the analysis will then shift to the two “houses” that the Legion subsequently occupied in Bucharest. These two houses present both similar and contrasting features, each of them representing different angles of “legionary life”. In addition, the establishment of work camps throughout the country created a sort of geography of legionary homes. The work camp represented another important political laboratory where legionaries experienced communal living and created extended families whose members were united by a combination of personal relationships and shared beliefs.

Lastly, the final section will be devoted to the legionary conceptualization and experience of this extended “family”, from the most basic ideological statements to the practical experiences of the legionary family. This model has common features with religious communities but also with other political projects engaged in the creation of different and “new” forms of society. Members of the legionary family sometimes lived together, but it was not a necessary requirement. Most importantly, they participated in the same transformative endeavor that aimed to “legionarize” their lives and their activities. This project encompassed personal, social, and economic aspects, and had as its ultimate goal the ideal of complete self-sufficiency. The gender relations among members of the extended legionary family will be analyzed in this context, together with the roles imagined for and played by women in the “legionary utopia”.

Marriage and Politics

At the confluence of personal, social, and political considerations, marriage represented one of the most complex ideological and practical issues related to the involvement of women in the Legionary Movement. Marriage was tightly interwoven with other significant issues, such as control over sexuality and dynamics of power and allegiances. As we will see, marriage was a highly “public” and political event in the Legionary Movement. Personal feelings and bonds of love and affection were important but were subordinated to the value these feelings and bonds had for the movement, for its stability and growth. The complex interconnections between marital status, political activity and power relations will emerge from the exploration of legionary marriage policies and their transformation during the movement’s history.

Two years before the foundation of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, one marriage had already been transformed into a highly political and politicized event, having received nation-wide attention and press coverage. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, after a spectacular trial for assassination which ended with his acquittal, married his fiancée Elena Ilinoiu on June 14, 1925.¹⁵⁸ Ilinoiu was a friend of Codreanu’s sisters, she had attended university in Cluj and the two had met during the intense years of Codreanu’s political activism among the students in 1922 and 1923.¹⁵⁹ The wedding was celebrated in the small Moldavian town of Focșani, which had a strong LANC following, and gathered thousands of attendants. The participation of a large number of anti-Semitic students raised serious concerns among the Jewish population of the town and police ordered the closure of Jewish shops as a preventive measure.¹⁶⁰ The same day, nationalist students in Bucharest organized a march through the streets of the city to celebrate the wedding, thus turning a private event into an occasion for a public rally.¹⁶¹

The wedding was a spectacular event, with thousands of attendants, mostly in traditional peasant costumes. The bride arrived on a massive oxcart, food was consumed in the fields, and traditional music and dances were performed.¹⁶² The nationalist nature of the event was anchored in the peasant environment, through landscape, clothing, and music. The

¹⁵⁸ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 51/1925, f. 2.

¹⁵⁹ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁰ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 11/1925, f. 9.

¹⁶¹ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 11/1925, f. 12.

¹⁶² Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 85.

linkage between student nationalism and the history and natural landscape of the country was already visible on this occasion, but these connections would become a central ideological and rhetorical pillar of the Legion. On this occasion, a sympathetic reporter from a local Moldavian newspaper described the atmosphere of the wedding in highly rhetorical terms, as the embodiment of a fairy tale, which had resurrected venerable peasant traditions, almost forgotten amidst the “flood of foreign customs, beliefs and songs”.¹⁶³

The propagandistic nature of the wedding emerged powerfully from its location, display and attendants. The event was also filmed, but the film was later confiscated by the police and destroyed.¹⁶⁴ However, a series of photographs of the couple circulated before and after the wedding, and they were printed and distributed or sold as postcards among the sympathizers and supporters of the nationalist student movement and the LANC.¹⁶⁵ In one of the photographs, the future bride and groom posed in traditional peasant costumes. In another, Codreanu was portrayed seated, again in peasant costume, while Elena Ilinoiu was standing, wearing a dress, enclosing him in her arms, almost dominating the portrait. In the photograph of the ceremony, they both wore traditional wedding garments, and, on their heads, they bore the traditional crowns used in the orthodox wedding ritual, but with the addition of a swastika. The photographs illustrate the political dimension of every detail, and the personal union of the young couple became a vehicle for Codreanu’s political activity.

In August 1927, soon after the foundation of the Legion, another wedding offered the opportunity to introduce the issue of marriage into the Legion’s ideological framework. Codreanu’s sister, Iridenta, married Ion I. Moța, Codreanu’s closest friend and political right-hand man since the early 1920s. A long article in *Pământul strămoșesc* described the event in great detail and was rich with suggestions on ideal gender roles, family life and women’s presence within the Legion.¹⁶⁶ The contrast with Codreanu’s “legendary” wedding was striking: only 30 attendants instead of “one hundred thousand”. It was not a moment of “delirious joy”, but a private and discreet ceremony.¹⁶⁷ Celebrated with a “strong Christian and nationalist spirit”, the wedding was described as highly symbolic in all its features. The ceremony was held at Neamț Monastery. Built during the reign of Stephan the Great in the fifteenth century, Neamț was (and still is) one of the most important religious settlements of

¹⁶³ Rep. [sic], “O nuntă de altă data...”, *Studentimea la sate*, 28 June 1925, I, 1, p. 4, in ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 49/1925, f. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 85.

¹⁶⁵ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 51/1925, f. 1, 4.

¹⁶⁶ “Nunta lui Moța”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 September 1927, I, 3, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶⁷ Codreanu’s wedding is briefly reminded in an article of the first issue, see Scut. [sic], “Rezultatul alegerilor”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 August 1927, I, 1, p. 8.

the Romanian Orthodox Church. The wedding banquet took place in the woods, accompanied by flute music played by two shepherds. Every detail reminded the reader of the Legion's connection to Romania's heritage, natural landscape, and peasant traditions.

The bishop's sermon on the "secrets of marriage" was reproduced in the article and it contained significant opinions on family and gender roles. The family was a "small society", the foundation "of the nation and of humankind". As in every society or state, the family had its own laws and its own constitution. "The head of the small society is the man", "his duty is to love his wife and his household", "his right is to be obeyed". The wife, besides being obedient and dutiful, should devote her love and her heart to the household, in order to make it beautiful and pleasant, "as birds use their own feathers to make their nests sweeter". The reproduction of the sermon in the article can be read as an ideological statement. In the Legion's ideal "new life", family represented the basic unit of society, where its values are first embodied and experienced.

Husband and wife had their own duties, performed in a spirit of love and mutual respect. Nonetheless, they were not equal, but their relationship was based, as the Legion itself, on the principle of hierarchy. Interestingly, among more gender-specific duties and qualities, the subject of motherhood was absent, and the bishop's sermon just briefly mentioned that "family is the source of life itself". The specific feminine role addressed here was the wife's responsibility for maintaining the beauty and pleasantness of the household. Some of the qualities traditionally assigned to women, such as carefulness and a refined sense of beauty were transferred into marriage as a wife's duty to ensure the happiness and well-being of her family and husband.

From the brief list of women attending Iridenta Codreanu's wedding, marriage also emerges as a kind of demarcation line, which divided the women in two groups. The difference in marital status produced a difference in the way women were identified. Married women were listed by the surname of their husbands, except for Codreanu's mother and wife, Eliza and Elena. On the contrary, unmarried women were listed only by their first name. Most likely, it was customary at that time to distinguish between married and unmarried women, and the two lists are preceded by the corresponding Romanian denominations of the honorifics "Mrs." (*doamne*) and "Misses" (*domnișoare*). Nevertheless, the absence of surnames from the list of the unmarried women represents an interesting detail. This omission can be read as a simple sign of discretion, due to the well-known political activities and orientation of the Legion's founders. However, the familiar tone used for the girls' names, visible in some diminutives (such as Ili, Tanti, Eugenița), can suggest their closer relationship

to and some form of involvement in the movement's first nucleus. Furthermore, the intentional or spontaneous shifting from the formal to the informal register in presenting married and unmarried women can also be read as a difference in the treatment of the two groups of women. After marriage, women seemed to assume a new identity, symbolized by the passage to the surname of the husband. Likewise, their friendships and family relations acquired a nuance of deference.

Marriage thus emerges as a factual and symbolic boundary among women, a boundary that was nonetheless characterized by problematic and contradictory features. Since the emergence of "gender" as a category of analysis in the late 1980s, many studies have focused on the complex relationships between gender and nationalism.¹⁶⁸ If "nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope", the participation of women in national projects has always been characterized by contradictory mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, by simultaneous marginality and centrality.¹⁶⁹ The contradictory relationship of women to nationalism is ultimately based on the original philosophical exclusion of women from politics. In her now classic work, Carole Pateman has argued, through the feminist analysis of the social contract theory, that "the right of men over women was *not political*".¹⁷⁰ By rereading the work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Freud, she has shown that the western political edifice was therefore built upon the tacit assumption that the rule of men over women is "natural", outside and beyond the new-born social and political system created through the social contract.

Carole Pateman's theoretical shift from the "patriarchal" to the "fraternal" social contract opened the path for even more insightful analyses of women's inclusion and exclusion in the formulation of political projects.¹⁷¹ In the case of the Legionary Movement, the integral nationalism professed by its members was strongly connected with the concept of "fraternity". Moreover, the generational separation of the youth from their "fathers" transformed vertical relations of power into horizontal social and political bonds. This

¹⁶⁸ Joan W. Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, in Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 28-50 (first published in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No.5, December 1986).

¹⁶⁹ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), p. 93.

¹⁷⁰ Carole Pateman, *The Fraternal Social Contract*, in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State. New European Perspectives* (London – New York: Verso, 1988), p. 107 (original emphasis).

¹⁷¹ "The contract is made by brothers, or a fraternity. It is no accident that fraternity appears historically hand in hand with liberty and equality, nor that it means exactly what it says: brotherhood.", in Carole Pateman, *The Fraternal Social Contract*, p. 109. The "fraternal" nature of the social contract relies on Pateman's critical reading of the version of the social contract (and the myth of the parricide) present in Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), with some insights from Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Totem and Taboo*.

horizontality, as already mentioned above, was nevertheless based on the principles of “faith, order, work, hierarchy, discipline”.¹⁷² The legionary community of brothers was also opened to include “sisters”, which became, especially in the early years, the most common term used to define legionary women members. Their belonging to the Romanian nation and to the same generation made this extension of fraternity to young women possible; a process which had started in a more spontaneous and informal fashion during the student protests. However, marriage divided women’s lives into two distinct stages, it marked a change in their personal, social, and political status.

In the legionary ideology marriage was important for men and women alike. However, while for men marriage was an event among many others, for women it was a life’s pinnacle. A married woman represented “disorder” for the orderly community of legionary “brothers”.¹⁷³ Once married, a woman accepted her husband as “a master for the whole of life”, as Rousseau claimed in his *Émile* and as the bishop reminded Iridenta during her wedding with Ion Moța.¹⁷⁴ As a result, a wife introduced an element of verticality into the Legion’s horizontal fraternity and obeyed a different “master” to the movement’s recognized leader. This would ultimately produce a clash of allegiances, which transferred the married woman from her status of “sister”, of companion, to a different level. Her primary allegiance to her husband was recognized by all the legionary “brothers”. This was linguistically translated into the omission of the very first names of married women and their consequent “natural” identification through the surname of their husbands.

On September 30, 1928, the marriage of Ilie Gârneață with Elvira Ionescu concluded the series of marriages within the small circle of the legionary leadership. Celebrated in the bride’s birthplace in the Moldavian countryside, the wedding reunited the closest friends of the couple, together with delegates of the nationalist student movement from the universities of Iași and Bucharest. Godparents (nași) of the spouses were Corneliu Șumuleanu, the already-encountered professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Iași, and his wife.¹⁷⁵ With this marriage, the three couples at the Legion’s forefront entered, to some extent, into a different stage. Corneliu Codreanu and Elena Ilinoiu, Iridenta Codreanu and Ion Moța, Ilie Gârneață and Elvira Ionescu, had all shared similar experiences as university students in the early

¹⁷² C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, “Legiunea ‘Arhanghelul Mihail’”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 August 1927, I, 2, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷³ The expression is taken from Pateman’s formulation in hers *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

¹⁷⁴ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or on Education* (Basic Books: New York 1979), p. 404, cited in Carole Pateman, *The Fraternal Social Contract*, p. 108.

¹⁷⁵ “Bucurie în familia Legionarilor”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 October 1928, II, 20, p. 8.

1920s, had become involved in political activism and had undergone gradual radicalization. They formed, despite their young age, a sort of “old guard” of the Legion, whose activity and engagement dated back to their university years. Their personal and political relationships were cemented by marriage, forming thus the first and strongest nucleus of the legionary “family” envisaged in the movement’s ideological statements.

However, while Codreanu maintained his status of uncontested leader and Moța and Gârneață were among the most important legionary members at both the ideological and organizational levels, their wives took a step back from the forefront. Their commitment to the Legion was not in question, but their activities became of a more discreet nature. Iridenta Codreanu (Moța after marriage) and Elvira Ionescu (Gârneață) soon became mothers, and the latter combined her legionary activism with her work as a gynecologist in Iași, until her death in 1935. In Bucharest, during the 1930s, the expanding involvement of university students led to a more intense participation of young women in important roles. The former activists of the older generation, now wives and often mothers, were involved in less spectacular and less dangerous activities. Nevertheless, being married to the leaders offered them a different status within and outside the Legion.

The ambivalent nature of this “special” status most clearly emerged during the moments of crisis the movement underwent at various times in the 1930s and from 1941 onwards. When the Legion was outlawed in 1933 and, again, and with more severe consequences, in 1938, the mass arrests of legionary men and their imprisonment revealed to the police a network of support and assistance. The wives of many prominent legionary members had close ties with “ladies” from the high society of Bucharest, as I will describe in more detail in chapter three. Unlike younger legionary women and the rank-and-file, the wives of legionary leaders and renowned members, though often less involved in direct political actions, were at the forefront of a less visible yet vital network of supporters.

According to a police report from 1939, Elena Codreanu, together with the wife of the prominent legionary member Gheorghe Clime and other legionary women, were well acquainted with Princess Zoe Sturdza, a strong supporter of the Legion together with the rest of her family. Legionary women were apparently habitués of the princess’ house, and, apart from Elena Codreanu and Clime’s wife, legionary member Dochita Gherman, a worker from the Army Pyrotechnics Factories, also frequented Princess Sturdza’s home.¹⁷⁶ These relations of support and friendship were vital in moments of chaos, especially for the wives of

¹⁷⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 252/1939, f. 281.

legionary leaders who had been imprisoned or, as in the case of Codreanu himself, assassinated by the authorities.

Seemingly, women from very different social backgrounds belonged to these networks, or, at least, their relationships became tighter because of the hardships of the moment. With the men absent and prevented from action, legionary women sometimes found themselves on the front line. While the wives of prominent members could have entered these networks through their husbands, other women might have been more visible because of the absence of men. The class differences between the princess, the worker, and the wives of the “legionary aristocracy” seem to have been transcended for the sake of the Legion’s survival. The sense of urgency and the state of emergency created by the movement’s dissolution might have strengthened pre-existing relations of friendship and political affinity.

In June 1939, another police report gives an account of Elena and Eliza Codreanu’s relations and acquaintances in Bucharest. After the death of her husband Corneliu, Elena remained in Bucharest while Eliza, her mother-in-law, moved back to the family’s hometown, Huși. Every time Eliza Codreanu came to Bucharest, she was hosted by a Mrs. Bacaloglu, a friend and legionary sympathizer. Their relations were about to become even stronger since Mrs. Bacaloglu’s daughter, the student and painter Elena Dumitrescu, was to marry Cătălin Codreanu, Corneliu’s younger brother. Mrs. Bacaloglu was also a very close friend of Iridenta Moța, who had lost her husband Ion Moța in the Spanish civil war. Apparently, in the eyes of Mrs. Bacaloglu, Iridenta was “a saint” and she also supported her financially.¹⁷⁷

From this report we see not only how reliable the support network built by the Legion was, but also how much marriage still functioned as a social glue. In moments of hardship, new bonds became even more important. In addition, fiancées and wives were among the few people who could visit the legionaries in prison. Within the movement, many couples had formed during the years prior to its dissolution. After the arrest and imprisonment of a great number of legionary members in 1938, the wives and fiancées probably got involved more than ever before. Not only did they take over some of the activities previously performed by the men, but they also contributed to maintaining close contact between those in prison and the outside underground network through their personal relations.

Even in March 1942, more than a year after the legionary rebellion and the definitive outlawing of the movement, the underground organization still relied on personal

¹⁷⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 12/1939, f. 202.

relationships to continue functioning. According to a military report from the metallurgical factories “Rogifer”, which passed under the control of the army during the war, around two thousand legionaries worked in the “Rogifer” factories. Among them, a relatively large number of women, who were still very active, kept a “subversive” atmosphere alive. Weddings and christenings were used as occasions for gatherings and political meetings, under the cover of private events. Moreover, contact with the imprisoned legionaries was constantly kept up thanks to the “so-called fiancées”.¹⁷⁸ It is hard to affirm with certainty, given the scarcity of information in this sense, but it is possible to assume that some of these relationships were more of a political than sentimental nature. As engagement or marriage was one of the few ways that would allow communication with imprisoned legionary members, relationships may well have been used in a strategic way. In the eyes of the police, close ties between men and women were most likely seen as linked to sentimentality rather than political engagement.

This situation was seemingly so serious that in spring 1942 new regulations were implemented that forbode imprisoned legionaries from receiving visits. The previous year, at the prison in the city of Aiud, where a large number of legionary members were confined, some wives moved to the city to be able to visit their husbands on a regular basis. As the police from Aiud observed in a report, the wives communicated news and information about the on-going legionary activity to their husbands during their visits.¹⁷⁹ Despite the strict regulations on conduct during visits, prison guards were often very tolerant towards the legionaries. Political sympathy and bribery were among the main reasons for this widespread tolerance, and, as a result, imprisoned husbands and their wives were sometimes allowed to talk privately.¹⁸⁰ In October 1941, the prison authorities of Aiud discovered the involvement of the prison’s chaplain in the legionary network.¹⁸¹

In this situation, which was increasingly difficult to control, the new regulations aimed to prevent any direct contact between the prisoners and the outside, and imprisoned legionaries were only allowed to receive packages.¹⁸² However, in this new setting, a sex scandal broke out in Aiud, involving a legionary inmate, his wife Elena Ionescu, and the director of the prison, Captain Aurel Munteanu. According to several police reports from Aiud, Mrs. Ionescu came to Aiud and the prison director was observed visiting her hotel

¹⁷⁸ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 25, vol. I/1937, ff. 124-125.

¹⁷⁹ AN-Cluj, Fond IGP, dosar 443/1941, f. 33.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 177.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, f. 68.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, f. 177.

several times during her stay. The police insinuated that Mrs. Ionescu used her “pleasant appearance” “to take advantage” of the director’s “weakness” and convince him to let her see her husband in prison without the necessary authorization. In the end, she “managed to reach her purpose”, and was supposedly allowed to visit her husband.¹⁸³

The following year, Aurel Munteanu (now Major) while still in the position of prison director despite the scandal, got involved in another one, this time with more severe consequences. Lene Maria, wife of the legionary member Lene Vespasian, moved to Aiud where she also opened a shop. While there, she seems to have started an intimate relationship with the major, and rumors of their affair eventually reached her husband in prison. As a result, Lene Vespasian (in some reports called Octavian), together with other inmates, initiated a prison revolt. The unrest lasted for several days, with the group of rioters demanding the major’s resignation. Eventually, the revolt was quelled, and the instigators were sent to another prison. In the end, the affair between the wife of Lene and the prison director was allegedly used as a motive for a more “political” rebellion. According to a report from the Aiud prison, some of the rioters were devoted partisans of legionary leader Horia Sima, supporting his refusal to accept any reconciliation with the Antonescu regime. They were also planning a jailbreak.¹⁸⁴

While it is hard to establish the truth of all these rumors of affairs and sexual favors, these stories nevertheless expose the fragile positions that the wives of legionary members found themselves in. If, for some women, being married to a leader or a prominent member might have ensured some benefits in terms of safety networks and protection, other women found themselves more endangered and faced more insecurity. Generally, women were less involved in the movement than their husbands, or, at least, they were less persecuted for it, thus the wives of less prominent members did not face imprisonment but were exposed to situations of financial and personal instability. On the other hand, they might also have used the contextual gender stereotypes to cover their political activities under the appearance of romantic relationships.

Another danger faced by all the close relatives of prominent legionary members, and by their wives in particular, was the constant police surveillance. Moreover, wives were among the first to be arrested after all the actions that involved the Legion as a whole, such as the assassination of Prime Minister Duca in 1933. Even if not directly involved in the movement’s actions, wives were considered to be highly informed individuals. They were

¹⁸³ Ibid., ff. 347-348, 351, 353-355.

¹⁸⁴ AN-Cluj, Fond IGP, dosar 468/1943, ff. 93-94, 97, 100, 103, 105, 107.

rarely detained for long periods of time nor were they often charged, but they were interrogated by the police because of their personal ties and their intimate closeness to the legionary inner circle. At times, the reaction of their husbands was to downplay their wives' roles and political involvement. As Mihai Stelescu, one of the leading legionary figures of the first half of the 1930s, declared during the trial for the assassination of Ion G. Duca, the only guilt held by his wife was for marrying him, condemning herself to a "tumultuous life".¹⁸⁵

The wife in question was Zoica Stelescu, a very active member in the legionary student's movement, as already mentioned in the chapter devoted to university politics. She was involved in many activities and attended student congresses. All her actions and beliefs were reduced by her husband and explained away as the consequence of their relationship and marriage, reinforcing the general stereotype of women's political involvement as a consequence of their feelings and passions. In this case, however, this downplaying of wives' roles and the presentation of them as victims of an unjust treatment might have been used as a strategy. Firstly, the Legion wanted to present an image of the state and of the authorities as persecutors, so blind in their actions that they would forget to show any consideration and "delicacy" toward women. As Stelescu continued in his deposition, almost surely exaggerating the facts, his wife, "a young, frail girl" was kept imprisoned in a cellar, for ten days, forced to sleep on the cold floor.¹⁸⁶

Alongside victimhood, downplaying the political role of their wives might have also served the purpose of keeping the networks of support alive. The functioning of these networks became vital especially after February 1938, when after the mass arrests of legionary members their wives continued the movement's activities. The attitude of the authorities toward this phenomenon was ambivalent, keeping them under strict surveillance but at the same time not arresting them. According to a police report from July 1938, the most effective way to catch important legionary members was by following the "women of their families" closely and, in general, the wives of the legionaries and their acquaintances.¹⁸⁷ Thus in the eyes of the authorities, the activities and the networks of the wives were important windows into the Legion's underground organization. The political involvement of wives seems to have been considered of great importance for the capture and arrest of legionary members, but not dangerous enough in itself to be interrupted through arrests and imprisonments. In the end, it might have appeared as "natural" and understandable for wives

¹⁸⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 15, vol. I/1934, f. 93.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., ff. 93-94.

¹⁸⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 45/1938, f. 7.

to continue supporting their husbands in prison and for this to be considered more a personal than a political engagement.

The status held by the wives of leaders and prominent members within and outside the Legion was also related to these interconnections between personal relationships and political roles. When the Legionary Movement started to gain a conspicuous following among the elite classes of Bucharest (as I will describe more widely in chapter three) the wives of the leaders were more likely to enter these circles.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, wives assumed greater symbolic roles after the death of their husbands, especially when these were later celebrated as legionary “heroes”.

Elena Codreanu became the most important legionary widow. After the assassination of Codreanu in November 1938, as the wife of the leader she was praised as a person who closely shared the “spirit” of Codreanu’s “mission”. Elena continued to maintain very tight contact with the legionary leadership, especially with Corneliu’s family and the Legion’s “old guard”. She seems to have been constantly under police surveillance, and her movements and behavior were closely scrutinized from within and outside the Legion. After Codreanu’s death, rumors about him being alive circulated periodically, and Elena’s mood, attires, and declarations were often used as grounds for these rumors. News about her, and other wives of those who had been assassinated together with Codreanu, being happy or laughing, or about Elena not wearing the traditional mourning clothes on different occasions, were all reported on by the police and used by legionaries to claim that Codreanu was still alive.¹⁸⁹

Alongside Elena Codreanu, Iridenta Moța and Ana Maria Marin, respectively the wives of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, became two more widows of heroes. These two legionary leaders and ideologues died as volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, where they fought alongside the Spanish Falange, together with other several legionary volunteers, from fall 1936 until their death in January 1937. Their funerals were transformed by the Legion into an impressive national event, with the tacit support of the state. Thousands of people, hundreds of priests, personalities from Romanian cultural and political worlds, and foreign diplomats, all attended the funerals, quasi-official events organized by the Legionary Movement. Moța and Marin were turned into the most celebrated “heroes” in the movement’s pantheon and became the objects of a cult among the members.

¹⁸⁸ As already mentioned, Elena Codreanu, Iridenta, and the wives of other leaders got acquainted with members from the higher classes, who supported them during difficult moments.

¹⁸⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 159/1928, ff. 12-13; dosar 252/1939, f. 176.

In the wake of their deaths, Moța and Marin's parents, children, and wives became central figures in the fabrication of the myth of the legionary heroes. A special commemorative issue of the student magazine *Cuvântul Studentesc* (The Student's Word) was devoted entirely to the celebration of the two legionaries. Proper eulogies were written for them by legionary journalists and friends, and their biographies were recounted in highly romanticized terms. Most of the pages dedicated to Moța were filled with a celebration of his political activity and ideological writings; his marriage and family life were mentioned only briefly. On the other hand, the portrait of Vasile Marin was more intimate, very likely because it was written by a close friend, the legionary journalist Mihail Polihroniade. The figure of Marin's wife Ana Maria was described more widely, though in idealized terms. She was a young doctor, a "lively", "mercurial", "witty" being, "of bright intelligence". The couple was supposedly very close, their love based on common values and a similar "moral strength".¹⁹⁰

A small brochure that circulated widely after the death of Moța reproduced a sort of last will and testament, a collection of private letters he had written before leaving for Spain that was meant to be published only in case of his death. The introduction mentions that two other letters were written for his wife Iridenta, but in the published version they were omitted, maybe because they were considered too intimate and too private. Her belonging to the Codreanu family must have driven a more careful treatment of her figure in the aftermath of Moța's death, but some private aspects emerge nevertheless from the letter written for Corneliu. Moța asked his friend and brother-in-law to be "patient and merciful" to Iridenta, and to not try, vainly, to change her to fit to his own opinions. She is "honest", "devoted", she "lives only for the children", thus she should be treated with tolerance, given her "ruined nerves".¹⁹¹

In the discourse of the Legion, the two widows were presented as loving, devoted wives, Ana Maria Marin more exuberant and Iridenta Moța, more fragile and maternal. But both women were seen and shown through the prism of their husbands' "greatness", as the beloved widows of two very important figures. No mention was made of their own political activity and involvement, for they were meant to represent the personal, intimate side of their husbands' political and politicized lives. Both Iridenta Moța and Ana Maria Marin, however, were deeply engaged in the Legionary Movement. As we have seen, Iridenta Moța had been active in the student movement during her university years in the 1920s and remained active

¹⁹⁰ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 114/1937, ff. 2-17, 21-24.

¹⁹¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 255/1937, f. 19, 22.

also after finishing her studies. Moreover, as Codreanu's sister, she shared with her brother and other siblings the highly politicized atmosphere of their family since her early youth. After Moța's death, she was kept under police surveillance and she continued attending even the most intimate legionary meetings.¹⁹² As far as Ana Maria Marin was concerned, her involvement seems to have continued throughout the years of the movement's underground activity. According to a police report from 1941, after the legionary rebellion she was sentenced to death, although there is no mention of what role she had during the rebellion to motivate such an extreme sentence.¹⁹³

Legionary wives, independent from their involvement in the political activities of the movement, were nevertheless considered as involved, informed, and supportive individuals. A wife had the duty to support and follow her husband, and her behaviors and political choices were never disentangled from her status as a married woman. These widespread considerations and suppositions about the so-called "traditional" relationships between husbands and wives led to multifaceted and to some extent contradictory results. As wives, women like Elena Codreanu, Iridenta Moța, and many others, were directly exposed to police persecution, as much as they were often protected by the social and political networks interwoven by their powerful husbands. On the other hand (and extendable also to the wives of less prominent members), the freedom of political action under the cover of personal relations was used as a strategy. The Legion made the most of this strategy especially during its most difficult moments, when wives and fiancées of imprisoned members became actively involved in the "resistance" of the underground organization.

However, alongside the wives and the fiancées, there were legionary women who maintained a clear separation between their personal relations and their political activity by remaining unmarried. During the movement's great expansion in the mid-1930s, the legionary feminine section took a more structured and organized form. These transformations were led by the appointed leader of the feminine section, Nicoleta Nicolescu, one of the most active members within the legionary student movement since the beginning of the decade. From her position as chief commander, Nicolescu devoted herself to the increased militarization of her section, as we shall see in more depth in chapter four. Groups of legionary women started to use uniforms and rallied at the student congresses of the mid-1930s wearing green shirts like their male comrades. Nicolescu was unmarried, and, as it

¹⁹² ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 278, vol. II, 1938, f. 251; ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 1/1938, ff. 36-38.

¹⁹³ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 14/1941, f. 16.

emerges from the following interview with a female commander conducted in 1933, other women made the same choice.

The journalist and legionary sympathizer Nicolae Crevedia wrote a reportage for the newspaper *Calendarul* (The Calendar) from the construction site of the future “Green House”, the headquarters legionary members were building on the outskirts of Bucharest. The commander of the group of girls working there, a teacher called Maria Radomir, was Crevedia’s guide throughout the work camp, and it was she who gave him explanations about the construction project. In the end, the journalist asked an “indelicate” question, as he puts it in the article. He asked Radomir if she was or if she ever had been, married, given that she “was wandering alone” at the site. The legionary commander replied she was not married and replying to his last question about her age, she told him she was 35, the article finishes on this note.¹⁹⁴ In a few lines, this article with its tone and selected vocabulary, disclose the entire dilemma of a woman’s choice, exposing the difficulty of choosing politics over marriage, and the social stigma related to remaining unmarried and ageing. On the other hand, however, the choice to not get married offered unexpected freedoms, the right – and the burden – of “wandering alone”, always scrutinized and questioned by the male gaze.

According to a widespread rumor of the time, Nicoleta Nicolescu required of new women members that they take a gynecological examination to prove their virginity.¹⁹⁵ While the truthfulness of the rumors is hard to prove, their existence and spread shed some light on the complex entanglement of sexuality and militarization, of marriage and the problem of leadership. With the passage of time and the increasing presence of women within the Legion, initial speculations on the potential sexual relations among members were contrasted and reversed by the creation of the image of the fighting woman. This image was based on the attempt to separate the presence of women from any sexual implications. At the same time, the choice to remain unmarried seems to have been more compatible with leadership positions, both within the feminine section and in the Legion at large. By avoiding marriage, the allegiance to Codreanu and the devotion to the movement’s political goals were not hindered by family duties.

The social stigma of spinsterhood was thus reversed into a form of independence, into the right to engage freely in political action. As the voices of legionary women are almost impossible to hear and read, it is difficult to guess whether this choice was the result of a coherent and conscious decision or the product of lived experiences and practices. In some

¹⁹⁴ Nicolae Crevedia, “Garda de fier la lucru!”, *Calendarul*, 27 August 1933, II, 457, p. 4.

¹⁹⁵ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 199.

cases, it has been possible to reconstruct a structured path toward this choice, as has been shown by Inbal Ofer in her work on the Feminine Section (*Sección Femenina*) of the Spanish Falange from its inception to its development throughout the long years of the Francoist regime. The highest cadres of the *Sección Femenina*, especially after the 1950s, were composed of unmarried women, the so-called *solteras*. The decision to not marry became thus part of a professional path that allowed women to find a space of independence between different imperatives of the regime. If women were supposed to be good wives and mothers and serve the country through their family duties, the *solteras* tailored for themselves a way to serve the country by remaining single.¹⁹⁶

In the case of the Legionary Movement, the decision to remain unmarried was very likely driven by less elaborate and less structured motivations. The idea of a political career in its most professionalized form was far from the movement's experience and from the lives of legionary women. Feminine involvement was more of an experiment, a laboratory where forms of participation were tested and transformed according to circumstances and practical experiences. But surely the legionary ideology and the idea of serving one's nation, or, at least, a greater ideal, might have led some women to withdraw from the allegiances and the duties of marriage. Women like Nicoleta Nicolescu might have found a sort of independence, as women, in choosing the more horizontal hierarchy of the legionary organization than the vertical hierarchy of marriage. The control of sexuality and of sexual attraction was thus in this case crucial, for the decision to remain a legionary "sister" implied, at least in principle, a renunciation of most of the so-called "feminine" features in order to enter the male fraternity.

The problematic and contradictory aspects related to this opportunity for independence within systems based on patriarchal, or fraternal, structures are manifold. This opportunity, first of all, is granted and allowed by the male leadership. Women had to justify their decision to not enter marriage, or, in the case of a less straightforward path, they at least had to legitimize their choice by subordinating it to a greater and more meaningful ideal or life project. Moreover, in both Francoist Spain and the Legionary Movement, unmarried women were accepted and tolerated inasmuch as they represented a minority, an exception. This is much easier to observe in the case of a regime that lasted many decades like in Spain: here the *solteras* constituted only the ruling elites of the Feminine Section. Indeed, in the Legion, women like Nicoleta Nicolescu were deemed to be "fanatics" and were, by design, a restricted minority. This aspect will be further discussed in chapter four.

¹⁹⁶ Inbal Ofer, *Señoritas in Blue. The Making of a Female Political Elite in Franco's Spain* (Brighton-Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), pp. 43-50.

Lastly, some legionary women held leadership and other prominent positions whilst also getting married, and sometimes even having children. This combination of apparently heterogeneous roles has been called a “hybrid model” of legionary woman.¹⁹⁷ However, besides the need to define explanatory categories, the ideas of “model” and of “hybridity” were much more complex in legionary practice. Women, upon entering the Legion at various levels, found a wide array of potential “models” of feminine participation, and, as I will explore more widely in chapter four, this array comprised different and contradictory elements. Male legionary ideologues inevitably got caught in the “disorderly” relationships of women with politics, and as a result, ideological statements were far more simplified than the actual practices and experiences of women which are much harder to categorize, define, and connect in a coherent fashion.

Women were faced with different roles, models, and forms of participation, belonging to both the Legionary Movement and the wider context in which they were active. As a result, the potential combinations of elements and features were manifold, and, ultimately, all of them were “hybrid” in many ways. Crucially, the adherence to a “model”, a form of political participation, was not chosen once and for all, but constantly shaped and modified by the sometimes very abrupt changes suffered by the Legionary Movement, especially during the 1930s. Different motivations and circumstances drove these choices: a women’s social background, her education, position in the Legion, personal preferences, religious beliefs, and various mixtures of all these reasons would influence how women chose to participate in the Legion.

Among the legionary women who combined heterogeneous features, two were particularly renowned: Lucia Trandafir, who was the successor of Nicoleta Nicolescu at the head of the feminine section, and Anastasia Popescu, who became a very active legionary member during her university years. Alongside them, as we have seen above, many women of the rank-and-file or in less prominent roles were married, had children, and, at the same time, were active in the movement to various degrees at different times. The “hybridization” of roles seems to become more meaningful, and becomes more striking also for the observer, when women held leadership positions while simultaneously getting married and having a family. Both Lucia Trandafir and Anastasia Popescu were much more renowned than their husbands, who were also legionary members. Their prominence emerges also from the ways Lucia and Anastasia are mentioned in police reports, by their maiden names and not by the

¹⁹⁷ Mihai Stelian Rusu, ‘Domesticating Viragos. The Politics of Womanhood in the Romanian Legionary Movement’, *Fascism. Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 5 (2016), pp. 149-176, p. 171.

surnames of their husbands, contrary to custom. As their political activity preceded their marriage, authorities knew them by their maiden names, which continued to be used by the police.

The growth of the Legionary Movement in terms of variety of activities and the constant ideological elaborations might have led to an increasing awareness, among legionary woman members, of a certain compatibility between political activity and family life. The idea of these two life choices as distinct and incompatible paths might not have even been present within the legionary experience. Two ideological elements in particular might have paved the way toward a wider understanding of political action. The first, more generally, was related to a general expansion of the concept of political participation, which included, as we shall see more widely in the following sections, a great number of perceived “ordinary” activities. Secondly, the figure of the “fighter” in the legionary ideology encompassed a greater variety of meanings than the word itself might suggest. To be a legionary fighter did not only mean engaging in paramilitary training, maneuvering weapons, and being ready to use violence. Besides these features, which were surely present, a fighter was a much more complex figure who served the legionary ideal with the means available to him or her, through a transformation of ordinary life, work, and leisure time into politically meaningful activities.

In this way, for some legionary women, withdrawing from marriage or family life was not deemed necessary in order to actively pursue a political ideal. On the contrary, as we shall see, the ideological statements and the experience of “legionary life” led to a deeper understanding of the interrelations between politics and the so-called private and domestic sphere. Similarly, the conceptualization and practice of a legionary familial life made the distinction between political activity and family life to some extent meaningless. The involvement of women in these projects was essential, and many ordinary “domestic” feminine occupations, such as cleaning, cooking, sewing, and buying groceries were transformed into political activities. The gender division of labor within the legionary houses, at the work camps, and in the “legionary family” followed mostly so-called “customary” forms. The multiple activities and enterprises launched by the Legion during its most successful years, however, was also accompanied by a greater variety of roles and occupations that blurred some of the divisions along gender lines and brought several women to work outside their own or their legionary homes.

The Theory of Separate Spheres and its Discontents

In conceptualizing the Legion as a family, one of the central elements of this peculiar familial life was the existence of a “legionary house”. The movement had several houses throughout the years, some of them real, others only imagined. The ideal houses and models of communal living described in the legionary press and writings were also important, for they served as a guideline for the implementation of the real ones. These houses served a great variety of purposes. They functioned as political headquarters, private homes, schools, meeting halls, shelters for legionaries in distress, and, at some point, also as centers for economic enterprise. Lastly, the work camps established by the Legionary Movement in various locations, especially in 1935 and 1936, expanded and multiplied the experience of the “legionary house”, where members could practice for weeks on a smaller scale, but intensively, the ideals of communal living and family propagandized by the movement.

During the Legion’s initial stages, the experience of the “house” emerged less from ideological statements than from the ordinary *ménage* of legionary life. The few members of the Legion had their headquarters in Iași, and the material, symbolic, and political value of this “house” was one of the most recurrent themes in the articles published in their first magazine, *Pământul strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land). This “special” place was the so-called *Cămin Cultural Creștin* (Christian Cultural Center), and its construction began as early as 1924 by the (now) members of the Legion, at the time members of the student wing of the LANC. Known affectionately as the *Cămin*, the building initially had two small rooms, a rudimentary gym and, abreast, an unfinished roof-less church.¹⁹⁸ However, the expansion progressed rapidly: in September 1927, a small reading room was opened and few months later it was large enough to host the first legionary ball, with more than five hundred attendants.¹⁹⁹

The *Cămin* was destined for members of both sexes, and the creation of the “Sisters of the Legion” did not imply any physical or spatial separation of the different groups within the movement. However, the roles of men and women were, at least in principle, separated

¹⁹⁸ Corneliu [Zelea Codreanu], “Dela ‘Căminul Cultural Creștin’”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 August 1927, I, 2, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹⁹ *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 September 1927, I, 4, pp. 14-15 and “Darea de seamă”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 November 1927, I, 8, p. 15.

according to gender criteria and stereotypical beliefs about gender-suitable activities. While boys performed exercises of fencing and boxing, girls were supposed to decorate the *Cămin* and to organize small markets with handmade objects to raise money.²⁰⁰ The legionary “house” seemed to recreate the patterns of familial “domestic” life, which implied a customary division of labor and activities between men and women.

The construction of domesticity as women’s “private world” follows, in Carole Pateman’s analysis, the exclusion of women from politics. Women’s world is thus identified, in theory, with the home and the family, an ahistorical and apolitical realm, untouched and untouchable by mechanisms of power, economic production and the market.²⁰¹ The theory of separate spheres, or the so-called public/private dichotomy, is, in Pateman’s words, “central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle”.²⁰² Second-wave feminists, in particular, engaged in deep critical inquiries of the configurations, features and functioning of this dichotomy, thus leading towards more comprehensive theorizations of power relations between men and women.²⁰³ Far from being “ahistorical” and “apolitical”, the theory of separate spheres emerges as an ideology inextricably linked to the development of liberal (and patriarchal) political and economic theories.²⁰⁴

The dichotomy between “private” and “public”, and, more broadly, the creation of a set of rules and prescriptions regarding appropriate gender roles and expectations are thus historically located and politically charged. The rejection of universal(ist) claims and of fixed binary divisions has led to the need for deeper contextual analyses, in which specific

²⁰⁰ “Darea de seamă”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 November 1927, I, 8, p. 15; C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, “Organizarea Legiunii ‘Arhanghelul Mihail’”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 1 October 1927, I, 5, pp. 3-4.

²⁰¹ Carole Pateman, *The Fraternal Social Contract*, p. 113. A more extensive and detailed analysis of these issues is presented in Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988; for further analyses of the division between the so-called public realm of men and the private world of women in Western political thought, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman. Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1979).

²⁰² Carole Pateman, *Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy*, in Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, p. 118.

²⁰³ The literature on the public/private divide is very extensive. A general introduction and some of these theories can be found in the essays collected in Joan B. Landes (ed.), *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁰⁴ Carole Pateman, *Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy*, pp. 119-124; for an analysis of the role played by liberal economic thought in the theory of separate spheres, see the *Introduction* by Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, to their edited volume: *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018). Both works underline that major ideologies opposed to liberalism, in particular Marxism, often failed to question the theory of separate spheres and accepted them as a ‘natural’ fact. There were, however, exceptions in this regard, such as Friedrich Engels’ 1884 essay *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

interpretations of “private” and “public” come into being.²⁰⁵ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, in their seminal work *Family Fortunes*, underlined the processual aspect of the theory of separate spheres. Ideal notions of masculinity and femininity, and what became defined as “private” or “public” were never fixed categories. The divisions were constantly resisted, reconfigured, and negotiated in practice, and, in turn, practices informed the character and the features of a dichotomy in the making. The “separate spheres” represented thus not an “unchanging division” but a “powerful discourse”, which involved and invested not only gender, but also class, religious beliefs, “race”, and the meaning and limits of what counted as “political”.²⁰⁶

In the past decades, historical research and feminist theory contributed to unveiling and exposing the construction, the functioning, and the consequences of the theory of separate spheres. Feminist inquiries into the patriarchal and class logics of this dichotomy argued that it “obscures the subjugation of women to men”, with the result of men being the rulers of both spheres.²⁰⁷ Historical research has shown the centrality of the supposed “private” sphere in the economic systems of different social contexts, mostly through the appropriation of women’s productive and reproductive work. This extensive research aimed to historicize the theory of separate spheres and has ultimately “undermined [its] very foundations”.²⁰⁸ However, as Judith Butler affirmed about gender, to claim that something is constructed “is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality”.²⁰⁹ In the same way, the study of the “construction” of the separate spheres (of which gender was constitutive) does not underestimate the impact and consequences of this division on the actual lives of women and men in the past and in the present. On the contrary, these studies have unveiled the struggles, the negotiations, and, often, the marginalization or exclusion of women from politics. Yet this work has also uncovered how women used (and still use) the porosity of the dichotomy and its internal contradictions to inhabit spaces of freedom, of agency, and of political action.

²⁰⁵ Carole Pateman, *Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy*, p. 126.

²⁰⁶ Catherine Hall, *Introduction to the Third Edition*, in Leonore Davidoff, Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London-New York: Routledge, 2019), p. XVIII. For an assessment of the impact of *Family Fortunes* on gender history and the study of the theory of separate spheres, see Susie Steinbach, ‘Can We Still Use “Separate Spheres”?’ *British History 25 Years After Family Fortunes*, in *History Compass*, 10/11 (2012): 826-837.

²⁰⁷ Carole Pateman, *Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy*, p. 120.

²⁰⁸ Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, *Introduction*, in particular section 5, *Historicizing, deconstructing, and dismantling separate spheres*, in *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*.

²⁰⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Third Edition (New York-London: Routledge, 2007), p. 45.

In the light of the constructed and mobile features of the division between “private” and “public”, a redefinition of the meaning and the limits of the “political” emerge as a central element in the experiment of the legionary “house”. A “separation” of “spheres” was present in the legionary ideology and practice, though divisions along gender lines were not always followed consistently. The participation of women was underpinned by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. More precisely, partial inclusion in some activities was accompanied by partial or total exclusion from others. This constant shifting was displayed in both discourses and practices, in which perceived “natural” and “traditional” gender roles were intertwined with more “innovative” and disruptive ones. The legionary “house” was in this sense paradigmatic because it represented a redefinition of the “private” and “public” spheres by creating, in the same physical space, a conflation of politics with a collectivized domesticity.

The legionary *Cămin* was simultaneously political headquarters and “house”, unifying thus the two “realms” of men and women into one physical and symbolic construction. The very word *Cămin* contains linguistically in its meaning the most familial and intimate nuances related to the concept of “home”.²¹⁰ However, for legionary women the *Cămin* was a peculiar “home”, where they performed most of their “customary” feminine duties as the keepers of order, cleanliness, and beauty, but, at the same time, they participated in a political project. This participation was alternatively (or simultaneously) perceived and described as both “public” and “private”.

This twofold characterization of women’s involvement extended beyond the physical space of the *Cămin* and reached the actual “private” houses of the women who wanted to join the Legion. There, amidst their daily domestic activities, women could sew, embroider and weave “in their free time” and this kind of work did not require an open affiliation or any other kind of manifest political and “public” activity. Women could sell the products of their humble and ordinary work and contribute thus to the legionary projects and activities. Needlework was traditionally part of the feminine “universe”, and it was perhaps the most familiar, simplest, and widely available activity for women of almost any social condition. In this way, daily, ordinary activities were invested with new meaning and politics penetrated the supposedly private space of domesticity.

²¹⁰ The word “cămin” has a variety of meanings and usages in the Romanian language. It is used to denominate cultural centers, mostly in a nationalist sense; it also means literally “fireplace” and is extensively used to define the “home”, the “hearth” of the domestic life.

In May 1928, a major event disrupted the Legion's process of development and its ordinary life, forcing the movement to rethink its priorities and modify its plans. Alexandru C. Cuza, president of the National-Christian Defense League (LANC) and the engineer Grigore Bejan started legal proceedings against the Legion in order to expel them from the *Cămin Cultural Creștin*.²¹¹ Bejan was a supporter of the LANC, a friend of Cuza, and, most importantly here, the legal owner of the land where the *Cămin* was built. After the bitter separation of Codreanu from Cuza in 1927, Bejan had taken Cuza's side in the subsequent personal and political conflict between the two. The attempt to expel the Legion from the *Cămin* was part of this conflict and it was aimed to weaken the already fragile foundations of the movement. After two weeks, the proceedings ended with an injunction for the legionaries to leave the building. The legionary leadership was forced to acknowledge the "difficult situation" of the movement and the problems caused by the loss of their "nest", guarantee of unity and cohesion. However, this potentially disastrous event was transformed into a new opportunity and a new project. For the first time, a more structured and coherent idea of a proper "Legionary House" emerged from the initial, experimental practices at the *Cămin*, with specific features and functions.

This "Legionary House" was significantly called "Saint Michael's Fortress" and its project represented a picture of the ideal legionary "new life", from social, economic, and cultural points of view. The "house", located on the outskirts of Iași, was, in principle, supposed to function as a political headquarters. Moreover, it would have been the home of thirty or forty legionaries "among the most distinguished" and they would have lived together "as a family", working for the movement and for the country. The "house" was designed to be nearly self-sufficient and for this purpose it would have comprised a "farmhouse", able to supply the legionary family with food. The building would have been constructed in the countryside, outside the town, "center of human malice and wickedness". At the "Legionary House", the "most idealist spirits of the Romanian youth" would have lived together as "soldiers for life", as "fanatics" devoted to one cause, the "solution" of the "Jewish question".²¹²

The place envisaged by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, a "small monastery", offers a picture of the Legion's imagined "new life", a kind of archetype of the future legionary world. A large, self-sufficient farmhouse, located outside the urban center, inhabited by young, fanatical members who lived and worked together as a family, sharing spaces, money,

²¹¹ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, "Chestiunea Căminului", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 May 1928, II, 10, p. 3.

²¹² Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, "Cetatea Sfântul Mihai", *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 June 1928, II, 12, pp. 3-4.

and knowledge. The basic unit of legionary life appears as a sort of “commune”, it was both exclusive and autonomous.²¹³ This great project, which echoed ideas and elements of religious communities and utopian socialists’ models of life, was never implemented, but it represented a first important ideological elaboration. After a few years of displacement and relative crisis, at the beginning of the 1930s the Legion moved its headquarters to Bucharest, where it restarted its political path, and these early ideas shaped the movement’s projects for expansion.

As was always the case, grandiose plans and idealistic projects encountered in practice many difficulties and led the Legion to accept various compromises and adjustments. These adjustments, in turn, contributed to reshaping and modifying ideas and transforming, where possible, compromises into innovative programs. In Bucharest, after a series of temporary offices, the movement established its headquarters at the large house of General Gheorghe Cantacuzino-Grănicerul, at number three Imprimeriei street, in the center of the city.²¹⁴ From the end of 1933 onwards, this address became one of the most monitored places by the authorities. Activities at the house were fervent and incessant, and, as mentioned above (pages 44-45), the house served as a meeting place for legionary student groups and associations as well.

The house on Imprimeriei street was in a privileged location, close to the university, the Royal Palace, and the offices of many newspapers. General Cantacuzino had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances from the upper classes, and legionaries grew increasingly close to these circles from 1933 onward. In addition, the size of the house and its closeness to the city’s most vibrant neighborhoods offered suitable conditions for the development of the Legion’s economic activities, which started to be implemented in the mid-1930s. The economic enterprises of the movement were tightly interrelated with the formation of wider legionary families, who sometimes lived together and mostly ran businesses together. This model (which I will analyze in more depth in the last section of this chapter) was experimented firstly in Bucharest, then implemented later in other cities as well.

While the house on Imprimeriei street was a perfect strategic location for many of the Legion’s activities, the ideals envisaged in 1928 were far from abandoned. On the contrary, the legionary leadership actively pursued the plan to build a large estate, or a “small monastery”, in Bucharest, on the outskirts of the city, in an area called Bucureștii Noi, “New Bucharest”. The project of a great “Legionary House” started in 1932-1933 and became one

²¹³ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, pp. 198-202.

²¹⁴ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 7/1930, f. 211.

of the movement's most important endeavors. The importance of this place, known as the "Green House" (Casa Verde), was both of a material and a symbolic nature. The construction of the house absorbed energy and financial resources for several years, but the difficulties and the obstacles encountered, and the completion of the building in 1936, paralleled and symbolized the Legion's success, giving a foretaste of the future "victory". The work went on for a few years, transforming the building site into a sort of permanent work camp, which served also as a model for the other work camps implemented throughout the country.

The work camp at the "Green House" was established in 1933, when the Legion started to gain a rising following in Bucharest and the support of several intellectual and journalistic circles. In Nicolae Crevedia's article published in the sympathetic newspaper *The Calendar*, the author describes the building site and the organization of the work. Apparently, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu invited several reporters to visit the work camp. The house was initially imagined as "The House of the Wounded Legionaries" (Casa Legionarilor Răniti), a place where the members wounded during their "battles" with the authorities, or with supporters of other political parties could find care and refuge. "Engineers, architects, professors, students, pupils", contributed to the building of the house, all working together, "half naked", "under the burning sun".²¹⁵

The transcendence of class difference was a central element in the ideology of the work camps. Working together and sharing similar hardships was considered an integral part of the legionary "ethics", an experience that would break down social distinctions and create an organic community of belief. Nevertheless, most of the workers at the "Green House" and at the other work camps were university students. Students had long periods of holiday during the summer months and most of them did not have family obligations, thus they could afford to work voluntarily and far from home for some weeks. Moreover, the experience of the work camp became an indispensable stage for legionary political curriculum. The work camp was supposed to be a "school", where young members were educated in the "legionary spirit".

During the trial following the assassination of the Prime Minister Ion G. Duca in December 1933, two witnesses called by the defense described in enthusiastic terms the work camp at the "Green House". The first witness was Grigore Forțu, a teacher in Bucharest and the founder of the "Citizen's Block", a small right-wing party. In his deposition, Forțu clearly stated his sympathy for the Legion, and especially for the ethics of the work camp. At the

²¹⁵ Nicolae Crevedia, "Garda de fier la lucru!", *Calendarul*, 27 August 1933, II, 457, p. 4.

“Green House”, he could “admire the most beautiful pedagogical model for the education of the youth”. “Hard work, cheerfulness, solidarity”, were in his view the key principles of the work camp. The other witness, the famous doctor and professor Dimitrie Gerota, declared he was “deeply impressed” in seeing young students, “intellectuals”, working so hard to build their house with their own hands. His visit to the work camp left him with “a great sympathy” toward the Legion and its “active and energetic” members.²¹⁶

Several observers noticed and remarked on the presence of women at the “Green House” work camp. The gender divisions of labor seemed to have followed customary patterns, reproducing the dynamics of an ordinary household. According to Grigore Forțu, women students did the laundry while men worked. Doctor Gerota said he was “enchanted” by the sight of young women preparing meals in the kitchens of the work camp. An article from the legionary press depicted the women at the “Green House” in hyper-romanticized terms. They were compared with Ileana Cosânzeana, a beautiful princess protagonist of many tales (*basme*) of the Romanian folklore. At the work camp, “girls with ivory hands” prepared the food for the men working at the brickyard.²¹⁷ In the general romanticized image of the work camp as a place of harmonious communal life, the presence of women appears even more romanticized. As women mostly performed “traditional” feminine activities, cooking, and washing, it was important to convey the different and superior meaning infused by the legionary ideal into these relatively menial tasks.

A slightly more complex picture emerges from the abovementioned reportage published in the newspaper *Calendarul* (The Calendar). The journalist, Nicolae Crevedia, is clearly sympathetic with the legionary enterprise but his writing style also presents an ironic nuance. The article starts with a description of the remoteness of the place, so close to Bucharest but at the same time so far, “connected to the civilized world” by only two dusty tram cars. Crevedia describes the presence of young women at the work camp as a sort of exotic curiosity. He engages with them in an informal interview. The legionary women are very young, in their teenage years or slightly older. Led by an older commander, Maria Radomir (already mentioned above on page 73), the girls prepared food for the legionaries and, besides that, worked with them at the construction site. Most of them, according to their own admission, were still in high school, and were using the free time of the holidays to volunteer at the camp. Supposedly their parents knew about their activity and had allowed them to go. Life at the camp was not easy: work started at six in the morning and went on all

²¹⁶ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 15, vol. I/1934, ff. 177-178, 219-220.

²¹⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 18/1935, f. 81.

day under the burning sun. However, despite the hardships and the effort, the journalist notes, the girls showed “a determination that probably only early Christians had”.²¹⁸

Despite the half-propagandistic, half-ironic tone of this article, it is possible to read some elements between the lines. The very young women volunteering at the work camp might have also contributed directly to the construction works, in a sort of imagined equality in engagement, energy, and physical strength. But this equality was hindered by a “double burden” for women, for they were also in charge of the ordinary functioning of the camp, through cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes. However, legionary men, as would also be the case at other, smaller work camps, were expected to be able to run a camp by themselves, though the local population living in proximity to the work camps, often provided them with food and helped them in various ways.

Work at the “Green House” went on until fall 1936, with long periods of interruption and problems. For a long period, and in the aftermath of the assassination of the Prime Minister Ion G. Duca, the authorities forbade the movement from continuing the construction work. In summer 1935, they still could not obtain authorization to restart work on the site, despite the movement’s reorganization and a certain degree of normalization in its relationship with the state.²¹⁹ In the same period, the legionary leadership asked the Patriarch Miron Cristea, head of the Romanian Orthodox Church, to approve the building of a church close to the “Green House”, in line with the ideal of the autonomous “small monastery” envisaged by Codreanu. However, despite the authorization of the patriarch, the municipality of Bucharest rejected the request. Legionaries were “indignant”, and they threatened great revolts and marches to obtain their “right” to build a church.²²⁰

Finally, in February 1936, work restarted, and the event was marked by a celebration at the construction site. Around five hundred legionaries and all their leaders present in Bucharest attended the ceremony, preceded by a religious service. After the mass followed the speeches of few legionary leaders. Alexandru Cantacuzino, prominent member and director of the work camp, made some remarks on the relationship with the liberal government and the delay in the authorization to restart the project. He declared, provocatively, that the government would have allowed the construction of a “brothel” but refused to allow them to build their house. The restarting of the construction work was thus incorporated into the narrative of the Legion’s moral superiority and spirit of sacrifice, as it

²¹⁸ Nicolae Crevedia, “Garda de fier la lucru!”, *Calendarul*, 27 August 1933, II, 457, p. 4.

²¹⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 20.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 360.

was underlined also by the speech of General Cantacuzino. After the speeches, legionaries sang legionary songs, danced, and donated money for the completion of the building.²²¹

In fall 1936, the building work was finally completed, and the official inauguration of the house was celebrated concomitantly with the Legion's patron saint's day, November 8, feast day of the Archangel Michael. Legionary delegations from different parts of the country joined the celebrations in Bucharest, which were nevertheless characterized by discretion in order not to alarm the authorities. The legionary leadership forbade massive gatherings on the streets and in the churches, as well as wearing green shirts and other insignia.²²² During this period, Corneliu Codreanu was expected to move into the "Green House" with his family. For the occasion, the legionary nests from Bucharest organized a fundraising campaign to buy a car exclusively for Codreanu, to facilitate the necessary contacts between the "Green House" and the headquarters in the city center.²²³

Ultimately, the ideal place envisaged at the end of the 1920s was realized, with many adjustments and compromises, in the shape of the "Green House". This realization was made possible by the combination of various factors, from the great amount of voluntary work to the support gained by the Legion among the members of higher classes and their networks. Lastly, a relative tolerance, though fluctuating, of the state toward the Legionary Movement allowed for this and other experiences of legionary communal living to function, at least for a few years. The "Green House" was used as a special headquarters, for celebrations, events, and gatherings. Codreanu and his family lived there, as well as other legionary members. Moreover, several children, orphans or from very disadvantaged backgrounds, lived in the house. According to a memoir, Nicoleta Nicolescu took care of the children, educating them, in accordance with the directives of Codreanu, in the legionary "spirit".²²⁴

At the "Green House", part of the legionary leadership and other members created an extended family, which combined various kinds of personal and political relationships. However, as far as gender relations were concerned, the movement displayed a complex combination of redefinition, reinforcement, and disruption of established gender divisions. On the one hand, women oversaw the housework, the decoration, and the daily practical organization of the extended family's life. On the other hand, however, the overcoming of the biological and nuclear family pursued by the Legion allowed some room for new and different experiences. Unmarried women, unmarried men, together with married couples, and

²²¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 283/1936, ff. 62-63.

²²² ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 21/1936, ff. 97-98.

²²³ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, f. 16.

²²⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, p. 199.

children not belonging to any of these members lived and worked together, redefining the meaning of family and of family relations. The entire household management was transformed and permeated by the political underpinnings of the legionary project.

Like many other legionary ideologies and experiences, the idea of “family” also underwent constant elaborations, changes, and adjustments to new or different situations. As analyzed above, during the early stages of the Legion’s existence the “defense” of the family from the “threat” posed by “modernity” and the sacredness of marriage had a more prominent role in the movement’s ideology. But slowly, and concomitantly, different imaginaries and practices started to emerge, primarily the identification of the Legion itself as a “family”, a community of “brothers” and “sisters” fighting for a common goal. The project of the “commune”, envisaged in 1928, unified these previously scattered ideas into a more accomplished ideological elaboration, which eventually became the model of the legionary “houses” in Bucharest.

The legionary “families” who lived in the “houses” were far from “traditional” in the composition of their members and in the relationships among them. Married legionary couples cohabited with other “brothers” and “sisters” and their roles within the “family” were based on multiple interactions between gender, age, marital status, rank within the movement, and personal skills or “inclinations”. In the pages devoted to the analysis of the political thought of Rousseau, Susan Okin discusses the philosopher’s ideas on what he perceived as the inevitable clash between allegiance to the family and allegiance to the state. In Rousseau’s view, the necessary devotion of the (male) individual to the “public” good was inevitably and constantly challenged by the devotion to the “private” realm of the family, with all its emotional and sexual bonds. Rousseau, however, was not intellectually ready to eliminate or re-conceptualize the family, with the result of leaving this dilemma unsolved and unsolvable within his political theory.²²⁵

Rousseau was hardly the only political philosopher concerned with this issue. As Susan Okin underlines, the “problem” of the clash of allegiances between family (and more in general, strong intimate relationships) and the state (whatever its form) had accompanied the development of Western political thought from its inception.²²⁶ The obliteration of the family and the adoption of a regime of (carefully planned and eugenically oriented) sexual promiscuity had represented one of the most radical solutions to this dilemma. Plato and Tommaso Campanella both opted for this solution in their utopian political projects,

²²⁵ Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, pp. 186-194.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

envisaged respectively in the *Republic* and in *The City of the Sun*. More recently, utopian socialist thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier, located in the “traditional” nuclear family and in the “private” household the origins of many social “evils”, namely egoism, individualism, and inequality, also between the sexes. In their work and in the short-lived communal experiments based on those works, the “traditional” family was transcended by adopting different “solutions”, from sexual promiscuity or “free love” to communitarian households and “extended” families.

The legionary leadership seems to have taken into consideration this clash of allegiances as well, especially as far as women were concerned. The *ménage* of the legionary “houses” and, more in general, the concept of “family”, displayed a combination of relationships, in which both marriage *and* extended, non-biological kinship coexisted. The sexual and emotional tensions between legionary “brothers” and “sisters” were diluted through endogamous marriages, which, as analyzed above, were strongly encouraged. But nuclear couples were part of larger networks, not necessarily cohabitants, who shared common values and worked toward a common goal. The “spiritual” kinship among legionary members also comprised mutual assistance and economic collaboration, as we shall see in the next section. The “solution” to the clash of allegiances was pursued by considering familial, emotional, and sexual relations as a contribution to the strength of the movement instead of as a potential source of weakness. The devotion to the Legion could rely on the role played by personal ties in the construction of its political project. The legionary “houses” epitomized and concomitantly helped shape this interconnectedness.

After the first experiments in Bucharest, between 1935 and 1936, which were the years of the Legion’s maximum expansion in terms of followers, the model of the legionary “house” and of the cultural center (*cămin cultural*) was adopted by many local branches. In July 1935, the legionary organization in Cluj started the construction of a *cămin*, following the model established at the “Green House”. A group of around forty legionaries volunteered at the camp, under the supervision of the regional legionary leader Ion Banea, renowned member and biographer of Codreanu. According to a police report, the necessary funds for the construction were partially raised among the members of the Association of Romanian Industrialists and Traders and, also, through donations from wealthier supporters.²²⁷ In summer 1935 a legionary house was also under construction in Giurgiu, a port city on the

²²⁷ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. I/1935, f. 145.

Danube.²²⁸ In January 1937, the “Legionary House” in Oradea was completed and inaugurated with the usual solemn ceremony and a religious service.²²⁹

While the model of the legionary house reached every angle of the country, it is hard to assess to what extent these regional houses also functioned as places of communal living for legionary families. From the already mentioned police report on the legionary house in Giurgiu, written in summer 1935, emerges a more “traditional” use of the legionary house as a political headquarters, meeting hall, and a place for fundraising events, lectures, and parties.²³⁰ Very likely, every local organization adapted the political, social, and economic experiments undertaken by the Legion in Bucharest to different situations and adjusted them in accordance with the specific features and needs of different contexts.

Work camps, on the other hand, were the places where the experience of “legionary life” was supposed to be lived in its most intense form. These camps had first and foremost a propagandistic purpose, but they also represented at the highest level the legionary ideals of communal work, discipline, frugality and the endurance of hardships, while tightening the relations among members through living and working together for lengthy periods of time. Mostly established in the countryside, at the seaside, in mountainous and remote areas, the camps were not only supposed to strengthen the ties among legionaries, but also to reconnect them with nature, with the landscape, with the villages of the peasantry. In line with legionary ideology, nationalism was not only a political stance, but an organic relationship with the natural elements, with the landscape and with the “soul” of the Romanian people. Expansion into the cities was necessary for the movement’s political growth, but its spiritual side was to be found in the mountains, in the fields and on the shores.

Beyond this hyper-romanticized discourse, the establishment of camps and construction sites was part of a great propagandistic project aimed at gaining more supporters outside the urban centers and the university environment. In June 1935, Codreanu issued directives and rules for the activities to be undertaken by the students during the summer months, back home in their villages and small towns. One of the most important tasks of the students was the “legionary education” of the less experienced members and sympathizers from the province and the countryside.²³¹ In addition, Codreanu outlined the principles and the regulations for the camps and the construction sites, which were regarded as two different activities, with different ideological and propagandistic purposes.

²²⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 286.

²²⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 15/1936, f. 22.

²³⁰ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 286.

²³¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. I/1935, f. 158.

A construction site was the simplest and most straightforward means of propaganda through the new “work ethics” developed by the Legionary Movement.²³² A construction site was established by a minimum of five legionaries, under the leadership of a nest leader or of an older and more experienced member. Work at the construction sites were deemed as being for the “public good”, and was undertaken for the building, reparation, or maintenance of roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. Legionaries were not supposed to “boast” about this work, make open verbal propaganda, nor expect something in return. The work itself was enough to show their engagement and commitment, in line with the legionary “ideology of the deed”, which the Legion contrasted with the “empty” propagandistic words of the other political parties.²³³

The work camps (*tabere de muncă*), on the other hand, though maintaining their propagandistic function, represented a much more structured and ideologically meaningful experience for the legionary members. The camp was envisaged as a distillation of “legionary life”, with a minimum of thirty members working and living together for at least one month. The work camp not only had a commander but also a “legionary missionary”, appointed by the legionary central command and in charge of the “spiritual education” of the legionaries attending the camp. Participation in a work camp became a necessary step in the formation of a legionary member and in their advancement within the movement. According to the directives of Codreanu, the work camp was a legionary “school”. Ranks and positions within the legionary organizational structure were bound to and granted only after participation in a work camp.²³⁴

During the summers of 1935 and 1936, a great number of work camps were established throughout the country, reaching, in these two periods, their highest levels of attendance and activity. Privileged areas were mountains, the Black Sea coast, and remote villages, where legionaries built or renovated churches, schools, and, in some cases, also houses for the poorest peasants. A police report on a work camp set in a village in Iași county offers some details on the activities of the legionaries and their relationships with the local population. In this particular case, the support of the village’s inhabitants was apparently very high. Villagers hosted them in their houses and provided them with food, besides helping

²³² The expression “work ethics” was used by a professor, journalist, and legionary sympathizer in an article devoted to the work camp at the “Green House”, see Dragoș Protopopescu, ‘O nouă etică a muncii’, *Calendarul*, 29 August 1933, II, 458, p. 1.

²³³ The expression “ideology of the deed” is taken from an article written by the prominent legionary member and ideologue Vasile Marin for the newspaper *The Axis*, see Vasile Marin, ‘O singură ideologie: fapta’, *Axa*, 22 January 1933, I, 5, p. 7.

²³⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. I/1935, f. 156.

them at the construction site. On Sundays and other holidays, the legionaries from the work camp visited nearby villages and engaged in intense propaganda. Authorities were alarmed and the work camp was placed under police surveillance. There were fears about potential attacks against the Jewish population as a result of the anti-Semitic legionary propaganda that was spread among the villagers.²³⁵

Another report from a Moldavian village in Vaslui county, though not mentioning the risks of potential disorders, underlined the great support offered to the legionaries by the local population. The village set up a committee, led by local legionary members and sympathizers, who collected food and donations from the inhabitants of the village and brought them to the work camp where legionaries were making bricks for the construction of a church. The camp was not very large, it counted only twenty members, with others expected to arrive in the following weeks. Among the legionaries present at the work camp there were also four young women, legionary members from Vaslui. Their names are listed together with the “workers at the brickyard” but there is no further description of their roles and tasks at the camp.²³⁶

Participation in a work camp was considered an essential step in the legionary education of members of the feminine section as well. According to a circular issued by the section’s leader Nicoleta Nicolescu, legionary women were expected to spend at least two weeks at one of the work camps established in their regions or elsewhere. At the work camp, they would not only strengthen their bonds and prove their commitment, but they would also experience “true legionary life”.²³⁷ For many legionary members, men and women alike, the work camps were very likely the only places where they could live as a “legionary family”. The camp was envisaged as a sort of temporary legionary house, which brought to remote areas far from Bucharest the experiments in communal working and living first tried in the capital. The experience of the work camp was to some extent even closer to the ideal “legionary life”, where the legionary spirit was forged by hard work and discipline, but also by solidarity and cheerfulness, all this in close contact with nature.

The photographic book *Tabăra de muncă* (The Work Camp), published in spring 1936, showed and celebrated the life and the work at the camps. In the short introduction, journalist Mihail Polihroniade described the purposes and the “spiritual” achievements of this work. At the work camp, the Romanian youth learned how to live a “harsh and simple life”,

²³⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 6, vol. I/1935, f. 50.

²³⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 284/1936, f. 64.

²³⁷ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 268.

devoid of all the “frivolities” overwhelming their souls. Two major elements emerge powerfully from the introduction: the overcoming of class differences, and the forging of a Romanian national identity, beyond regional diversity. At the work camp, “intellectuals and peasants” “workers and students”, worked together, sharing the same hardships, the same tents, the same food. Similarly, legionaries from Oltenia, Banat, Bessarabia, Bukovina, met there and created a new national identity out of their regional identities.²³⁸ Thus, the work camp, materially and metaphorically, served as a foundation for the future Romanian nation.

The photographic album is accompanied only by very short descriptions, for “the pictures will speak for themselves”, and begins with some of the first experiences of this kind in Ungheni, near Iași, in summer 1924.²³⁹ At that time, the future legionaries, militants in the youth section of the LANC, were fabricating the bricks for their first cultural center in Iași. After integrating this early experience into a teleological narrative leading to the developments of the mid-1930s, most of the book is devoted to the work camps established in summer 1935. In line with the ideas expressed in the introduction, the photographs portrayed the social and geographical variety of the members attending the camp. Moreover, the pictures taken in small remote villages show local peasants taking part in the activities of the camp, dressed in traditional costumes.

Besides depicting the work, which comprised digging and making bricks, or the progress of a building, the album shows the moments of relaxation, fun, and cheerfulness. Legionaries were photographed bathing in rivers, climbing mountains, talking and resting under trees, romantically described as “the living rooms” of the legionaries.²⁴⁰ The simplicity and humbleness of life at the work camps is celebrated as a virtue, propagandized as a “spiritual” quality that profoundly distinguished the Legion from any other political party. Weddings were sometimes celebrated at the work camps, and one photograph depicts two young and beautiful newly-weds in peasant costumes, surrounded by legionaries and locals in a countryside setting. While young men are often the main characters in the images portraying work, the other moments of communal life are characterized by the presence of older men, women of different ages, and children, conveying thus the picture of an extended and large “legionary family”.

Women are present in most of the photographs that are not directly related to the construction works. Very rarely, they are depicted working alongside men, while in general

²³⁸ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 13/1935, f. 21.

²³⁹ Ibid., ff. 21-23.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., f. 34.

they posed for group photographs, where teenage girls, a larger number of young women, and several older women appear. Formal legionary members are intermingled with women from the local communities, which explains the presence of older women at some camps, where the vast majority of the volunteers were students. Gender stereotypes are not lacking, and a photograph showing a group of young and smiling legionary women bears the description “legionary women perform their duties...in the kitchen”.²⁴¹ In other pictures, however, cooking is depicted as one of the most important communal moments, and men and women seemed to have contributed, though not equally, to the preparation of meals. Moreover, the only pictures not taken at the work camps are devoted to the legionary women’s workshop, where they weaved, sewed, and embroidered items to sell and raise money for the Legion.²⁴² The workshop is presented as a sort of continuation, during the winter months, of the activities performed at the work camps in summer.

The largest legionary work camp, attended in shifts by around eight hundred legionaries between July and September 1935, was the one established in Carmen Sylva (today Eforie Sud), a small locality on the Black Sea. The photographs from this work camp show a much more conscious and structured propagandistic effort. The image of spontaneity and simplicity characterizing the other work camps is now accompanied by more staged and spectacular pictures. Many photographs depict scantily dressed men, posing standing still, burnt by the sun, in perfectly ordered rows, or practicing sports, placed in the scenography offered by the sea and the deserted beaches. The images recall Italian fascist aesthetics, and, while many photographs from other camps resembled more a family photo album, those from Carmen Sylva could be easily used for political posters and postcards.²⁴³

The work camp of Carmen Sylva, because of its dimensions and importance, was of most interest to the authorities. The camp functioned throughout the summers of 1935 and 1936, though the photographic book shows only pictures from 1935. Codreanu used the camp as his residence during the summer months, and the area around Carmen Sylva, together with the nearby port city of Constanța, became an important legionary center. According to a police report from February 1936, plans for the work camp were impressive. For the summer of 1936, Codreanu was supposedly planning to expand the work camp and build a city, able to host around three to four thousand legionaries.²⁴⁴ These ideas were surely utopian in scope and scale, even without considering intervention by the authorities, who would have never

²⁴¹ Ibid., f. 51.

²⁴² Ibid., f. 35.

²⁴³ Ibid., ff. 36-42.

²⁴⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 283/1936, f. 61.

allowed the construction of a proper legionary city. The work camp of Carmen Sylva was nevertheless one of the most successful and lively legionary activities, attended by hundreds of legionaries from all over the country and visited also by groups of students from other countries.²⁴⁵

The presence of legionary women at the work camp of Carmen Sylva was proportionate to the size of the camp. The group of women reached a considerable number, and one photograph shows two rows of legionary women, in line, performing the Roman salute. Life at the work camp was marked by quasi-military rituals, in a mixture of convivial moments and army discipline.²⁴⁶ Women apparently performed these rituals separately, for they very likely had separated “quarters”, where they had their tents and their part of the camp. Pictures from the kitchen of Carmen Sylva show men and women working together. The great number of legionaries present at the same time surely required more collaboration, because there were always fewer women than men. At Carmen Sylva, the tasks of legionary women may have been more varied, though still based on gendered divisions. Groups of children were hosted in shifts from other regions, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who spent their time at the camp without their parents.²⁴⁷ Very likely, legionary women attended to the children, while legionary men trained them in the more military aspects of the “legionary spirit”, through sport and work.

The prolonged and more structured experience of the Carmen Sylva work camp also exposed some of the dissatisfactions of several members with the policies and the ideals pursued at the camp. According to a police report, intellectuals were unhappy about being treated in the same way as workers and asked Codreanu for at least some form of distinction. Eventually, to calm raised spirits, Codreanu established a sort of “High Command” (stat major) composed only of intellectuals, who participated in the leadership and organization of the camp. Thus, the ideals of harmony and overcoming of class distinctions propagandized by Codreanu were met with some dissatisfaction by his followers. At smaller work camps, far from the centers of power and the struggle for visibility, more egalitarian and harmonious “family” experiences were probably easier to achieve. But at a camp such as Carmen Sylva power relations were still in place and distinctions were still craved and pursued.

²⁴⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 233/1935, f. 255. According to the police report, Codreanu was waiting for “legionaries” to arrive from Czechoslovakia and France to the Carmen Sylva work camp.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 254.

²⁴⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 32/1935, f. 62.

The summer of 1936 was the last period of activity in the legionary work camps and construction sites.²⁴⁸ The success of these activities and the growing following of the Legionary Movement shook the tolerance of the state. As far as construction sites were concerned, the infrastructural works undertaken by the legionaries blatantly exposed the inefficiency of the authorities, who had failed to build or renovate roads, bridges, and churches. The highest council of the Romanian Orthodox Church, despite the support received by the Legion from local priests, forbade the building of churches by legionaries. Similarly, measures against the work camps made them much more difficult to set up, for they now required official authorization. During the summer of 1937, the former camp of Carmen Sylva was not active anymore, though legionary groups, mostly composed of high-school pupils, continued to come for summer camps and holidays.²⁴⁹

The experience of the work camp, though it did not last more than two summers, became one of the central elements of the legionary “utopia”. Far from being a legionary “invention”, the movement nevertheless transformed it not only into a great means of propaganda, but also into a social and educational laboratory.²⁵⁰ The ideological underpinnings of the work camps had been circulating within the movement from its very beginning and the creation of legionary “houses” were among the first experiments in this sense. The number and the geographical distribution of the work camps brought these experiments to a new level, creating a network of legionary “houses” able to reach regions and people far from the political centers of the movement.

Communal life at the work camps and the peculiar “families” created therein realized, however briefly, the legionary ideals of a community of belief that transcended immediate kinship relations. In large work camps such as Carmen Sylva, but also in villages where local sympathizers joined the camps, members were often strangers, but were united by common goals. For many reasons, the number of women who participated in the work camp experience was much smaller than the number of men. When it happened, gendered divisions of roles were often reproduced at the camps, though legionary women were also subjected to the same discipline and endured similar hardships. The difference between doing similar jobs at their own homes and doing it at the work camp resided, however, not only in the political

²⁴⁸ According to an internal report, the work camps established in summer 1936 were 47, see ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, ff. 249-261.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., ff. 116-120, 122-125.

²⁵⁰ Rebecca Haynes, ‘Work Camps, Commerce, and the Education of the “New Man” in the Romanian Legionary Movement’, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol.51, No.4 (Dec. 2008), pp. 943-967.; see also Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain*, pp. 265-271.

and educative value the Legion assigned to these activities, although this too was important. Some legionary women might have assigned a different meaning to their work for they considered it the result of a personal choice, a declaration of freedom from their “biological” families.

The Legionary Family

Alongside work camps, ordinary legionary life in Bucharest expanded the concept of the “legionary family” and the translation of this concept from discourse to practice. A more coherent elaboration of the functioning and organization of the “legionary family” emerged in the mid-1930s. The legionary family represented a social and, especially, economic experiment of communal living, which presented a much more complex and articulated structure and division of labor. While in the work camps women mainly undertook “feminine” tasks, such as cooking, sewing, and attending to children (their own and many others), the legionary families in Bucharest had more diversified roles and women were also direct economic contributors, as tenants of legionary restaurants and shops.

The economic elements that characterized the organization of the legionary household were related to concerns about economic independence and economic production present in the legionary ideology from the very beginning. The chronic financial problems and instability experienced by the Legion during its first years of activity were not the only reasons behind the projects of economic development. The Legion pursued the eradication of corruption, considered the greatest evil and “sin” of the Romanian political class, to be achieved by developing and supporting an honest and dignified economic situation for its members. In addition, their economic plans concerned mostly sectors that the Legion considered “monopolized” by the Jewish population: commerce and restaurants. In the movement’s violent anti-Semitic worldview, its economic projects aimed to replace these businesses with enterprises run by ethnic Romanians, creating thus a truly “national” economy.

The centrality of economic activities in the legionary ideology and practice emerged as early as 1928, when the Legion announced from the pages of its magazine *Pământul*

Strămoșesc (The Ancestral Land) the opening of an “economic front”.²⁵¹ Economic hardships had been presented as part of the Legion’s life since the first issue of the magazine, and this potential weakness had been transformed into a sign of distinction. Poverty, in line with Christian principles, was treated as a value: a further quality of the movement, a guarantee of its honesty, humbleness and distance from the greed associated with the mainstream political parties. Nevertheless, the survival of the movement, its growth and evolution, required economic resources and the movement’s leadership increasingly showed its concern for this issue. The 1928 article on the creation of the Legion’s “economic office” is extremely significant in displaying the ideological premises and considerations behind this project.

The Legion needed an “economic structure” in order to provide every legionary with livelihood opportunities, thus creating a “material basis” for each member and for the movement in general. This “material basis” was considered of capital importance because it would guarantee the “*economic independence*” of the members in the first place. While poverty acted as a “moral guarantee” in a more spiritual sense, economic independence was directly connected to the “*political independence*” of legionary members.²⁵² In this case, “political independence” had a twofold dimension. Firstly, it related to the legionary’s independent choice to actively support the movement free from the most urgent and basic material constraints. Secondly, legionaries had to be independent from “Jewish” economic exploitation and from the material “rewards” promised by the political parties. Ultimately, the “economic front” represented an essential part of the general “solution” to the “Jewish question”, through the gradual replacement of Jews with “true” Romanians in the key economic sectors.

At that time, however, the material conditions of the movement and its very small number of followers did not allow for great developments in this sense. The success reached by the Legion in the mid-1930s and especially the networks established by the legionaries in Bucharest led, in fall 1935, to the launching of new economic enterprises. Concomitantly, the concept of “legionary family” took on a more structured form and the organization of a legionary household began to be implemented at the legionary headquarters on Imprimeriei street in the same period. After a summer marked by the establishment and activity of the

²⁵¹ Emil Eremeiu, “S’au înființat încă două birouri la Legiune”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 March 1928, II, 6, p. 7.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

work camps, Codreanu envisaged new projects to be undertaken in Bucharest, and, gradually, in other towns, on a more ordinary basis and with a long-term perspective.

The first and most important economic enterprise launched in fall 1935 was the legionary “cooperative”, through which legionaries started their own commercial activity. The work and the organizational procedures lasted around two months, from September to November 1935. A wing of the house of General Cantacuzino facing the street, previously the guardhouse of the building, was renovated and transformed into a shop. According to legionary claims, the necessary investments for the renovation came from the money raised at the work camp in Carmen Sylva. Legionaries contributed by working on a voluntary basis on the renovation of the shop, which was finally opened in mid-November 1935. The purpose of the cooperative was to “resurrect the old reputation of Romanian and Christian commerce based on *honesty and love for the people*”.²⁵³ This emphasis served to mark the distance between the supposed pure and honest Romanian traders and the Jewish traders, whose “invasion” had led to the disappearance of Romanian commerce. The legionary cooperative was to be “healthy and honest”, “like the legionary soul”, bringing to the buyers the best Romanian products from all over the country.

According to a police report on the opening of the legionary cooperative, Codreanu had already started organizing the supplies for the shop at the end of September. The process required time and coordination, for the idea was to sell foodstuffs produced by legionary members in different regions of the country.²⁵⁴ Thus, the legionary cooperative was supposed to integrate production and distribution and, at the same time, to integrate the work of legionaries from the provinces and the countryside into the economic enterprises launched in Bucharest. The personnel who worked at the shop, “for the Legion and for the country”, was composed of two older legionary members, who probably also had supervision roles, four students, two men and two women, and two high school pupils, one boy and one girl.²⁵⁵ With time, the number of students working and volunteering at the various shops opened by the legionary cooperative increased. Working at the cooperative and at the restaurants was also particularly encouraged among students in need of financial support.²⁵⁶

In the same period, in light of the renovation works at the headquarters and the project of the cooperative, the issue of meals for the relatively high number of legionaries living in the house on Imprimeriei street and coming to it on a daily basis emerged. As a result,

²⁵³ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 5/1930, ff. 168-169.

²⁵⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 321.

²⁵⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 5/1930, f. 169.

²⁵⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 321.

Codreanu and the legionary leadership thought about opening a canteen in an abandoned building close to the house of General Cantacuzino, renovated and cleaned by legionary volunteers. The canteen provided “a good, clean, tasty, and adequate” meal, and all the ingredients were purchased through the legionary cooperative. The canteen was designed for around thirty or forty legionaries, particularly for those who worked at the cooperative, for the leaders of the various sections, and for the poorest members. The management and staff of the legionary canteen was entirely female. A Mrs. Vrane, wife of a doctor and older legionary sympathizer, was the coordinator and directress. Meals were prepared by legionary women and other “ladies”, friends of the Legion, who wanted to contribute and “do good”. Mrs. Vrane was also in charge of training the more unprepared and unskilled legionary women.²⁵⁷

Thus, the cooperative and the legionary canteen were two interrelated enterprises, pursuing multiple goals. The cooperative fostered the integration of legionary producers from the provinces and the countryside into the economic projects in Bucharest. The canteen was a special gathering place, initially envisaged only for legionary members. But it soon developed a welfare side, providing affordable meals for the poorest legionaries. Similarly, the needy students willing to work at the cooperative and the canteen received free meals and other material support. Women were extensively involved in these new economic enterprises, not only as workers and volunteers, but also as coordinators and directors. With the growth and development of this business, commerce, restaurants, and welfare became the sectors where women, members, and sympathizers of the movement were more active and engaged.

During this same period of new projects and fervid activity, Codreanu gave a more structured and coherent form to the idea of “legionary family”. The concept of family, so important in legionary ideology, was supposed to be translated into something more concrete and functional than the ideal community of belief shared by all legionary members. While those ideological underpinnings were surely central to these new developments, what Codreanu envisaged in November 1935 was a family of legionaries installed at the headquarters on Imprimeriei street. This “family” was to be composed of the staff of the cooperative and the leaders of various sections whose meetings and activities were mostly concentrated at the headquarters. According to a police report, the family comprised among its most important members Corneliu Codreanu, who lived there before moving to the Green House the following year, the leader of the youth section (Cross Brotherhoods) Gheorghe

²⁵⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 68/1938, ff. 23-24.

Istrate, the leader of the legionary students Victor Dragomirescu, the directors of the cooperative, and the directress of the canteen Mrs. Vrane.

The legionary family was at this stage “an experiment”, which had two, interrelated purposes: the tightening of the “spiritual” relationships among the members, and, at the same time, better management and exploitation of the economic enterprises, in part by learning practical business skills. Once the experiment proved successful in Bucharest, Codreanu’s idea was to expand this model to other legionary centers.²⁵⁸ The integration of other legionary centers into these plans of development seems to have been a major concern of the legionary leadership in this period. Bucharest was the place where experiments were launched, but the extension of these experiments to other centers was of capital importance. In Codreanu’s vision, economic activities would not only educate legionary members in the “practical issues” of life but would become a source of self-funding as well.²⁵⁹

Thus, the legionary family was a family unit based concomitantly on personal connections and economic relations, both permeated by legionary beliefs and “spiritual” harmony among members. The legionary family encompassed and surpassed the potential existing and future relations of kinship, which were nevertheless very common in the legionary membership structures. On the other hand, the members of the family were something more than business partners. They shared their experiences in various fields of the legionary organization, working together for a common ideal. Police reports focused mainly on the prominent members of the legionary families, namely those who held leadership positions in various sections. At times, however, there are mentions of other members, for apparently all the staff who had stable tasks at the legionary headquarters became temporary family members. At the house on Imprimeriei street, the guards who were present to guarantee Codreanu’s safety, were part of the legionary family for the duration of their service.²⁶⁰

The formation of this more complex and structured family unit did not, however, overshadow the importance and meaning assigned to the creation of nuclear families. The two units were not placed in opposition with one another, and they did not represent competing models. On the contrary, a nuclear family could have been incorporated, for shorter or longer periods, into a larger legionary family. The “spiritual” relationships between members and the economic cooperation would have only benefitted from the existence of an

²⁵⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol.II/ 1935, f. 247.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., f. 254.

²⁶⁰ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 21/1936, f. 51.

increasing number of legionary nuclear families, already tied by emotional and contractual bonds. While, as analyzed above, endogamous marriages between legionary members had always been encouraged or, at least, expected and hoped for, in this period such marriages seem to have become a stronger concern for the legionary leadership. Codreanu devoted a special circular to this issue in summer 1937, at a time when the legionary family was no longer an experiment, and the number of followers reached its peak.

Codreanu thus strongly encouraged marriages between legionary men and women, marriages based not on “the mere appreciation of physical beauty”, but on “the resplendent legionary spiritual achievements”. These married couples were to form what he called “legionary citadels”, or “centers of resistance” and, additionally, they were to give birth to the future “heroes” of the nation.²⁶¹ By transforming the legionary marriage into a stronghold of resistance, the language of this circular combines a highly romanticized tone with a quasi-militaristic nuance.

The need to insist on the issue of marriage and motherhood, though not expressed in gendered terms here, might have been driven by various factors, mostly related to the presence and roles of women. The expansion in activities and following led also to an increased feminine participation, but to ensure the stable, long-term involvement of women, endogamous marriage might have seemed an appropriate solution. While the decision not to marry was embraced by a certain number of legionary women, as already analyzed above, the movement was not eager to actively promote this choice among its women followers. Marriage between legionary members was more likely to guarantee a less fluctuating and stronger commitment to the movement. On the contrary, marriages with non-legionaries had the potential to drive women away from their political involvement, in line with the idea that a woman’s first and most important allegiance would be towards her husband (the above-mentioned “clash of allegiances”) Moreover, the formation of the more extended legionary families, in promoting the overcoming of the nuclear family through a larger structure, may have produced, as a sort of “side effect”, a decrease of marriages within the movement. The legionary leadership, however, insisted not only on the coexistence of the legionary family and the nuclear family, but also on the creation of nuclear families as an element of resistance and stability in the extended legionary family itself.

The need to tie together different forms of relationships and interactions very likely sprang from the nature of the legionary family as Codreanu envisaged it in fall 1935. The

²⁶¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 262/1940, f. 81; see also, ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 113/1937, f. 48.

interpenetration of “spiritual” bonds and economic collaboration was ideally guaranteed by common beliefs and shared experiences. Nevertheless, one main feature of the legionary family was the transitory status of its members. The more stable figures might have been the leaders of the various sections, but the guards, the volunteers and the workers changed on a more regular basis. Moreover, regional leaders from the provinces were sometimes assigned temporary roles at the legionary headquarters in Bucharest, to have a direct experience of legionary life and economic enterprises undertaken therein.²⁶²

In the shifting constellation of the family members, personal relationships still played an important role, especially because some of the members lived together at the legionary headquarters. Married couples may have represented a guarantee of stability and took part in the daily organization of “legionary life” at the various legionary houses. In fall 1935, Codreanu and his wife lived at the house on Imprimeriei street, where the experiment of the legionary family was first launched. As leader of the movement, he wanted to closely observe if the experiment worked before extending it to other legionary centers. Codreanu spent the summer of 1936 at the work camp in Carmen Sylva and, after the return to Bucharest in fall 1936, he moved directly to the Green House. But another couple of newly-weds joined the legionary family on Imprimeriei street, the legionaries Teodor Ioraş and Maria Pascu. After marrying at the work camp in Carmen Sylva, he entered the directive of the legionary cooperative and the couple resided at the headquarters.²⁶³

Between 1935 and the end of 1937 the economic activities grew steadily, not only in Bucharest, and the political and socio-economic legionary family units also developed in more complex ways. The larger and most important legionary “nests” in Bucharest, the Axa group and the Răzleţi corps, were reorganized and transformed into so-called “families of nests”. Very likely, this reorganization was adopted at a more general level, as a result of the increasing number of members. A “family of nests” sprang from one group, whose components formed new nests while maintaining tight relations with their old nest and in general, militating in the same section or field. According to a police report from January 1937, the “family of nests” held common meetings, where they discussed activities and strategies.²⁶⁴ Individual “families of nests” were most likely formed along lines of social difference: students, intellectuals, workers, who each had different roles and different goals in the overall organization of the movement’s political action.

²⁶² ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 247.

²⁶³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 284/1936, f. 153.

²⁶⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 10/1937, f. 7.

The growth and expansion of the economic enterprises was steady and significant, introducing new forms of political action, social engagement, and propaganda. During the year 1937, a crucial time in the history of the movement, the economic activities in Bucharest received a great impulse. The successes registered in 1936, the spectacular display of power and the attention received on the occasion of the funerals of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, and the expansion toward the working class from fall 1936 were all important factors in this economic development. Moreover, the restrictions of the authorities on the establishment of work camps fostered new plans and investments in other directions and toward more stable activities.

In summer 1937, a legionary restaurant was opened. This was an evolution of the initial legionary canteen designed only for legionary members. The advertisement leaflet for the restaurant, written by Codreanu, develops themes already encountered in the ideological underpinnings of the work camps and the cooperative. One of the main goals of the work camp activity, the overcoming of class differences, was strongly reaffirmed in the case of the restaurant. After the complaints at Carmen Sylva and the difficulties encountered by his “equalizing” principles, Codreanu was aware of how slippery the discourse about class could become. In the restaurant, he expected professors not to “look with contempt” at their “brothers” from the working class, who, for their part, were expected to behave decently without “shouting”, “spitting” or “cursing”.

The general tone of the leaflet is permeated by an urge to control and to regulate behaviors and interactions. The restaurant was supposed to become a “school of good behavior, refinement, and warm legionary camaraderie”. To achieve this goal, however, the clients were expected to lower their voices, to sit and eat in an appropriate way, to handle cutlery carefully, without making noises. The controlled setting of the legionary restaurant, in contrast (to some extent) with the spontaneous and relaxed atmosphere photographed at the work camps, had an ideological justification in Codreanu’s vision of the “legionary” future of the Romanian people. The legionary restaurant should not resemble a “Greek coffee shop” or a “Jewish tavern” (*havra jidovească*). An imagined Romanian ‘predisposition’ to well-mannered behavior and the insistence on an almost austere atmosphere were related directly to Codreanu’s anti-Semitic ideology. The reference to the Greeks is, on the other hand, less common, but served to corroborate his thesis of substantial, irreconcilable differences between the Romanians, of whom the legionaries represented some sort of quintessence, and all the other “foreigners”.

The integration of the working class among these quintessential representatives of the Romanian nation was at the same time successful and problematic. The projects of expansion toward the working class, mainly in Bucharest, were envisaged and launched in fall 1936, when the Legionary Workers' Corp (Corpul Muncitoresc Legionar) was created. The efficient propaganda, the general success registered by the Legion in this period, and, significantly, the outlawing and severe state persecution of the Romanian Communist Party, led to the fast and steady success of the Legionary Movement among the workers of Bucharest. According to a police report from May 1937, less than a year after the creation of the Workers' Corp, the importance and the activities of the legionary workers overshadowed the role previously played by the students at the movement's forefront.²⁶⁵

Despite these spectacular developments, however, the relationships between the workers and the rest of the legionaries were not always as harmonious as the legionary leadership envisaged and presented them. As mentioned above, intellectuals and journalists displayed a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the equalizing policies applied by Codreanu to the communal life and work at the camp of Carmen Sylva. In addition, the paternalistic tone used by Codreanu in his leaflet on the legionary restaurant blatantly exposed the stereotypes that circulated about the working class. The clients of the working class and their families were depicted as noisy, dirty, and unrefined. While university professors were only invited to "show respect" for their hardworking "brothers", the behavior of the workers was strongly policed and controlled in order to transform them into "proper" legionaries. In a similar fashion, in May 1937, the legionary leadership decided to remove interaction between intellectuals and workers at the Green House, by changing their schedule of attendance. Using legionary members to act as guards for the building, intellectuals were sent on Sundays and holidays, while workers were used on weekdays. This decision was taken because on Sundays and holidays there were many visitors to the Green House, and the workers were "not very presentable" and unprepared to answer the visitors' questions.²⁶⁶

The incorporation of the working class into the legionary family thus proved to be much harder and less straightforward than envisaged by the discourses on harmony and equality among all Romanians. The difficult and at times uncomfortable coexistence between legionaries of different social backgrounds in the same locales and buildings led to a sort of spatial separation. In October 1937, a large legionary cooperative was opened in a working-class neighborhood. This decision was surely driven by the massive following among the

²⁶⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 7/1937, ff. 3-4.

²⁶⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 264/1937, f. 378.

workers and the growth of the Legionary Workers' Corp. In addition, though, legionary shops and restaurants in different neighborhoods followed the already existing divisions in Bucharest between the city center and the working-class areas. The building was situated in front of the Grivița factories, where train coaches were manufactured and where, according to a police report, there were 103 active legionary nests.²⁶⁷

The new legionary cooperative aimed to cover most of the practical and social needs of the workers. On the ground floor there was a restaurant, while upstairs there were large rooms for “concerts, balls, and meetings”.²⁶⁸ The social gatherings of the legionary members from the working class were thus supposed to take place in this cooperative, strategically located close to the factories and, very likely, the homes of the factory workers. In general, the different sections of the movement always held separate meetings, for all had different goals and political strategies. In the case of the workers, however, the space devoted to leisure activities and social events was physically separated from the other legionary places. It is hard to imagine the intellectuals from the “Axa” group attending parties organized at this cooperative, thus its very existence reinforced within the movement prior separations along class lines.

The dynamics of the concomitant inclusion and marginalization of the working-class legionaries acquires an even more complex outlook if interwoven with gender dimensions. As mentioned above, the staff at the first legionary canteen, from the directress to the cooks and waitresses, was entirely composed of women. The cooperatives, on the other hand, often had men as coordinators, while women usually worked and volunteered in the shops. This “feminization” of part of the legionary business thus followed customary gender roles, with women monopolizing the catering sector, from management to the more menial tasks. In September 1937, the personnel active at the restaurants and canteens held a meeting at the legionary headquarters. The vast majority of the attendees were women, mostly “ladies” who were named only by the surname of their husbands, and so, presumably, wives of legionary members and sympathizers.²⁶⁹

Codreanu's circular on the opening of the legionary canteen notes that “ladies” close to the Legion were to contribute to the preparation of meals and the general organization of the canteen. Chapter three will analyze more widely the roles and forms of engagement of these “ladies”; women from the higher classes who sympathized with the Legionary

²⁶⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 3/1937, f. 157.

²⁶⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 11/1937, f. 223.

²⁶⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 11/1937, ff. 136-137.

Movement. Their affiliation was informal and very discreet, but nevertheless very fruitful for the movement's financial support and networking. The direction and coordination of the legionary restaurants benefited from the support of these "ladies", together with the more direct involvement of the wives of legionary members. Lastly, cooks, waitresses, and vendors at the legionary shops were mostly recruited among students, who were able to combine political activity with earning a living.

When restaurants and shops started to open in working-class neighborhoods, the management and staff of these activities seem to have never involved directly working-class legionary members. The men were mostly factory workers and would therefore not have the time and the energy to participate directly in these businesses. Moreover, as mentioned above, they were also removed from their service as guards of the Green House on Sundays and holidays, to a great extent the only time when they were not at work. In this way, many constraints hindered their involvement in the social and economic activities of the legionary family. As far as the wives and families of the working-class legionaries are concerned, they were surely expected to use the legionary cooperatives and restaurants, as well as participating, in accordance with their means, in the legionary activities and campaigns.

Very likely, various considerations prevented the inclusion of working-class wives or daughters in the staff of the legionary cooperatives and restaurants. Lack of time, poor education, unpreparedness, and political immaturity were all potential elements at the root of this exclusion. While the legionary family was envisaged as a unit that would interweave political participation and economic cooperation, working-class women were hardly imaginable in the roles of directresses and coordinators of economic enterprises or living stably at the legionary headquarters. The legionary women, members, and sympathizers, who undertook the direction of the restaurants and canteens might have assumed a philanthropic attitude towards the members of the working-class. This might have represented a major inclination of women from the higher classes, engaged in philanthropic associations and activities before their involvement in the Legionary Movement. The wives of prominent legionary members might have easily followed this attitude, for their network of acquaintances brought them to higher, though fragile, social positions, as a result of the growing support for the Legion among the elites of Bucharest.

Philanthropic actions and policies toward disadvantaged social strata increased during the brief duration of the National Legionary State. The new regime was built on the fragile alliance between General (later Marshall) Ion Antonescu and Horia Sima, who became the leader of the Legionary Movement in 1938, after the death of Codreanu. The installation of

the National Legionary State in September 1940 followed a dramatic summer for the Romanian state and its territorial integrity. Though at that time Romania was still a neutral country, the events of the war caught it in their rapid unfolding. The aftermath of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the fall of France, and, lastly, the so-called Vienna Diktat led to the loss, for Romania, of vast parts of its territory, including Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and Northern Transylvania. As a result, King Carol II, who was considered unable to defend the national borders, was forced to abdicate. His royal dictatorship fell, and it was replaced by the National Legionary State. The undisputed leader of the new regime was General Ion Antonescu, with the Legionary Movement as an ally. On the contrary, the young King Michael I saw the powers of the monarchy strongly reduced, and his role was diminished to a symbolic one.

In this context, the Legionary Movement launched a vast welfare organization called the “Legionary Help” (Ajutorul Legionar). The newly gained power and access to resources and infrastructure allowed the “Legionary Help” to function quickly and efficiently. In October 1940, one of its first achievements was the opening of a large soup kitchen in Bucharest for the refugees from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. The soup kitchen could count on state funding and support, but the legionary family “Biruința” (Victory) managed the entire organizational aspect. The “legionary ladies” of the town and of this family coordinated most of the philanthropic activities, and they also presided over the inauguration of the soup kitchen. A newspaper article covering the event described the women “comrades” from the family as personifications of “good will and camaraderie”, able to make everyone feel at home, despite the hardship endured by the refugees.²⁷⁰

While in fall 1940 the legionary welfare section could benefit from unprecedented funds and support from the authorities, the organizational networks, and the activities of many legionary families in this sense were already well established. Even more, between 1938 and 1940, the underground activity of the Legionary Movement strengthened the relationships between the members of families and families of nests. Under the persecution of the authorities and with a great number of legionaries in prison, the nests devoted a significant part of their activity to a sort of internal welfare, aimed at supporting and helping the members in prison and their families. According to police reports from June and October 1938, “hundreds of families” of imprisoned legionaries were enduring extreme financial

²⁷⁰ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 221/1940, f. 52; Fond MI-D, dosar 12/1940, f. 146.

difficulties, and they could count mostly on the safety net provided by the underground fundraising campaigns.²⁷¹

This tight collaboration and interconnectedness between nuclear families and extended legionary families were a central element of “resistance” under persecution. This aspect became even more important after January 1941, when after the rebellion the movement had to make a great effort not to disappear completely. In summer 1942, the underground leadership still issued a series of directives for the activities of the legionary families. Raising money represented the most urgent endeavor, to be achieved through campaigns among personal relationships and donations from sympathizers. This economic resistance was presented as an “obligation” and the most vital contribution a legionary could give in that situation of crisis.²⁷²

The difficult times following the definitive outlawing of the movement in January 1941 also transformed the “feminization” of some legionary activities into a strategic tool. Wives of imprisoned legionaries sometimes took over new roles and tasks in the movement. Most importantly, they contributed to keeping contacts and ensuring the circulation of information between members in prison and the underground organization outside. In a similar fashion, a few legionary restaurants and soup kitchens allowed for political and welfare activities to continue for a while after January 1941. In March, the abovementioned soup kitchen for refugees, even after replacing most of its staff with supposedly non-legionary workers, was still a lively meeting point for the movement’s members. After a thorough search, the police asked for the soup kitchen to be closed or at the least for it to be kept under stricter surveillance.²⁷³

The soup kitchen, ran mostly by legionary women, passed after January 1941 under the direction of a philanthropic association. The new direction partially replaced the staff, except for Mrs. Popescu, wife of the prominent legionary member Tudose Popescu. The philanthropic association was under the leadership of the wife of an army general, and she might have been acquainted with the legionary “ladies” involved in the activities of the soup kitchen during the National Legionary State. The tolerance for intense political activity after the outlawing might have been fostered by a general sympathy of the new leadership for the Legion and its achievements, especially in the field of welfare services. Moreover, in some cities or neighborhoods the soup kitchens and shelters opened by the “Legionary Help” were

²⁷¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 278, vol. II/1938, f. 88, 135; dosar 252/1939, f. 166.

²⁷² ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 26/1940, f. 14.

²⁷³ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 13/1939, ff. 190-193.

the only available social services, and their closure would have caused many problems and much distress. According to a police report from February 1941, this happened in the city of Brăila, where the legionary soup kitchen had provided food for around four hundred inhabitants of the poorest neighborhoods. After the closure of the canteen in the aftermath of the rebellion, these inhabitants restarted their begging on the streets, not only causing a social emergency, but also offering the legionary underground organization a motive for propaganda.²⁷⁴

The legionary family, born as a social and economic experiment during the Legion's most successful period, became in times of crisis an important element in keeping the movement alive and vital. In the underground organization all the different sections and networks tightened their relationships in order to survive politically. Mutual help, propaganda, and new strategies were possible because they relied extensively on pre-existing structures. The formation and development of the legionary families produced a safety net able to reorganize and efficiently combine social contacts and economic collaboration. Far from replacing biological and nuclear families, the legionary families integrated these more "traditional" social groups into a wider structure, based on the belief in and devotion to the political project envisaged by the movement.

Conclusions

Marriage, the so-called "division" between private and public, and the reconceptualization of family relations blatantly expose the contradictions and complexities of women's participation in the Legionary Movement. The presence and contribution of women was essential, for no legionary family, community, or utopia was envisaged without women, and especially without wives and mothers. However, the "disorder" produced by the women's presence touched every aspect of legionary life. Any political project designed by men is based simultaneously on the inclusion and the exclusion of women, resulting often in insolvable ideological riddles and conundrums. The very existence of an "issue" around marriage, private and public life, and new understandings of family sprang mostly from the difficulty to adjust disruptive ideas and concepts not only to the current gender norms present in the general context of interwar Romania, but also to the desire and need for these norms to be maintained in the legionary utopia as well.

²⁷⁴ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 79, vol. II/1941, f. 152.

Marriage was a defining element for the gender relations within the Legion and for the perceptions and opinions about these gender relations outside the Legion. The inclusion of the legionary “sisters” into the male fraternity was a complicated step, dictated by the need to attract women members but also accompanied by complex features. The presence of young, unmarried women inevitably created room for rumors and attacks from political enemies based on allegations of “immorality” and potential sexual promiscuity. Endogamous marriages between legionary members emerged as the most appropriate solution, able to reach two intertwining purposes: to assure the necessary presence of women in the legionary political project and, at the same time, to keep this feminine presence under control. Marriages were supposed to dissipate the rumors of “immorality”, in line with the sort of “gentlemen’s agreement” according to which wives “belong” to their husbands and they do not commit adultery. Moreover, a legionary marriage was also expected to prevent women from abandoning the Legion, or their political engagement, after marriage. For the kind of political project envisaged by the movement, marriages with non-legionary men would have irretrievably compromised women’s involvement.

In practice, these ideal solutions became much more complex, leading to adjustments and compromises. The “deviations” from the path of marriage and, potentially, motherhood, were to some extent impossible to avoid. The inclusion of women in the legionary “fraternity” had as a “side effect” the realization for some women that political engagement, activism, and at some stage a leadership role was more suited to them than marriage and motherhood. The Legion made this choice possible, though it is hard to say to what extent this option was an unintended consequence of a propagandistic rhetoric, of a discourse not meant to become practice. When this happened, however, the legionary ideologues were particularly careful to prevent the unmarried woman from becoming a “model”. Political involvement was presented as something not incompatible with family life, since family life itself was meant to be “legionarized”, and ordinary activities were transformed in political acts. Unmarried women, as leaders, “fighters” and fanatics, were supposed to remain an exception, a restricted group of women who served their ideal not through their “supreme” roles of wives and mothers, but through something else. They were different, “special”, and their sexual availability and “dangerousness” was neutralized by tailoring them to a half-monastic, half-soldierly image.

For legionary women marriage was sometimes a burden, at times a privilege, and often a vehicle for political action. These aspects did not depend solely on their choices and personal attitudes and initiatives but were inevitably interconnected with the roles and actions

of their husbands, within and outside the Legion. Wives of leaders and prominent members were always under the control and supervision of the authorities. When their husbands were arrested or prosecuted, wives were often arrested as well and interrogated, though they very rarely faced longer periods in prison or house arrest. Wives of prominent members and of less prominent members alike engaged in activities considered less “dangerous” and less “political”, such as the management and the organization of several legionary economic enterprises and welfare services. These activities, however, acquired a different dimension during periods of crisis. After the outlawing of the Legion in 1938, and, more dramatically, in 1941, the mass imprisonment of legionary men resulted often in a much more direct political activity of their wives. Legionary women managed the “internal welfare” of the movement, by raising funds to economically support the families of the imprisoned members, continuing propaganda, and keeping contacts between legionaries in prison and the underground organization outside.

Despite ideal and practical differences in treatment and consideration between married and unmarried women, all women fell under customary gender divisions and roles in the functioning of the legionary houses. From the homes in Bucharest, installed at the house of General Cantacuzino, then at the Green House, to the temporary houses represented by the work camps, the customary gender division of labor was generally implemented without great modification. Women were more often than not in charge of the daily menial tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and sewing. The “aesthetic” side of the legionary houses was also entrusted to women, for women were considered not only housekeepers, but also the sources of beauty and pleasantness, “the angels of the home”.

These ordinary tasks, however, were given an extraordinary meaning through the legionary ideology and practice. The legionary houses and the work camps were presented as different from any other home the members had inhabited before. The life transformation envisaged by legionary ideology demanded that members became involved in every aspect of the Legion, the ideology of which permeated even the most ordinary of activities. At the work camp, legionary life was lived in the closest way to this ideal. A strong ritualization accompanied the daily tasks of the members, through the “legionarization” of resting, leisure time, and convivial events. In Bucharest the experience of the work camp was adjusted to different and more complex organizational aspects and political activities. Few legionary women lived at the legionary houses, the vast majority had their own houses and families. The main purpose of what can be called the legionary family policy, however, was to

legionarize any aspect of the members' "private" lives, to turn the house of any of its members into a legionary house.

Legionary houses, work camps, and economic enterprises had at their core the ideal of overcoming class differences and privileges. Work camps in particular, were considered the perfect location to experiment with a new ethics of work and sharing, not based on class and cultural distinctions. This class harmony was pursued to reduce the enormous distance between the political elites and the rest of the population, especially the peasantry and the lower classes in general. This harmony was strongly propagandized but the outcomes were not as straightforward and smooth as envisaged in legionary discourse. Many elements hindered the translation into practice of this ideal, from the struggles for power within the movement to the stereotypes on and intolerance toward the habits and the appearance of the working class. Moreover, another central element of this attempt to overcome class divisions was the complete omission, in both discourse and practice, of its gender dimensions.

Whilst the legionary members and supporters praised the presence of intellectuals, professors, and noblemen at the work camps, the image of a noblewoman, a lady from high society, or a famous actress cooking at a camp and sleeping in a tent was unconceivable. Nor was it ever mentioned, in the sources analyzed so far, that something of that kind was envisaged or expected. The intersection of class and gender fostered division and segregation among women from different social backgrounds diametrically opposed to the attempts of harmonization and the overcoming of class differences in the case of legionary men. Some exceptions, however, confirmed the rule. Wives of legionary leaders and prominent members were acquainted with women from the higher classes, and they entered exclusive circles through the political position of their husbands. The legionary leadership, though coming from modest backgrounds, formed a kind of "temporary elite", who benefitted for few years from the sympathy and the support of the established elites. Moments of crisis also fostered collaborations and relationships that went beyond class differences. Nevertheless, the attitude adopted especially by noblewomen and "ladies" was often philanthropic, in particular toward the working class, reproducing pre-existing dynamics of power. In the following chapter, I will analyze the forms of support and the political activism of women from the higher classes, from cultural and intellectual circles, and from aristocratic families.

Artists, Intellectuals and Noblewomen: was Legionarism fashionable?

Introduction

During the years of its extraordinary expansion, from 1932-1933 to 1937, the Legionary Movement established the center of its activities in Bucharest. The city, vibrant, chaotic, “cosmopolitan and nationalist”, offered the movement a new and challenging scenario for its political expansion and ideological elaborations.²⁷⁵ The two souls of the city, the cosmopolitan and the nationalist, were expressed and experienced not as an irreconcilable dichotomy, but as the two faces of the same coin, with fascinating and sometimes idiosyncratic outcomes. The both glamorous and bohemian life of the “Little Paris” was staged along Calea Victoriei and its surroundings, an area of approximately three square kilometers that represented the quintessence of this life. Cafés, concert halls, theaters, the Royal Palace, the university, student houses, luxury hotels, the Cișmigiu park, newspapers’ offices, everything was there, in an almost claustrophobic proximity.

The cosmopolitan soul of Bucharest was displayed along these streets, at the cafés and the theaters, with contents and features not too far from the familiar – if not trite – sights and experiences of other European cities of the time. The sounds of jazz, Charleston and tango started to permeate the Romanian musical scene. New and syncretic genres appeared, performed by the first “pop stars” of the time, like Jean Moscopol and Maria Tănase, still today praised as “legends” of the interwar period. Theaters showed the movies of Greta Garbo; Maurice Ravel included Bucharest on one of his tours and conducted the Romanian Orchestra in two successful concerts. Newspapers and magazines displayed a wide range of advertisements, for clothing, body-care products, perfumes, movies, and books, showing an incipient consumerist culture, though mainly directed toward the urbanized and relatively wealthy classes.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L’oubli du fascisme. Trois intellectuels roumains dans la tourmente du siècle* Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p. 57. For a detailed account of the Legionary Movement’s activity in these years and especially in Bucharest, see Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer*, pp. 261-279; Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*. pp. 95-150, 162-164, 168-174.

²⁷⁶ Images, accounts, and memoirs of interwar Bucharest are present in a wide variety of literary works, novels, journals, city “biographies”, and many more. Among the “classics” books on interwar Bucharest, see Paul Morand, *București* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015, originally published in 1935); see also, among the more recent

Alongside the city's cosmopolitanism, and in the same places where this was displayed, the cafés, the newspapers' offices and, in this case, the university halls, Bucharest also showed its other face: the capital of a country engaged in a titanic nation-building process and the quest for "national identity". As the political and administrative center of Greater Romania, Bucharest was "the metropolis", the place where the nationalizing reforms and policies were prepared for implementation, with uncountable difficulties and flaws, in the rest of the country.²⁷⁷ This political endeavor was accompanied by a wide range of cultural enterprises devoted to the fabrication of national identity. The works of the violinist and composer George Enescu, the "national composer", incorporated elements from regional folk music into the forms of the European symphonic canon, thus creating "Romanian Rhapsodies", "Romanian" Caprice for Violin and Orchestra and the "Poème Roumain".²⁷⁸ The sociologist Dimitrie Gusti founded a sociological school which had among its major purposes the observation and documentation of the customs and traditions of Romanian villages, and their contributions to "national heritage". He created and trained teams of sociologists and ethnographers, who compiled a series of monographs devoted to villages, also introducing the use of the ethnographic documentary film.²⁷⁹

In this political and cultural atmosphere, a group of intellectuals in Bucharest took nationalist discourse a step further, transforming the quest for national identity into an existential problem. This new philosophical dimension of the national question began to be explored and theorized at the University of Bucharest, especially through the figures of the philosophy professors Nae Ionescu and Nichifor Crainic. They promoted these theories and ideas in the newspapers they edited, and a group of young intellectuals started to interiorize and develop these theories. This group counted in its ranks the most brilliant figures of the "new generation", Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, Mihail Polihroniade and

publications, Catherine Durandin, *Bucarest. Mémoires et promenades* (Saint-Claude-de-Diray : Ed. Hesse, 2000); Ioana Pârvulescu, *Întoarcere în Bucureștiul interbelic* (Bucharest : Humanitas, 2012).

²⁷⁷ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, p. 189.

²⁷⁸ The literature on George Enescu is relatively abundant. For an overview on his life and work, see Noel Malcolm, *George Enescu. His Life and Music* (London: Toccata Press, 1990). For the relationship between music and nationalism, see also Benjamin Curtis, *Music Makes the Nation: Nationalist Composers and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amherst-New York: Cambria Press, 2009).

²⁷⁹ Systematic scholarly research on the sociological school of Dimitrie Gusti and, more generally, on the tight relationship between sociology/ethnography and nationalism in interwar Romania is still lacking. For a general introduction on this topic, see the monographic issue of *Les études sociales*, nr. 153-154, 2011/1-2, *Sociologie et politique en Roumanie (1918-1948)*. For a very general overview on the ethnographic documentary, considered one of the most significant achievements of Romanian cinema, see Călin Căliman, *Istoria filmului românesc (1897-2010)* (Bucharest: Contemporanul, 2011), pp. 100-111.

others.²⁸⁰ The distinctive features of this form of nationalism, its existential and philosophical character, emerge from Marta Petreu's analysis of the work of Emil Cioran, especially his crucial *The Transfiguration of Romania*, published in 1936.

The two major aspects of this "new" nationalism were grounded in the younger generation's contempt for and disillusionment with the political class and its "old-fashioned" nationalism, and a general sense of inferiority in being Romanians, an element that particularly characterized Cioran's pessimistic and disquieting philosophy. To this old nationalism, which was considered passionless, empty, meaningless, and concerned only with the trivial "territorial preservation", Cioran and his friends opposed a reinvigorating form of nationalism, lived as a spiritual and philosophical experience, transformative of one's self and one's country, vivified through violence and "revolutionary" actions.²⁸¹ Romania, in Cioran's view, meant nothing, had no historical place among the other nations, had always been incapable of splendor, of creation, of action. Only a revolution, a truly nationalist revolution, could lead Romania into history, a revolution similar to the one witnessed by Cioran, with great admiration, in Nazi Germany.²⁸² A revolution was necessary because there was no political tradition to return to, with one remarkable exception: anti-Semitism.

Integral nationalism and violent anti-Semitism became thus the key aspects of the intellectual elite's political and philosophical stances. These features, although expressed at a completely different level of refinement and depth, were present in the legionary ideology from its very beginning. The encounter between the intellectuals and the Legion, in Bucharest, at the beginning of the 1930s, triggered a process of mutual influences and "elective affinities". The relationships between this group of intellectuals and the Legion's most prominent members became increasingly tighter, and reached their peak in 1936 and 1937, the years of the movement's major expansion. These relationships between men of such different cultural and social backgrounds were not always smooth. Indeed, they were also characterized by suspicion and distrust, and Codreanu seems never to have trusted them completely. However, the allegiance to the Legion of many renowned intellectuals, and the open support of the "father" of the "new generation" Nae Ionescu, elevated the movement to a new level; it allowed encounters with a different world, and fostered contacts with high society and the cultural and artistic elites of Bucharest.

²⁸⁰ For the concept of 'new generation' in Romanian history, especially in relation to cultural production and nationalism, see, Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the "Archangel Michael" in Inter-war Romania*, pp. 57-63.

²⁸¹ Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past. E.M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), pp. 12-14.

²⁸² Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past*, pp. 8-11.

Alongside the new relationships with the nationalist intellectuals, life in Bucharest also opened access to the composite world of aristocracy. The key figure in this process was General Gheorghe “Zizi” Cantacuzino-Grănicerul, a war veteran, passionate nationalist, and member of one of oldest Romanian aristocratic families. The general became the formal president of the “Everything for the Country” Party, the political form taken by the Iron Guard in December 1934. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the big house belonging to the general on Imprimeriei street (later Gutenberg Street) became the headquarters of the Legion, a multifunctional space, which functioned as a private house, office space and meeting hall, all under the eyes of the police. The incessant comings and goings kept the police very busy, with students, legionaries, friends, many unidentified “gentlemen” and suspicious “ladies”, constantly entering and leaving the house.²⁸³

The headquarters on Imprimeriei street was part of the abovementioned, three square-kilometer area that encompassed the major cultural, social and political institutions and events of the city. The proximity of the university, of the Royal Palace and the state’s ministries, the offices of the newspapers and the houses of many intellectuals and noble families, put the Legion’s leadership in tight contact with these milieus. Alongside this building in the city center, the movement had another headquarters on the outskirts of Bucharest, the Green House. As already analyzed in the previous chapter, the Green House was a never-ending building site, a place imagined as the ideal house of the legionary community, with a farm and vegetable garden for self-sustenance, and a church. This construction site on the periphery of Bucharest mirrored the experience of the work camps, reproducing within the city the relationship between the headquarters of the Legion and the work camps established all over the country. While a centralized office was necessary for organizational and strategic reasons, the “spiritual” training of the legionaries belonged to the work camp. The house belonging to the general in the center of Bucharest was a sort of necessary evil, but the project of the Green House represented the real training ground for the “legionary utopia”.²⁸⁴

The attraction to this “legionary utopia”, the support raised among nationalist intellectuals and journalists, and the contacts with high society established in Bucharest

²⁸³ ANIC – Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, f. 2, ff. 4-5, f. 7, ff. 9-12, f. 20, ff. 23-43, f. 46-48. According to a police report, the house of the General became the official headquarters of the Legion in April 1934. However, the house was under surveillance since the end of 1933, thus it was very likely already used as an informal “legionary house”, see ANIC, MI-D, dosar 7/1930, f. 211.

²⁸⁴ See Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, “Cetatea Sfântul Mihai”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 June 1928, II, 12, pp. 3-4. In this article Codreanu drew the picture of the ideal ‘legionary house’. The “house” was imagined far from the town, “center of human malice and wickedness”.

brought together men from extremely different social and cultural backgrounds. The legionary leadership, especially Corneliu Codreanu, the two lawyers and ideologues Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, and student leader Gheorghe Furdui were all in close contact with important personalities in the cultural and political world. Political and personal ties were also very common among less prominent legionary members, who had many opportunities to meet supporters and sympathizers from different classes and backgrounds. From this point of view, the work camps represented an important element, for one of the central features of the work camp experience was the erasure of all class distinctions and the construction of a communitarian life devoid of “undeserved” privileges.

Among their great number of admirers, sympathizers and supporters from different social and cultural circles the Legion could also count many women. Certainly, the existence of a female following was not an entirely new phenomenon, but it acquired unprecedented proportions during the mid-1930s, especially in Bucharest. In Moldavia, during the Legion’s early years, and before, during its founders’ militancy in the ranks of the LANC, women of different classes and backgrounds had supported the movement. But at the time of the movement’s extraordinary growth in the 1930s, support from women reached still greater numerical proportions while presenting a varied and multifarious set of features. The great issues of women’s public roles, the relationships between the personal and the political, and the viable roads toward emancipation were often at stake for women who chose to support the Legion, though for different reasons and in different ways.

Most of these women supporters and sympathizers belonged to a world previously unknown to the Legion. These women introduced new patterns of belonging that went beyond the personal and sentimental relationships that had shaped a great part of the women’s support during the movement’s early years. Relations of kinship, love and friendship maintained a crucial role in women’s political engagement, but the forms, the experiences, and the conceptualizations of these relationships acquired far more complex features. The women of high society, those from the cultural elites and the members of aristocratic families who started to support the Legion offered a different kind of feminine presence within the movement. Their class, their education, their social status, led to new forms of participation, forms that created an enormous difference between them and most of the other legionary women. Different from students, from the rank-and-file, and from nest commanders, these women had never cooked in a work camp, performed military exercises, sewed and embroidered tablecloths or distributed leaflets. On the contrary, they wrote, they organized soirées, raised money, and ran charitable associations; they even piloted aircraft. In

so doing, they created connections between the Legion and the world of politics, of finance, and of the aristocracy.

However, despite these huge differences in activities, in roles, and positions, women supporters, members and sympathizers of the Legion shared not only their political engagement for the same cause, but together redefined what it meant for a woman to act politically. While class and social position created a kind of segregation among different groups of women, most of them performed “disruptive acts”, in their personal lives and their political commitment.²⁸⁵ These acts allowed them to step beyond the role of wives and mothers prepared for them by the same legionary ideology they supported (and, in the end, by almost every other ideology around them). Most of these women were also wives and mothers, but their activities showed that it was possible to be more, and to do more. They brought complexity to the legionary ideology and practice regarding women, they exposed its contradictions and they profited from the interstices of freedom offered by those same contradictions.

The concept of “disruption” guides Mary Louise Roberts’ analysis of the lives and work of a group of women in fin-de-siècle France. Through their personal and professional choices, these women resisted and challenged established gender norms, which equated femininity with domesticity. Belonging mostly to the worlds of journalism and theatre, the protagonists of Roberts’ analysis exposed the ideological grounds of the supposedly “natural” gender order. Through their “disruptive acts”, they replaced “nature” with “performativity”, and “destiny” with choice.²⁸⁶ Despite the distance and differences between the group of women analyzed by Roberts (which includes, among others, the “divine” Sarah Bernhardt) and the women of this chapter, they share some common features.²⁸⁷

Firstly, they were relatively wealthy and well-educated women. As we shall see, some of them reached economic independence through their profession, while others belonged to rich aristocratic families. Some of them were part of intellectual circles or wrote columns in newspapers; others presided or were members of feminist or philanthropic associations. Secondly, as Roberts has underlined in the introduction to her analysis, most of these women “have ill-fit our histories of resistance to gender norms”.²⁸⁸ The reasons behind the difficulty

²⁸⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: the New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-17. For the concept of “performativity” see the now classic work of Judith Butler, in particular *Gender Trouble*, pp. 101-190.

²⁸⁷ On the life and “myth” of Sarah Bernhardt, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: the New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, pp. 165-219.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

to include some of these women in the mainstream feminist narratives are manifold: some of them did not identify themselves as feminists, and their resistance to gender norms is deemed a “personal” rather than a “political” choice. Or, as we shall see later in this chapter, other women identified as feminists, but their political allegiances, and, in some cases, their anti-Semitic views make them uncomfortable and dislikeable figures.

“Disruption” was sometimes easier for women with an established social position and economic independence. Nevertheless, the decision to support the Legion, whether driven by belief, passion, or calculation, was not a position devoid of risk. It carried the hazard of being publicly exposed, of being followed by the police and perhaps even of imprisonment, of losing money, prestige, or friends. Exploring the lives and political actions of three groups of women will allow a better understanding of their decisions, of the risks they took, and of the forms taken by their support to the Legion. The division in three groups is (as so often happens for analytical purposes) half arbitrary and half driven by considerations related to affinities, similarities and common actions of the women grouped together.

The first group is the least arbitrary, for it brings together the women belonging to the intellectual and artistic circles that supported the Legion in Bucharest. Most of them knew each other personally. They were friends and met regularly, together with their husbands and partners, the writers, philosophers and journalists of the “young generation”, and sometimes, with their elderly mentors. The second group is made up of women from aristocratic families, most likely in contact with each other, for they often shared the same extended circle of acquaintances in the world of politics and finance. Different from the women of Bucharest’s cultural circles, noblewomen did not constitute a self-evident group. Nonetheless, they all highlight important issues related to the transformation of the “old” elites, to women’s use of power, influence and money and to how this use took on a political dimension and a personal meaning. Lastly, the third group is the most heterogeneous and complex, for the analysis will embrace the activities and lives of women who may be defined as feminists. In the composite world of incipient Romanian feminism, the interwar period saw a multitude of different currents. Alongside the liberal suffragist current, ran other interpretations of the road toward women’s emancipation and women’s rights. Or, better, the very same concepts of “emancipation” and “rights” were framed in various ways. Here, in particular, I will analyze the activism of women belonging to the more nationalist, Orthodox and conservative currents of interwar feminism. Some of them, especially in the 1930s, entertained a political “flirtation” with the Legion and its sympathizers. This kind of political “flirtation”, probably driven by both strategic reasons and sincere beliefs, can shed light on the various roads taken

by feminists, in Romania and elsewhere, to seek visibility and try to reach their goals in a political world where their voices alone often remained powerless and unheard.

Passion and Politics

In late October 1936, legionary commander and journalist Mihail Polihroniade hosted an afternoon tea at his house. Corneliu Codreanu was present, “everyone called him ‘Captain’”. Marietta Sadova asked Codreanu to sign a copy of his book and, though he seemed not to know who she was, Sadova listened to his words “ecstatically”. Haig Acterian offered Codreanu copies of all his literary works, poems and essays, each with a dedication. After the event, they described the encounter with Codreanu as a “colossal” experience.²⁸⁹ Marietta Sadova and Haig Acterian formed in 1936-1937 one of the most important and famous “legionary couples” within the circle of nationalist intellectuals. Marietta Sadova was a renowned actress, and Haig Acterian was both a writer and literary and theater critic. Indeed, he was one of the central figures of Bucharest’s cultural elite.

The exploration of their love, their circle of friends, and their legionary sympathies is possible thanks to the relatively wide scholarly attention that this circle of intellectuals have received in Romania and internationally. The presence of the most brilliant minds of the Romanian interwar cultural scene in this circle and above all, of Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran, has fostered extensive interest, especially since the 1990s. From then on, the legionary past of these two important intellectuals began to emerge from the cloud of shame, oblivion and self-censorship that they fabricated for themselves during the decades that followed the Second World War.

The legionary experience of this circle was much more than a few, insignificant “imprudent acts and errors committed in youth”, as Mircea Eliade euphemistically frames it in the second volume of his autobiography.²⁹⁰ The discovery and publication of Eliade’s *Portugal Journal* of 1941-1945, the heartfelt memoir of Cioran about his youth, *Mon Pays*, published posthumously in 1996, and other journals and memoirs from the interwar period have shed much light on the strong and extremely passionate political commitment of these

²⁸⁹ Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal, 1935-1944* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016, first edition 1996). For the English translation, see Mihail Sebastian, *Journal 1935-1944. The Fascist Years* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000). All my references are from the Romanian edition.

²⁹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume II: 1937-1960. Exile’s Odyssey* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 138.

intellectuals to the legionary cause.²⁹¹ Moreover, archival material, especially police reports, show how carefully these circles of artists and intellectuals were followed and surveilled by the authorities. Their legionary activity was clearly well-known since most of them published extensively in newspapers and magazines and made their political affiliation to the Legion public. They were organized in two main nests, the “Axa” nest, named after one of the first legionary newspapers in Bucharest (closed in December 1933) and the nest “Athenée Palace” after a luxury hotel on Calea Victoriei where legionary members from high society used to meet.²⁹²

Scholarly inquiry into the legionary affiliation of these intellectuals, composed of rich and deep analysis of their writings, and on the other hand the dry police reports, have left in the background the intense personal life of these intellectual and artistic circles. What emerges from journals and memoirs (theirs or those written by other observers) is a roller-coaster of feelings and emotions, a whirl of passion that encompassed love and politics alike. Mircea Eliade, in the *Portugal Journal*, talks about the same passion that inflamed his legionary feelings and his “poignant love” for his wife Nina, both ultimately driven by his “passion for the Absolute in metaphysics and religion”.²⁹³ A kind of hyper-romanticizing process invested love and political engagement with a totalizing dimension, transforming the personal and the political into an existential and philosophical experience.

The role of women in this maelstrom of love and politics, their personal lives and their political activities, are interwoven with issues of power relations, economic independence, and social status. The analysis, even partial, of women’s feelings and activities within this group is inevitably flawed by the absence, in most cases, of their direct voices. The vast majority of journals and memoirs are written by men, men who were their friends, husbands, rejected lovers, brothers-in-law. To write about their lives, their loves, and their political engagement, requires reading between the lines of men’s words, reading women’s silence, reading their actions, and studying their choices.

During the final years of the 1920s, while the Legion of the Archangel Michael was taking its first steps in Iași, its future intellectual supporters were starting to build friendships and to organize cultural meetings. Mircea Eliade, Haig Acterian, Ion Victor Vojen and others created a “cultural and artistic society”, which held regular meetings, attended also by “a few

²⁹¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010); Emil Cioran, *Țara mea/Mon Pays* (Paris-Bucharest: Gallimard-Humanitas, 1996).

²⁹² Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 126-135; Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the “Archangel Michael” in Inter-war Romania*, pp. 63-67.

²⁹³ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, p. 157.

girls”.²⁹⁴ These girls remain anonymous in this account, given by Eliade in his *Autobiography*. Some years later, this circle of friends became a much more organized intellectual and political group.²⁹⁵ The period 1935-1937 marked the gradual affiliation to the Legionary Movement of many intellectuals of this circle, and, almost concomitantly, most of them got married, or fell passionately and excruciatingly in love. Even the mentor of the “young generation”, the philosopher Nae Ionescu, got caught in the torment of passion, and he lived an intense relationship with the writer and pianist Cella Delavrancea.

Mircea Eliade’s extensive *Autobiography* offers a lively account of the relationships within this circle of friends. Eliade wrote the two volumes of his autobiography between the 1970s and 1980s, when he was relatively old and at the height of his fame and prestige. The self-exculpatory character of these memoirs and the mystifications used by Eliade to cover the depth of his legionary engagement have been analyzed by Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine in the extensive work she has devoted to Eliade, Cioran and Eugène Ionesco. In this book, she has also signaled how “love” and “passion” were used as devices to reduce responsibility for having supported the Legionary Movement, as if amorous passion, exacerbated nationalism and political activity were all fruits of some kind of youthful “madness”.²⁹⁶ In this sense, the *Autobiography* of Eliade, in particular the parts covering the first half of the 1930s, mostly recalls the torments of love, of his being caught in a “triangle”, and the need to write autobiographical novels to analyze his own feeling. Women emerge from his work as romanticized and estheticized *objets d’amour*, fostering his creativity and his “genius”.

Finally, in the mid-1930s, Eliade settled down with Nina Mareș, who would become his first wife. They moved in together and started a “bourgeois” life, which Eliade deemed ill-suited to his “extraordinariness”, but eventually accepted it as a necessary step in order to fulfill his “destiny”. Nina, born Nicolîța Mareș, was for some time rejected by Eliade’s family and she raised eyebrows among Eliade’s friends. She was older than he was, she had a daughter from a previous marriage, and she was poor and not an intellectual. However, according to Eliade’s recollections, she managed to scatter all doubts and preoccupations by becoming the “ideal” wife, completely devoted and ready to sacrifice herself, a woman who lived for him and through him.²⁹⁷ The acknowledgment of such unbalanced relations of

²⁹⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume I: 1907-1937. Journey East, Journey West* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 66-68.

²⁹⁵ The most recent reconstruction of the cultural activity of this group in the first half of the 1930s can be found in Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania. The Criterion Association* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 59-176.

²⁹⁶ Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L’oubli du fascisme*, pp. 21-22.

²⁹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume I: 1907-1937*, pp. 265-266, 269-272, pp. 275-277.

power within their marriage, allegedly admired and envied by most of his friends, is expressed with a tender and peaceful nostalgia in these autobiographical notes, written decades after the events. On the contrary, the conflicts, the struggles, and sometimes the violence of the relationship with Nina emerge more openly from the *Portugal Journal*, written between 1941 and 1945.

The Eliade family spent the years of the war in Lisbon, where Mircea was appointed press attaché after having worked for a brief period as cultural attaché or secretary in London. In Portugal, his journal reflects his despair and preoccupation for the fate of Romania, while his megalomania reaches paroxysmal levels.²⁹⁸ The suffering for the country he loves so much is combined, in the journal, with a growing self-admiration for his novels, his “genius”, and his talent, wasted in the sterile offices of the Romanian legation. The journal entries on his relationship with Nina are sometimes punctuated with remarks on the difficulty of tolerating her presence, on the “neurasthenic” crises she fostered in him. However, the love he had for her was immense, he claimed, and, more importantly, he knew that Nina lived only “through” him and the love she bore for him.²⁹⁹ In the journal, there are many recollections of experiences and events from their years in Bucharest. We find Nina working with him at the Romanian Academy on the writings of Hasdeu, one of the intellectuals rediscovered during the interwar period, whose work Eliade curated in a critical edition in the 1930s.³⁰⁰ Moreover, what appears in this journal, and is completely absent from the later *Autobiography*, is Nina’s sharing of Mircea’s legionary affiliation.

While throughout the journal there are several thoughts and comments related to Eliade’s own political beliefs, Nina’s engagement appears only briefly in the diary, and it was occasioned by the arrival in Portugal of King Carol II of Romania. The latter fled the country with his mistress Elena Lupescu, after having abdicated in favor of his son Michael and the proclamation of the National Legionary State in September 1940. After spending some time in Spain, they reached Lisbon in May 1941, from where they eventually left Europe. During a meeting of the king with the Romanian *chargé d’affaires* in Portugal, Mihai Cămărășescu, they talked about Eliade, especially about his work on India and his novels, but the king also remarked on the strong influence that Nina had on him. In a similar fashion, Ernest

²⁹⁸ Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L’oubli du fascisme*, p. 287, pp. 293-295.

²⁹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, pp. 20-21, p. 84.

³⁰⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, pp. 104-105. Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (1838-1907) is considered one of the most important Romanian intellectuals of the XIX century. In the interwar period, the rediscovering of part of his work was also used as intellectual ground for anti-Semitic theories, together with the political writings of other Romanian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, see Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past*, p. 25.

Urdăreanu, ex-palace minister and one of the closest men of the king, mentioned to Cămărășescu that many people believed Mircea was under Nina's influence.³⁰¹

The sense and content of this influence is clarified by Eliade's reactions to these comments, which made him "angry". Undoubtedly, the remarks sounded outrageous to him, given his perceived "total" power over Nina's life and feelings. The influence concerned Nina's seemingly well-known legionary "passion". Mircea attributed this "misinterpretation" of their shared political affiliation to their two, very different ways of expressing it publicly. While Nina was "intransigent" and "straightforward about her legionary faith", he, on the contrary, had a more "diplomatic" attitude. Thus, her "unbending vehemence", in opposition to Mircea's conciliatory behavior, gave the impression that he was being influenced by her, which was "far from true".³⁰²

The possible interpretations of the expression "far from true" can be manifold. On the one hand, the "legionarization" of Nina and Mircea might have been an independent process, with little mutual influence. This process might have started before they became a couple, a hypothesis that is suggested by Eliade's remark, in the journal, that they were "friends and comrades" before falling in love.³⁰³ On the other hand, Eliade might have thought that also Nina's legionary feelings were part of her devotion and dedication to him. It is also possible, however, that Nina's "passion" for the Legionary Movement was the only aspect of their relationship that laid beyond Mircea's control, something that did not belong to their love, something that transcended their relations of power, a feeling and an engagement in which she could also be free and powerful and active. But, since the memory of Nina mostly lives through her husband's writings, her inner thoughts and motivations will probably always be beyond our reach.

The legionary affiliation of the couple, which was in 1941 apparently so renowned that even the king and his entourage were aware of it, dated back to the mid-1930s. The process of "legionarization" that led the circle around Eliade to support the Legionary Movement has been widely reconstructed and analyzed, especially through their intellectual production of the time. A more personal reconstruction has also been given by Eugène

³⁰¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, pp. 247-250. The episode is also recounted in Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'oubli du fascisme*, pp. 284-285. The author also mentions the memoirs of Dumitru G. Danielopol, colleague of Eliade at the Romanian legation in London in 1940, who recalls the "inflamed legionary beliefs" of Nina, see Dumitru G. Danielopol, *Jurnal londonez* (Iași: Institutul European, 1995).

³⁰² Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, p. 249.

³⁰³ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, p. 143. My emphasis. The word "comrade" (camarad – camaradă) was commonly used within the Legionary Movement to designate its members, both men and women, also in circulars and leaflets.

Ionesco in his memoirs, *Present Past, Past Present*, in which he recalled the transformation of his friends into strangers, the modifications that occurred in their language and behavior, and the appearance of a new violent attitude, especially in the rise of a ferocious anti-Semitism.³⁰⁴ The “legionarization” process was also witnessed by the Romanian Jewish intellectual Mihail Sebastian (born Iosif Hechter), who entrusted to the pages of his diary the painful experience of the gradual isolation he suffered from all his friends, in particular Mircea and Nina Eliade, with whom he was particularly close before their legionary “conversion”.

The activity of the women in this circle, most of them if not all of them wives of the intellectuals, is much harder to reconstruct. Their names, contrariwise to those of their husbands, are mostly forgotten. In Eliade’s *Autobiography*, we can find some of them, accompanied by short comments on their looks, their character, sometimes their jobs. There is Mary Polihroniade, wife of the journalist and legionary commander Mihail Polihroniade. She was an English woman who taught in a high school and helped Eliade with the translation of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, which was later performed with success in Bucharest. There was Mariana, wife of Petru Viforeanu, who amazed Eliade for her refined culture and her ability to read ancient Greek fluently. The philosopher Constantin Noica also married an English woman, Wendy Muston, who sometimes helped Eliade with the English translations of his works.³⁰⁵ Lastly, there was Marietta Sadova, who with Haig Acterian formed a kind of “golden couple” within the circle. Both had established careers and a beautiful apartment on Elisabeta Boulevard, one of the most central streets of Bucharest, where they held evening gatherings and cultural meetings.

While Nina’s legionary beliefs are known mostly from the accounts and journals of Mircea Eliade and Mihail Sebastian, the political activity of Marietta Sadova was much more intense and long lasting. In 1936-1937, during the “glorious” years of the Legionary Movement, it was probably hard to imagine the persecutions, the assassinations, and the destruction of the Legionary Movement that King Carol II would unleash after the proclamation of the Royal Dictatorship, in February 1938. The previous year the Legion had its apotheosis among the intellectuals of this circle. Imagining Codreanu at soirées, afternoon tea parties, and at the cultural meetings of the intellectuals is still a bizarre mental exercise.

³⁰⁴ Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L’oubli du fascisme*, pp. 241-247. Eugène Ionesco’s play *Rhinoceros* (1959) is based on this experience. The protagonist of the play, Berenger, sees the gradual transformation of the people around him (his friends, his girlfriend) into rhinoceroses. This process of “rhinocerization” mirrors the “legionarization” witnessed by Ionesco, characterized by what he considered a loss of “humanity”, see Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 211-212.

³⁰⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume I: 1907-1937*, pp. 216-219, p. 223, p. 229, p. 295.

At the time Codreanu had a car and a driver in Bucharest – the times of his riding white horses through dusty countryside roads were mostly over – but his suspicion of and uneasiness with the city and the refinement of the intellectuals and their “fashions” was nevertheless very strong in him.

For the intellectuals, on the contrary, Codreanu’s presence, his thought and the ideology of the Legion as embodied in him, were crucial for their belief in their “true” and “pure” nationalism, which they considered to have been initiated by Codreanu and completed through their own philosophical and esthetic refinements. The presence of the legionary leader at one of their gatherings could have meant for a woman like Marietta Sadova to be politically *à la page*, and also part of what Mihail Sebastian, who knew her very well, has called in his diary “her masterly social strategy”.³⁰⁶ Her beliefs, her anti-Semitic feelings, her legionary activity, were perhaps simultaneously induced and legitimized by the general atmosphere of sympathy and support around the movement.

Her husband, closest friends, university professors, a part of the high society of Bucharest and the students made up an entire constellation of social groups that became supporters in those years of legionary expansion. To believe in the legionary nationalist “dream” might have meant something more than just following a political “fashion”. The political and social atmosphere in Romania, the rise of Nazi Germany, the imperialist wars of Fascist Italy, the dramatic battle between the nationalist forces and the communist “danger” in the Spanish Civil War: all these elements might have fostered the feeling of being part of a momentous national and international breakthrough, the edge of a “new world”, where Romania would also have finally risen to a different, more central position among the “great” nations.

After the Legionary Movement’s unexpected success at the general elections held in December 1937 (under the name of the “Everything for the Country” Party), the following years witnessed the systematic destruction of the movement by the authorities. In February 1938 King Carol II abolished the Constitution of 1923 and proclaimed the Royal Dictatorship, under which all political parties were outlawed. The Legionary Movement was struck at its core with the assassination of Corneliu Codreanu in November 1938 and the mass imprisonment of its most prominent members. Mircea Eliade was imprisoned for his legionary activity in a prison camp in Miercurea Ciuc, together with other legionaries, where, despite imaginable difficult conditions, they could hold meetings, read and in his case, also

³⁰⁶ Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal, 1935-1944*, p. 91.

write a novel. Eliade's privileged treatment and his eventual release for a suspicious lung disease (which seemed to be tuberculosis) were due in part to his fame and in part to the tireless efforts of Nina interceding for her husband.³⁰⁷

Nina was related to General Nicolae M. Condeescu (also spelled as "Condiescu"), president of the Society of Romanian Writers, a close friend of the couple and well positioned within the closest circles of the king. Thanks to his intervention, Mircea received some degree of comfort in prison, Nina was allowed to visit and, when he was moved to a sanatorium in the Bucegi Mountains in Transylvania for the treatment of his lungs, Nina stayed with him. Though her legionary beliefs were well-known to the king and his entourage, Nina does not seem to have been followed by the police, she did not face arrest and could help her husband in prison. During the persecution of legionaries, her beliefs and her support were seemingly not considered "political activity". She did not publish articles and books, she did not campaign for elections, she was not a formal "legionary member". Nina supported the Legion in speech, openly and passionately, but her feelings were very likely considered a "private" matter, a personal belief with no political value.

On the contrary, the path of Marietta Sadova followed completely different directions, and her allegiance to the Legion endangered her freedom and her life for many years. During the period of the Second World War, the two women, who were friends and companions, fought two very different battles. Nina Eliade followed her husband abroad, and she was slowly and painfully consumed by cancer, which ultimately led to her death in Portugal in November 1944.³⁰⁸ Marietta Sadova stayed in Bucharest, where her position became very risky, especially after the legionary rebellion of January 21-23, 1941.³⁰⁹ Her husband Haig Aterian was the director of the Romanian National Theater during the National Legionary State, and he was imprisoned after the rebellion. Meanwhile, Sadova was considered a "prominent legionary" by the police, and she was surveilled for her role in the underground reorganization of the movement.³¹⁰

At the end of March 1941, she was interned at the prison camp of Târgu Jiu, an internment camp mostly destined for political prisoners.³¹¹ In 1943, Haig Aterian was released from prison and sent to the Eastern Front, in a similar fashion to other legionaries who demanded their release to join the Romanian Army in Russia. Sadova continued her

³⁰⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume II: 1937-1960. Exile's Odyssey*, pp. 66-76.

³⁰⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, pp. 139-140.

³⁰⁹ For a more detailed account of the legionary rebellion, see below, chapter four.

³¹⁰ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 11/1930, f. 43.

³¹¹ Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal, 1935-1944*, p. 317.

activity in the underground legionary network well into the communist era, and she was arrested during one of the periods of recrudescence in the state's persecution of "anti-communists". In 1959, she was imprisoned for introducing "anti-communist" propaganda material from Paris into Romania, which consisted of works by her friends Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran, both of whom were living in the French capital at the time.³¹²

Besides these famous cases, scattered archival evidence from the late 1930s and early 1940s discloses a much more extended network of legionary activity, involving different social groups and cultural institutions. The close surveillance of the police after the outlawing of all political parties in February 1938 and, subsequently, after the rebellion of January 1941 exposed this extensive network more systematically. Legionary nests were reported at the National Theater, at the National Opera House, in the offices of ministers and state-run institutions, in the world of printed media, practically in almost any sector of political and cultural life in Bucharest.

At an event organized in December 1936 by the Bucharest Student Center to raise funds for the completion of the Green House, actors from the National Theater and singers from the Opera House were present among the performers. Famous legionary songs were sung by the singers and all the attendants alike, standing.³¹³ In October 1944, after the fall of the Antonescu regime, a newspaper published the names of the Opera House personnel "compromised" by the Legionary Movement. Among them, the soprano Mimi Nestorescu was signaled as a "legionary commander". The name of Floria Capsali, a ballet teacher and a close friend of Eliade and his circle also appeared on the list.³¹⁴ As far as state institutions were concerned, a police report from February 1939 offers an account of the "legionary current" at the *Monitorul Oficial* (The Official Gazette of Romania) and among the state functionaries working at the Ministry of Finance.³¹⁵ However, many other denunciations of legionary activity appeared to be false after some inquiry.³¹⁶ In an ascending climax of persecution, after 1938, 1941 and 1944, to accuse someone of legionary activity potentially

³¹² For a brief account of Marietta Sadova's activity after 1944, see Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania*, pp. 267-271.

³¹³ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, ff. 340-341.

³¹⁴ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 12/1940, f. 258; Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume I: 1907-1937*, p. 227. In the months following the rebellion of 21-23 January 1941, legionary nests were reported at various theaters of the city, at the Opera House, within the Philharmonic Orchestra, at the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. As the police noted, artists seemed to have become some of the most active "legionary agents", see ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 11/1930, f. 63, f. 81, f. 91, ff. 92-93. "Intense" legionary activity at the Opera House still reported in June 1943, see ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 11/1930, f. 127.

³¹⁵ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 1/1939, ff. 59-61.

³¹⁶ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 5/1939, ff. 74-79; dosar 13/1939, ff. 211-213; ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 251/1940, f. 23, f. 56, f. 160.

meant ruining a person's career and often endangering his or her freedom, if not life in some extreme cases, and these accusations might also have been largely abused.

Thus, long, deep, and systematic research, impossible within the scope of this research project, would be necessary to reconstruct the legionary penetration of Bucharest, and to understand the intricate connections of people, events, activities, and the various degrees of legionary engagement of the actors involved. This relatively small group of intellectuals represents just one thread of this extensive network, although well documented because of the notoriousness of the participants and the substantial quantity of writing, documents, and material useful to reconstruct their activity. From a closer look at this personal, intellectual, and social experience an additional dimension of the relationship between legionary affiliation and forms of feminine political activity also emerges. Nina Eliade and Marietta Sadova were both "legionary women", but the intensity of their engagement, the actions they undertook, and the forms of their beliefs followed different paths.

A Legionary Aristocracy

The connections established by the Legionary Movement with members of Bucharest's high society, fostered also by the strong ties with General Cantacuzino, led toward an increasing penetration of legionary ideas among the upper classes of the city. Concomitantly with the growing support of intellectuals and journalists, between 1933 and 1937, the movement counted among its followers many members of the aristocracy, rich industrialists, renowned engineers, lawyers, and various personalities from different professional and social sectors. The move from Iași to Bucharest at the beginning of the 1930s, accompanied also by major changes in the Romanian political landscape, represented a crucial decision for the Legion's expansion and mobilizing force.

The importance of this move and the different image the Legion started building for itself in Bucharest emerges clearly from a report sent from Iași in November 1935. While the movement was thriving among the capital's elites, in Iași, the "cradle" of the Legion throughout the 1920s, the local organization acknowledged its lack of support among the well-positioned sectors of society and the vital necessity of this support. Therefore, among

the most important plans for the immediate future, the local legionary section designed a strategy to raise sympathy among these social sectors. The first step was to establish tighter contacts with the younger members of the higher classes, attract them to the Legion and, subsequently, hope for their parents to become gradually involved too. First and foremost, however, the Legion had to refashion its image of “thugs” and “fools” that was so widespread among the higher social strata, an image that surely dated back to the student riots, the street violence and the assassinations associated with some legionary names in the mid-to-late-1920s.³¹⁷

The difficulty of raising support among the higher classes, which was accompanied by logistical and economic problems in Iași, signals a widening distance between the emergence of Bucharest as the Legion’s new center and the local organizations in other regions.³¹⁸ The legionary central command in the capital was aware of this situation, and in February 1935 they decided to organize a campaign throughout the country. The members of the two main nests in Bucharest, “Axa” and “Athenée Palace”, in which the intellectuals were also active, were supposed to visit the local branches in different regions. Alongside the control and supervision of their activities, the main goal of the tour was to tighten the relationships and become more acquainted with the local leaders and supporters of the Legion in various regions and counties.³¹⁹

The legionary leadership in Bucharest sought thus to reduce the distance, practically and ideologically, between the center and the provinces. In this same period, growing support for the movement among the elites led to a formal request to the legionary command for the creation of a special section. In November 1936, a group of “distinguished citizens” founded an association called “The Friends of the Legionaries”, directed at those who, for different reasons, could not join the Legion as formal members, but felt “spiritually” close to the movement’s activities.³²⁰ According to the statutes of the association, these “young people” (the legionaries) deserved a “helping hand” in their “fighting for the country”. Despite the “indifference” and “slander” surrounding the legionaries, there were people eager to support

³¹⁷ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 6/1935, vol. I, f. 155.

³¹⁸ Gheorghe Furdui, a prominent legionary student leader, was sent in the same period from Bucharest to Iași to inspect the situation, and he registered the bad conditions of the legionary students’ headquarters and the lack of funding for relocations and improvements, see ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 6/1935, vol. I, f. 117.

³¹⁹ AN-Cluj, fond IP, dosar 227/1935, f. 78.

³²⁰ The original name of the association was “Prietenii Legionarilor”, often found in police reports also as Prietenii Legiunii, “The Friends of the Legion”.

them, and this “discreet” association was created to offer these people the opportunity to help.³²¹

The leadership of the Legion welcomed the request “with great joy”. The association would group the “truthful friends of the [Romanian] people”, and every “Christian” was welcome to join, from any social condition and any political party. Nevertheless, there were some conditions for acceptance. Those who attacked the Legion “wickedly”, who proved themselves to be weak, or who made money through “incorrect” and “dirty” business would not be admitted to the association. Once accepted, members would help the Legion “materially and morally” in accordance with their means. Secrecy was another crucial element. Members were not supposed to know who else was in the association, and they were not supposed to meet. Formal legionary members were not informed about the “Friends”, the latter representing a group of supporters not directly belonging to the movement.³²²

Behind the rhetorical accents on national friendship and “spiritual” closeness, the “great joy” surrounding the creation of the association was related, primarily, to the promise of a not negligible monetary contribution. Moreover, the social and political position of the potential members would have provided the Legion with a series of new networks, able to offer protection and support in difficult moments. According to a police report, the foundation of the association produced a “very favorable impression” among the legionary members, for in this way the Legion would finally receive more help from many people previously cautious about contacting the organization directly.³²³ The insistence on discretion and secrecy was mostly related to the social position and visibility of the “Friends”, who could not expose themselves publicly, who could not “be active in nests, attend meetings and participate in the various demonstrations of the Legionary Movement”.³²⁴

The idea of creating such an association had been part of the Legion’s program since the very beginning, and it was outlined in the first issues of their periodical *Pământul Strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land) in August-September 1927. This section, “of the protectors of the Legion”, was imagined as a group that would be composed of “more mature” members, though still organized in nests like the youth section. These members had the duty to materially support the Legion, and to provide “help and support in any endeavor and circumstance”. In this way, they would form a “moral elite” of the nation, accurately

³²¹ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, f. 280.

³²² ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, ff. 280-281; see also ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 10/1939, ff. 51-53.

³²³ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, f. 271.

³²⁴ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 21/1936, f. 87.

“selected” by the Legion.³²⁵ In November 1936, this idea contoured nine years before was taking concrete form with some modifications, requested by the new, unforeseen circumstances in which the movement found itself in Bucharest. The “Friends of the Legion” were indeed protectors, but they were not formal members, they were not organized in nests, but in a more “discreet” association of sympathizers organized like a cell. And, most importantly, they were not only a rhetorical “moral” elite of the nation, but members of the actual social, economic, and political elites of the country.

Shortly after the foundation of the association, leaflets were distributed across the country, to expand the group of “Friends” not only numerically, but also, perhaps most importantly, geographically. In January 1937 a leaflet was reported by the police to have circulated among civil servants in the county of Alba Iulia, in Transylvania.³²⁶ Civil servants represented a particularly targeted category for the association, for their position as workers of the state did not allow them to openly join the Legion without the risk of persecution or of losing their jobs. In May 1937, a circular signed by Codreanu was directed to the regulation of the acceptance in the Legion of “personalities with remarkable public roles”, mainly members or former members of other political parties. According to Codreanu, they were not allowed to join the Legion, but they could join the “Friends of the Legion” and support the movement from the outside.³²⁷ Leaflets of the association were also circulated in different localities throughout the country in September 1937, almost one year after its foundation.³²⁸ Apparently, a steady campaign of recruitment continued through the year 1937, the Legion’s most successful period.

The founding committee of the association was composed by seven members. Among them, there was the renowned professor from Iași University Corneliu Șumuleanu, friend and supporter of Codreanu since the early 1920s. Moreover, two women were part of the leading committee of the “Friends of the Legion”, princess Zoe Sturdza and Mrs. Maria Beiu Palade.³²⁹ The two women, in particular Maria Beiu Palade, would be among the protagonists of the Legion’s tumultuous political experiences, through astonishing success, violent persecutions, and its brief seizure of power, followed by many years of underground activity. The expansion of the “Friends of the Legion” brought among its associates other women from the upper classes and from aristocratic families, especially from the ancient and

³²⁵ C.Z. Codreanu, I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu, R. Mironovici, “Organizarea Legiunii ‘Arhanghelul Mihail’”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, 15 September 1927, I, 4, pp. 3-4.

³²⁶ AN – Cluj, fond IP, dosar 253/1937, f. 6.

³²⁷ AN – Cluj, fond IP, dosar 253/1937, f. 16v.

³²⁸ AN – Cluj, fond IP, dosar 255/1937, f. 178.

³²⁹ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, p. 280.

renowned Cantacuzino, Sturdza and Ghica (also spelled as Ghika) families, which had manifold branches and were often interrelated through marriage.

Already in Iași, in the mid-1920s, the noblewomen Constanța Ghica informally offered some help to the youth section of the LANC, composed at that time of a young Codreanu and his followers. Belonging to an older generation, from an old and respectable family, Constanța Ghica was also part of the nationalist and anti-Semitic political network of Iași. She was a member of the leading committee of the LANC, the far-right party of Alexandru C. Cuza.³³⁰ Her sons, colleagues of Codreanu at the Dealu Monastery, a military school, became legionary members.³³¹ Constanța Ghica donated to the youth section a portion of land where they implemented a vegetable garden, one of the first communal work experiments led by Codreanu.³³² The students of the LANC also met at her house, giving the very first example of the mixture of private house and headquarters represented by the house of General Cantacuzino in Bucharest.

The features combined in the figure and the actions of Constanța Ghica: aristocratic belonging, political engagement, participation in a complex network uniting different generations and classes, reached, in Bucharest, a much higher level. Princess Zoe Sturdza represented in this sense an extreme example of wealth, political connections, and legionary affiliation. Zoe, born Mavrocordato, was the wife of Prince Mihail Sturdza (1886-1980), an important politician and diplomat. Zoe and Mihail belonged to one of the oldest and wealthiest aristocratic families and, concurrently, he was one of the protagonists of the interwar Romanian political scene. The family traveled and lived extensively abroad, creating, through the prince's diplomatic activity, connections with important members of the elites of different European countries. Furthermore, in the mid-1930s, they became a "legionary family", since Mihail, Zoe and their son Ilie-Vlad, born in Switzerland in 1916, were all active, at different levels, in the Legionary Movement.

Zoe Sturdza's name is mostly related to founding and leading the committee of the "Friends of the Legionaries". From archival evidence, she emerges as a central figure in the

³³⁰ Before its official foundation in 1923, the LANC was called National Christian Union (Uniunea Națională Creștină. As it emerges from a leaflet distributed in 1922, this organization had the same committee and the same newspaper of the future LANC. Besides A.C. Cuza, Ion Zelea Codreanu and others, also "princess Constanța Ghika" is listed among the members of the central committee, see ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 36/1923, ff. 4-7.

³³¹ On Codreanu's education at the Dealu military school, see Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*, pp. 40-42.

³³² Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, p. 68.

association from its creation in 1936 to the outlawing of the movement in January 1941.³³³ The men of the family, Prince Mihail and their son Ilie, have both left impressive memoirs of their lives and activities, in a highly unapologetic tone and proudly declaring their affiliation to the Legionary Movement. While acknowledging the problematic nature of these memoirs as reliable sources, they can nevertheless offer insight, although oblique, into the life and activities of Zoe Sturdza. Like other women in this chapter (and like countless women in general), the fate of Zoe was to live and to be remembered thereafter mostly through the words of men.

From the memoirs of her husband Mihail, emerges only the “domestic” side of Zoe’s life. As a prelude to the great historical events which cover most part of the book, there is a brief account of the encounter and subsequent marriage with Zoe. With nostalgic tones, the prince recalls their meeting, almost children, and the years of adolescence and early youth in the Moldavian countryside, where both families had large estates. The memories of their marriage, their love for nature, the nights spent camping in the mountains, evoke a kind of “paradise lost”, of which Zoe represents a central element. She is part of a private, intimate sphere, of domestic peace and shared memory, but completely separated from the tumultuous political life and events witnessed by the prince during his diplomatic career.³³⁴

In the memoirs of Zoe Sturdza’s son, Ilie-Vlad, the portrait of the princess appears more complex, showing a mixture of maternal devotion and legionary feelings. Ilie recalls the image of his parents bursting into tears at the news of the assassination of Corneliu Codreanu in November 1938.³³⁵ Ilie was imprisoned for his legionary activity in autumn 1939, during the intense persecution campaign that started after the assassination of the Prime Minister Armand Călinescu by the legionaries in September 1939. Zoe tried to obtain milder conditions for her son in prison by offering money to a relative, entrusted with bribing a person from the staff of the Prefectural Police, without even knowing if her money did actually reach its supposed recipient.³³⁶ Zoe Sturdza herself was briefly imprisoned, together with her husband, at the Malmaison prison in Bucharest, after the legionary rebellion of

³³³ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, f. 280; ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 103/1933, f. 105; ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 255/1940, f. 123. See also, Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, p. 166.

³³⁴ Mihail Sturdza, *The Suicide of Europe* (Western Islands, 1968), pp. 4-6. (the book was translated and published in Romanian in the 2000s by a publishing house sympathetic with the Legionary Movement, see Mihail Sturdza, *România și sfârșitul Europei. Amintiri din țara pierdută. România anilor 1917-1947* (Bucharest: Criterion Publishing, 2004).

³³⁵ Ilie-Vlad Sturdza, *Pribeag printr-un secol nebun: de la Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail la Legiunea Străină* (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2002), pp. 18-19.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

January 1941.³³⁷ After spending most of the war years in Denmark, Mihail and Zoe ultimately found refuge in Spain, where other Romanian exiles lived, some of them legionaries. In the 1950s, their son Vlad, after many adventurous experiences as a member of the French Foreign Legion, joined them in Madrid, where they spent the rest of their lives.³³⁸

Princess Zoe Sturdza was thus part of a wealthy, influential elite, composed of old aristocratic families who maintained part of their power by covering new roles in the realm of politics. While her husband worked at the highest level of diplomacy, and her son was a young legionary member in contact with the most active sections of the movement, Zoe Sturdza found for herself a middle ground for political action. Through the “Friends of the Legion”, she used her extensive connections to create a network of support around the Legionary Movement, first and foremost from an economic point of view. Financial difficulties represented a constant feature of the Legion’s political experience, and the degree of expansion reached in 1936-1937 was also partially due to conspicuous donations from wealthy supporters.³³⁹

Besides the Sturdza family, the other old aristocratic family involved at various levels in the Legionary Movement was the Cantacuzino family. Through its numerous branches, members of the family from different backgrounds, provenance and generations are found among the Legion’s leadership, supporters, and sympathizers. The highest level of participation was represented by General Cantacuzino, head of the movement’s political party “Everything for the Country” (founded in 1933) and the much younger legionary commander and close collaborator of Codreanu, Alexandru Cantacuzino (1901-1939). According to a police report on the preparations for the celebration of the Legion’s Day (November 8, feast day of the Archangel Michael) at the house of the general, members belonging to other branches of the Cantacuzino family were invited for a “reconciliation”. Apparently, the legionary supporters from the Cantacuzino family and other close relatives had split in two factions after legionary leader Mihai Stelescu separated from Codreanu and founded a new movement called “The Crusade of Romanianism”. Part of the family seemed to have followed Stelescu, but General Cantacuzino and the legionary leadership probably sought a “reconciliation” after the death of Stelescu in 1936 (assassinated by a legionary commando).

Among the legionary supporters belonging to the Cantacuzino family, there was Despina-Maria Cantacuzino, known as “Pita”. Born in 1901, she was the natural daughter,

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

³³⁹ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, pp. 166-168.

later recognized, of the engineer Ioan G. Cantacuzino. She lived in Bucharest, in a three-floor house of her own possession. According to the police report, Despina Cantacuzino was member of several charity associations, such as the Red Cross and the Saint Catherine's Cradle (Leagănul Sfânta Ecaterina, an institution devoted to the raising of orphans and children from extremely poor parents). Through these associations, she established contacts with many "ladies from the high society", "renowned for their nationalist ideas". Her house was searched twice in 1938, in May and in September, and both times a large amount of legionary material was found.

Despina Cantacuzino was an extremely active member of the "Friends of the Legionaries". After the dissolution of the political parties in February 1938, she helped the children of the imprisoned and missing legionaries, in particular the two sons of the prominent legionary commander Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa. Cantacuzino was followed by the police between November 14 and December 27, 1938. In this period, it was established that Despina Cantacuzino had tight contacts with many personalities involved in the Legionary Movement, and close contacts with the family of Ion Moța and the wife and mother of Corneliu Codreanu. The police report defines Cantacuzino as a "fanatic" legionary supporter and thus she was placed under "permanent" surveillance.³⁴⁰

At this stage, Despina Cantacuzino's name has emerged only from this one report, but the details contained, or not contained, in it, allow some insights into her life and activity. Despina, born in 1901, was relatively young, approximately the same age as Codreanu and other legionary founders. Almost certainly, she was not married and did not have children, for this information would have been included in the report otherwise. As the natural daughter of a Cantacuzino, she probably received enough money after her recognition to maintain a stable economic independence and a large house in Bucharest. Despina Cantacuzino's support for the Legion followed two directions: firstly, through informal participation through the "Friends of the Legion", and secondly by a much more direct and personal involvement.

Despina Cantacuzino's engagement in helping the children of legionary members was in line with her activity with the Red Cross and the other charity associations. In this sense, she was part of the great number of noblewomen engaged in philanthropic associations. The provision of social services, especially for women and children from the lowest classes, represented an important aspect of the public role of many aristocratic women throughout the

³⁴⁰ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 251/1940, f. 12.

first half of the twentieth century. The political aspects underpinning this social work and other forms of welfare provisions were openly exploited by the Legionary Movement in its attacks against the state, deemed not only unable to deal with but also indifferent to the “misery” of the poorest sectors of the population. Despina Cantacuzino’s political activity was expressed primarily through her engagement in social assistance, which she provided personally through her direct relationships with the wives and children of legionary members and leaders.

In contrast with this more conventional participation in politics through social action, another aristocratic woman from the Cantacuzino family combined her political activity as a legionary supporter with one of the most unusual professions for a woman of her time. Ioana Cantacuzino (1895-1951) was among the pioneers of Romanian civil aviation, the second women pilot of the country and the first to hold a pilot license and to direct a school of aviation, which she opened with her brother Mircea in 1928.³⁴¹ Alongside Ioana and Mircea, Constantin Cantacuzino (from another branch of the family) was a pioneering figure of civil aviation and an elite pilot during the Second World War, as well as a proficient motorcyclist and an ice hockey champion.

These relatively young aristocrats, who reached their twenties at the end of the First World War, found for themselves a different role in a changing world. They embraced the image of an aristocracy “with a modern face”, in contrast with the nostalgia for the “old times” and for the stable power of ancient nobility installed in large countryside estates. They did not resign their privileges, but they used their social status and their wealth to engage in expensive hobbies, sports, and unusual activities. Aviation represented one of the most fascinating fields, in which technological development and skillfulness were intermingled with all the evocative and romantic imagination surrounding the “eternal” human desire to fly. Moreover, the pioneering stage of aviation created an atmosphere of competition among pilots and nations, and record-breaking achievements were reasons for personal and national prestige.

The police described Ioana Cantacuzino as a “fanatic militant”, strongly devoted to the legionary cause and a very active member of the “Friends of the Legion”. In January 1940

³⁴¹ For an account of the lives and careers of Romanian women pioneers of aviation, see Sorin Turturică, *Aviatoarele României. Din înaltul cerului în beciurile securității* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2015). More specifically on Ioana Cantacuzino, pp. 39-41, 100-110; for a more general account of early feminine aviation, see Eileen F. Lebow, *Before Amelia. Women Pilots in the Early Days of Aviation* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books Inc., 2002).

she was confined at Sadaclia, a remote town in Bessarabia, for her legionary activity.³⁴² Her tireless political engagement was not hindered by the outlawing of the Legionary Movement in January 1941, and she militated in the underground network. In September 1941, Ioana Cantacuzino made clandestine propaganda for the Legion within the aristocratic and high society circles to which she belonged, and organized commemoration ceremonies for the dead legionaries at her own expense.³⁴³ Ioana Cantacuzino was a friend of Marietta Sadova, and the two women militated together for the reorganization of the movement.³⁴⁴ Her extensive network was not limited to the aristocracy and the upper classes, as she was also in tight contact with the higher ranks of the Legion, and with the leader Horia Sima.³⁴⁵

Ioana Cantacuzino was thus a militant legionary, very likely unmarried, and an aircraft pilot. Her “disruptive” choice of devoting herself to aviation, coupled with her strong political commitment, sheds light on the interactions between social and economic status, personal enterprise and political activity. Ioana Cantacuzino’s status as a noblewoman, her wealth, and the sharing of the passion for flying with her brother provided her with freedom of choice and offered her the opportunity to devote herself to such an unusual activity for a woman. Her commitment to the Legion might have added a wider and greater framework to the personal dimension of her pioneering activity. The strong nationalism of the legionary ideology, imbued with dreams of heroism, and the legionary rhetoric of representing a new kind of spiritual elite might have sounded enticing to a young, assertive aristocrat and aviation pioneer.

Furthermore, the figure of Ioana Cantacuzino exposes the apparent contradictions between the rhetoric of legionary ideology regarding gender roles and the incessant negotiation, redefinition and negation of these roles in legionary life and experience. These contradictions are only apparent because they all stem from the “disorder” represented by women and their simultaneous inclusion in and exclusion from politics. The idealized role of devoted wife and mother, with all the trite corollaries related to the women’s roles as guardians and keepers of the nation’s history, “tradition” and integrity, was part of the legionary’s rhetorical ideological formulations. In practice, and sometimes also in discourse, this rhetoric was questioned, often on the basis of personal experiences of and relationships with specific women who defied these prescriptive gender roles.

³⁴² ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 251/1941, f. 14.

³⁴³ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 10/1939, f. 77.

³⁴⁴ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 11/1930, f. 43. For more details on Marietta Sadova, see above the first section of this chapter.

³⁴⁵ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 251/1941, f. 14.

In this sense, a short article from a local legionary newspaper from Tecuci, in the Moldavia region, praised another woman pioneer of Romanian aviation. The issue of April 1933 reported that the “young aviatrix” Smaranda Brăescu, who “brought the fame of Romanian courage to every corner of the world”, will spend her Easter holidays in her hometown, situated in the same county. The legionaries thus welcomed with joy the “brave” Smaranda Brăescu.³⁴⁶ Local and national pride appear intertwined with admiration for the extraordinary achievements of Brăescu, who in 1932 set a new world record in parachute jumping.³⁴⁷ Courage, skillfulness, international fame, and a certain degree of “extraordinariness” emerge as features that allowed women who possessed them to surpass the ideal boundaries of defined gender roles and to become, instead, part of a different kind of imagery. In this legionary framework, Brăescu was considered a “token woman for the nation”, whose “Romanian-ness” was more representative than her gender.³⁴⁸

The figure of the “exceptional woman”, who in virtue of her qualities transcends the boundaries of gender roles, has been analyzed in the case of Romania by Maria Bucur, in her article dedicated to the impact of the First World War on gender divisions. Through the figures of Queen Marie of Romania on the one hand, and Ecaterina Teodoroiu, the only woman soldier of the Romanian Army, on the other, the author has pointed out how the exceptionality of these women were used not to redefine, but to reinforce gender norms.³⁴⁹ While Queen Marie became the more familiar symbol of the self-sacrificing, care-giving woman, the figure of Ecaterina Teodoroiu presented the more disturbing feature of the woman fighter. Teodoroiu died in battle and was praised as a war hero, but in order to make this figure acceptable the post-war rhetoric transformed her through the “masculinization” of her persona. Her exceptional role as a soldier was related to her “un-womanly” features,

³⁴⁶ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 67/1932, f. 9.

³⁴⁷ In May 1932, in California, Smaranda Brăescu jumped with her parachute from the record-breaking altitude of 7100 meters, see Sorin Turturică, *Aviatoarele României*, pp. 31-37.

³⁴⁸ The expression “token woman for the nation” is taken from Şule Toktaş, ‘Nationalism, Modernization and the Military in Turkey: Women Officers in the Turkish Armed Forces’, *Oriente Moderno*, 2004, Nuova serie, anno 23 (84), pp. 247-267, p. 254. The author devotes few pages to the figure of Sabiha Gökçen (1913-2001), pioneer of aviation and first female fighter pilot in the world. She too represented an ‘exceptional’ woman, for her achievements in aviation and for being the adopted daughter of Atatürk, who transformed her into a symbol of the qualities and modernity of Turkish women. This symbolic role, however, was not followed by an actual reform of the Turkish armed forces, which continued to deny women’s inclusion despite Sabiha’s multiple requests, see, in particular, pp. 253-255.

³⁴⁹ Maria Bucur, ‘Between the Mother of the Wounded and Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War’, pp. 30-31.

which made her different from the quasi-totality of other women, who, lacking her features, were therefore supposed to follow the gender norms established for them.³⁵⁰

Traces and further elaborations of these considerations on “exceptional” women are visible in legionary ideology, and they emerge even more vividly in practice. Moreover, the legionary experience widened the spectrum of potential “exceptionality”, and women supporters engaged in a wide range of activities which surpassed and questioned the established, perceived, and imposed gender norms. The figure of Ioana Cantacuzino as an aviatrix and a militant legionary woman stands at the confluence of exceptionality and politics. As an aristocrat, she was part of the elite, and she used her network to spread her political ideas and support the Legion. As an aviatrix, she very likely raised admiration and praise among the legionaries, using thus her abilities to get into close contact with and be respected by the legionary leadership. Owing to her social background and the relatively restricted field of aviation, Ioana Cantacuzino represented an extreme example of exceptionality. Yet the “disruptiveness” of her activities was paralleled, at different scales and in different fashions, by many other legionary women who surpassed and redefined the gender roles designed for them by their own leaders.

Lastly, another feminine figure belonging to the “legionary aristocracy” opens an additional window onto the interactions between gender, class and political activity. By 1933, Maria Beiu Palade was already close to Codreanu and the Legion, and her commitment to the movement continued for the rest of the decade and after the legionary rebellion. Despite the importance of her activity, her biography is very difficult to reconstruct. She was among the founding members of the “Friends of the Legion”, but in contrast with Princess Zoe Sturdza Maria Beiu Palade does not seem to have been member of or related to any of the important families.³⁵¹ According to different sources she was a teacher, and, in the years around 1940, also director of a girls’ school.³⁵²

Despite her profession and the apparent lack of direct connections with aristocratic or elite families, Maria Beiu Palade was nevertheless part of important networks. She was tightly connected with the founders of the “Friends of the Legion” and the supporters and

³⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 45-48. “Masculinization” of “exceptional” women was (and still is) a common way to describe women who disrupted gender norms in various ways. In the specific field of early feminine aviation, the above-mentioned parachutist Smaranda Brăescu was perceived as “boyish” in her village since she was a child, see Sorin Turturică, *Aviatoarele României*, p. 23; in a similar vein, the German pilot Hanna Reitsch, one of the very few women pilots of the Third Reich, was described by the press of her time as a “girl who acted like a man”, see Bernhard Rieger, ‘Hanna Reitsch (1912-1979): The Global Career of a Nazi Celebrity’, *German History*, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 383-405, quote from p. 388.

³⁵¹ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 3/1936, f. 280.

³⁵² ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 11/1930, f. 43.

sympathizers from the upper classes who subsequently joined the association. Moreover, she seems to have had close contacts with important political personalities and she used these contacts to the advantage of the Legion during moments of crisis and difficulty. In 1933 Maria Beiu Palade was reported as the leader of a philanthropic association called “The Rights of the Mother” (Dreptul Mamei), seemingly close to the right-wing milieu of Bucharest and the circle around the professor and philosopher Nichifor Crainic.³⁵³ The leadership of a philanthropic association implied a certain degree of economic independence and a network of contacts with the “ladies” of high society.

Maria Beiu Palade was in direct and personal contact with Corneliu Codreanu by June 1933 (if not earlier). At that time, the legionary leader visited Beiu Palade at her home, and they discussed a very famous case of the time, the assassination of a Jewish landowner by the former captain and war veteran Emil Șiancu.³⁵⁴ Șiancu belonged to the *moți*, the inhabitants of a remote mountainous region in Transylvania. This region and its population became part of the legionary imaginary as the quintessential representation of the purity and suffering of the poor and forgotten Romanian people, betrayed by its politicians, and exploited by Jewish landowners and businessmen. This trope was widespread among many other nationalist and anti-Semitic political organizations, and the deed of Șiancu raised a wave of sympathy and support within the nationalist groups. Emil Șiancu was also a legionary member and Codreanu largely exploited his case for political propaganda. During the visit of Codreanu to Maria Beiu Palade, they discussed the case of this “hero” and the strategies to implement more organized and coherent support for his cause.

Maria Beiu Palade’s contacts within the political circles in Bucharest became very important during the months following the outlawing of the Iron Guard and the assassination of Prime Minister Ion G. Duca in December 1933. Most of the legionary leaders were arrested, and, in some cases, also their wives. Through a courier, Codreanu asked Maria Beiu Palade to help his wife Elena in prison, by sending her clothing, food and medicine. Beiu Palade seems to have been in close contact with the entourage of Marshall Alexandru Averescu, leader of the People’s Party (Partidul Poporului) and part of the circle of politicians close to the king. Through the intercession of Averescu’s secretary, she managed to deliver the required items to Elena Codreanu under a false name.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 104/1933, f. 99.

³⁵⁴ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 7/1933, f. 14.

³⁵⁵ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 7/1930, ff. 85-86.

Besides these more immediate and material necessities, the long and detailed police report also shows a deeper involvement of Maria Beiu Palade in brokering contacts between the Legion and part of the political elite of Bucharest. Hence, Marshall Averescu and his secretary communicated with the legionary leadership through Beiu Palade. At that time, Averescu appeared to be considering taking over the leadership of the Legion and fantasized about a seizure of power with the support of the army. While these ideas never turned into a practical or even plausible political project, Averescu nevertheless maintained good relations with the Legion and offered his help in moments of crisis like the one in 1933-1934.³⁵⁶

Moreover, the report also contains the only mention so far of Maria Beiu Palade's husband, who, in the absence of his wife, seemingly refused to receive Codreanu's courier, fearing problems with the police. The relationships between Codreanu and Maria Beiu Palade, and her political activity, were indeed known to the police, and the house was surely surveilled. For this reason, a person entrusted by Beiu Palade was supposed to meet Codreanu's courier somewhere in the city to avoid the police. Lastly, the report finishes with a comment on Maria Beiu Palade's satisfaction with the support offered by Averescu to the Legion. And, on a more sinister note, she seems to have wondered why the supporters of Averescu do not assassinate a certain Mrs. L. instead of waiting for the legionaries to undertake such an action.³⁵⁷ The Mrs. L., who is mentioned on several occasions in the report, was Elena Lupescu, the mistress of King Carol II. Lupescu was widely disliked and criticized for her supposed influence upon the king - and for being Jewish - and was the focus of violent hatred in legionary (and many other) circles.³⁵⁸

The involvement of Maria Beiu Palade in the Legionary Movement was thus very strong and thorough, and reached different levels. Her activity in the "Friends of the Legion", of which she was still a leading member in 1940, was only a part of her commitment. The personal relationships with Codreanu and, presumably, with his family, put her in direct contact with the legionary leadership. She must have been a trusted person, given Codreanu's paranoid fear of betrayal and his general suspicion toward opportunism and superficial commitment. Through her networks, Maria Beiu Palade offered him protection and support from political personalities, a necessity that would become less important after December 1934, when General Cantacuzino became the Legion's protector.

³⁵⁶ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, p. 105.

³⁵⁷ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 7/1930, f. 88.

³⁵⁸ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, p. 192.

Her devotion to the Legion seems to have been so strong that she accepted – even urged – the most violent activities of the legionaries, namely, political assassinations. In this sense, her alleged comment on the potential assassination of Elena Lupescu by the Legion or by another group shows that it made sense, in her vision, to recur to this extreme measure if politically “necessary”. Since the archival evidence on this specific issue is limited so far to this one report, it is hard to reconstruct Maria Beiu Palade’s attitude towards the activity of the Legionary Movement at large and the extent of her support of its actions. But her activity within the “Friends of the Legion” is far more documented and, in this case, she used other networks to spread propaganda and especially, to raise money within the circles of “ladies” who sympathized with the Legionary Movement.

The informal and, to some extent, secret support of many women from the aristocracy and the upper classes became formalized during the brief experience of the National Legionary State (from September 1940 to January 1941). In October 1940, the leader Horia Sima divided legionary women in two distinct groups, the “Organization of Legionary Ladies” under the leadership of Marietta Claudian Tell, and the “Legionary Women’s Corps”, led by the legionary commander Lucia Trandafir.³⁵⁹ While the seizure of power legitimized support for the Legion and secrecy was no longer necessary, this division followed two distinct but intertwined lines. The first one was based on class belonging and tended to group together women from the upper classes, united by personal relationships, activities, and economic resources. The second line followed the forms of activism and direct involvement undertaken by these two groups of legionary women. While the “ladies” took over the realm which they knew better, the provision of social services, the women’s corps implied the militant and to some extent militarized activities of commanders and rank-and-file women members.

For some women from the upper classes the support for the Legion might have been to some extent “disruptive” in the second half of the 1930s, and it became risky as well during the periods of more intense persecution. However, the coming to power of the movement implemented a division along class lines that returned elite and aristocratic women to the more familiar field of welfare provision. The seizure of power alongside General (later Marshall) Ion Antonescu and the generally conservative atmosphere of the National Legionary State, together with the loss in the previous two years of most of the legionary

³⁵⁹ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 12/1940, f. 79.

political and intellectual leadership, may also have produced an overall downplaying of the Legion's most radical stances on bringing down class barriers.

During the National Legionary State's brief life, the "ladies", and several other legionary women, offered a wide range of social provisions, mostly through the new welfare organization created by the government, the "Legionary Help" (Ajutorul Legionar). Besides offering material help to needy families and persons, in Bucharest the "Help" organized shelters and soup kitchens not only for the poorest groups of the city, but also for the refugees from the regions lost during the summer of 1940: Northern Transylvania to Hungary, part of Bukovina and Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. An entire series of social initiatives were widely covered by the press and saw the participation of many women from high society, legionary and otherwise. The union of different nationalist political forces was deemed necessary given the moment of crisis and the potential entry of Romania into the war, which did not come, however, until June 1941. This union was also epitomized by elite women from different circles working together, and legionary "ladies" attended social events with Maria Antonescu, wife of the head of the state, and her entourage.

After the legionary rebellion and the outlawing of the movement in January 1941, this harmonious union of different social and political forces to the benefit of national cohesion fell apart. The "Legionary Help" and different social services were dismantled, or at least the state tried to "de-legionarize" them, by changing the personnel and excluding well-known legionaries, both men and women, from public life. However, the underground reorganization of the Legion began during the first weeks after its outlawing. The great risk involved in these clandestine activities led to a reduction in the legionary following, leaving only the most committed and faithful supporters to continue the "fight".

Feminism, Orthodox Style

Romanian feminism was, during the interwar period, a timid and composite movement. A constellation of different but interrelated elements characterized this incipient stage of feminism in a country dominated by patriarchal political methods and a recent and slow entry of women into the public sphere. Nationalism, philanthropy, religion, suffragism, and civil rights were all aspects of the feminist debates of the time. Collaboration for common goals was often accompanied by disagreement on methods and guiding principles. Despite the conflicts and disagreements, however, a common denominator of the feminist

movement was class, since the membership of the feminist associations was mostly composed of aristocratic and upper-class women.³⁶⁰

A substantial part of the interwar feminist movement was rooted in a combination of ideas and goals that sprang from nationalism and Orthodox religious feelings. This feminist current promoted and campaigned for a social and political program centered on philanthropy, education of the rural population, and welfare protection for mothers and children; but it also demanded more inclusive civil and political rights for women. This latter aspect was at the core of the other major current within the interwar feminist movement, the suffragist one, which found some support among members of the main political parties as well, in particular the National Peasant Party. The two feminist currents were, however, in tight collaboration and contact, given that most feminists shared the same social milieu and common networks. Moreover, several of them belonged to different associations, with goals ranging from philanthropy and social work to more direct suffragist issues.

These two interrelated currents were represented by two major associations, the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women (Societatea Ortodoxă Națională a Femeilor Române, SONFR) and the National Council of Romanian Women (Consiliul Național al Femeilor Române, CNFR). The more religious and nationalist oriented SONFR was founded in 1910, having among its goals the “elevation of the Church’s prestige”, the “strengthening of the national ideal” and “the cultural, moral, social, and religious education of the new generations”.³⁶¹ The SONFR was a charitable organization deeply involved in the provision of social services and became a sort of umbrella organization for many smaller philanthropic associations directed to women and children.

The National Council of Romanian Women was founded in 1921 and presented a slightly different character. The religious aspect was substantially downplayed, since the association was open to members of any confession.³⁶² The provision of social services for women was also an integral part of the CNRF’s activity, especially in relation to childbirth and puericulture. In addition, however, the CNFR showed a deeper involvement with the

³⁶⁰ For a general overview on Romanian interwar feminism, see Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, pp. 273-299; for more specific issues, such as the relationships between women and politics from the standpoint of political discourse and the battle for emancipation, see, respectively, Alexandra Petrescu, *Femeia în imaginarul politic* (Bucharest: Editura Ars Docendi, 2008) and Ghizela Cosma, *Femeile și politica în România: evoluția dreptului de vot în perioada interbelică*.

³⁶¹ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Din istoria Societății Ortodoxe Naționale a Femeilor Române* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2016), p. VII.

³⁶² Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici, vol. I* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), p. 19. The author does not specify if “any confession” meant also Jewish, but on the list of associations affiliated with the CNFR there was the “Union of Israelite Women” (Uniunea Femeilor Israelite), thus almost surely Jewish women had separated associations.

suffragist cause, with its delegates participating in international suffragist congresses and campaigning for the right of women (although for a restricted, upper-class category) to vote in local elections; a right that was granted in 1929. The composite character of the organization led to a series of internal conflicts and dissensions, especially during the 1930s, hindering the attempt to unify more feminist associations under the CNFR. In particular, CNFR's refusal to participate in the activity of political parties created dissension with other feminists, who were more inclined toward collaboration with the main political parties to achieve their goals.

Despite these differences of strategy and opinion, several Romanian feminists were members of both the SONFR and the CNFR, and sometimes involved as well in other associations closer to their own personal beliefs and strategies. Renowned feminists Calypso Botez and Elena Meissner were among the main figures involved in both organizations, and other names are recurrent in this fragmented mosaic of associations. However, a central figure of the SONFR and the CNFR, and of several other organizations, national and international, was Alexandrina Cantacuzino. The princess, born Pallady in 1876, became part of the omnipresent Cantacuzino family through marriage, and her wealth, education, and tireless activity made of her a leading figure of the Romanian interwar (and to some extent also prewar) feminist movement.

An intransigent "nationalist fighter", Alexandrina Cantacuzino grounded all her activity in the defense and promotion of what were for her the pillars of society, "Church, School and Family".³⁶³ In this major personal, social, and national endeavor, women represented the key element. Thus, women's education, health, and rights were indispensable for the nation's success. In an interview given in 1926, Alexandrina Cantacuzino declared that "the woman is in every country the preserver of the ethnic character of a people".³⁶⁴ The Romanian woman, in particular, as she stated in another interview at the radio from 1934, is characterized by her being first and foremost a mother.³⁶⁵ The centrality of motherhood was one of the elements characterizing Alexandrina Cantacuzino's ideology, and she grounded this feminine primary "mission" in the irreducible difference between hers and the so-called "Anglo-Saxon" feminism.

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁶⁴ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I, p. 62.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

On the contrary, Alexandrina Cantacuzino was an advocate of the so-called “Latin” feminism, elaborated in Fascist Italy and close to the princess’ ideology and practice.³⁶⁶ The elaboration of “Latin” feminism, led by important Italian feminists such as Olga Modigliani, Teresa Labriola and others, was a contradictory attempt to “reconcile fascism with feminism”.³⁶⁷ In her important work on women under Fascism, Victoria de Grazia has analyzed this difficult, defective, and ultimately painful attempt of part of Italian feminism to find a compromise with the regime. While the battle for civil and political rights had become impracticable under the dictatorship, the improvement of women’s conditions was the main goal of “Latin” feminism, to be pursued through “cultural uplift” and philanthropy.³⁶⁸ The theoretical grounds of this kind of feminism were fragile and contradictory, and, as Teresa Labriola underlined, “was best understood by its practices”.³⁶⁹

For Alexandrina Cantacuzino, the ideology and practice of “Latin” feminism might have appeared not only close to her own personal beliefs, but also easier to promote within Romanian interwar society. The patriarchal and authoritarian political atmosphere was less inclined to listen, let alone satisfy, more “radical” feminist demands. Cantacuzino herself, in 1930, declared that Romanian women were still politically unprepared to really make a difference in the elections, but their goal was to promote a different “political ethic” and full civil and political rights would be achieved only gradually.³⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the appropriation of “Latin” feminist ideology and its adaptation to the Romanian national condition appeared as a more viable solution. The features indicated by “Latin” feminism – specific to Italian women, “devotion to family, love of tradition, and respect for the race” – were easily translatable in a political language fully understood and shared by almost the entire political spectrum.³⁷¹ The specific accent on motherhood as a specifically Romanian feminine inclination enriched even more these rhetorical elements.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino’s membership in the leading commissions of both the SONFR and the CNFR, and her extensive international activity, placed her at the center of an extensive social and political network. The connections established within right-wing and nationalist political milieus were manifold and strong. In the years 1932-1933 the CNFR

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁶⁷ Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1992), p. 236.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

³⁷⁰ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici, vol. I*, p. 71.

³⁷¹ Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945*, p. 236.

obtained a women's column in the newspaper *Calendarul* directed by Nichifor Crainic, philosopher and professor at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Bucharest. Crainic was renowned for his intransigent nationalism and orthodox beliefs, and in his philosophical work he promoted the idea of "ethno-nationalism".

While Alexandrina Cantacuzino rarely wrote articles for newspapers, the women's column in *Calendarul* (The Calendar) saw the participation of journalists affiliated with the CNFR, and their agenda widely mirrored the feminist ideas of Cantacuzino. One of the main issues emerging from the articles of the women's column was the "moral" status of women and their role as guardians of morality. In the "new" times, so "brutal" and "cruel", a women's place was not anymore confined to the "peaceful atmosphere of the home"; rather, they had to deal with "the multiple sufferings" of the era.³⁷² The various philanthropic associations founded and led by women had as their main purpose to help women in need and in moral "danger".³⁷³ In this way, engaged women were to collaborate to "the moral rebuilding of the country".³⁷⁴

The moral concerns were accompanied by the centrality of motherhood as the axis of women's social role. The maternal attitude constituted, furthermore, a central feature of feminist women, of "true feminism".³⁷⁵ The maternal character of feminism inspired "devotion" and "love" and allowed women to understand and soothe the sufferings of others. "In every feminist beats the heart of a mother", as another article stated.³⁷⁶ However, this rhetorical insistence on motherhood was not accompanied by a consistent presence in the women's column of the subject of motherhood. While many articles dealt in general with family and its "defense", a wide coverage was reserved to women's achievements and successes in different professional fields. These women were not exemplifying the "wife and mother" model; neither were they active in "traditional" feminine fields.

A large number of short articles were devoted to aviatresses, astronauts, policewomen, explorers, and other pioneering feminine figures of different professional

³⁷² "Viața actuală a femeii", *Calendarul*, 27 January 1932, I, 2, p. 4.

³⁷³ In this sense, a highly publicized organization in these articles was the "Young Girls' Association" (Asociația Tinerelor Fete), which offered support to young women who arrived in Bucharest to work. The association's purpose was to help these young girls, often from the countryside, to avoid the "dangers" of the big city, in particular prostitution, see "Calendarul femenin", *Calendarul*, 25 January 1932, I, I, p.4; "Viața actuală a femeii", *Calendarul*, 27 January 1932, I, 2, p. 4; Apriliana Medianu, "Poliția Femenină", *Calendarul*, 29 January 1932, I, 5, p. 2; Apriliana Medianu, "În jurul unui articol", *Calendarul*, 14 March 1932, I, 50, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ "Viața actuală a femeii", *Calendarul*, 27 January 1932, I, 2, p. 4.

³⁷⁵ Eugenia Dem. Constantinescu, "Adevăratul feminism", *Calendarul*, 27 February 1932, I, 34.

³⁷⁶ Eliana, "Feminitate", *Calendarul*, 18 August 1932, I, 131.

categories, mostly from other countries.³⁷⁷ The examples of these “extraordinary” women contradicted the supposed “inferiority” of women and were used in the women’s column as a reminder of women’s intelligence and ability, which can be developed fruitfully in the right conditions. While bringing to light these successful examples from other countries, many articles exposed, on the other hand, the difficult conditions of women in Romania, especially in the countryside, where a lack of education, overwork, and mistreatment made of peasant women one of the most miserable social groups of the country.³⁷⁸

This composite mixture of maternal ideals, “disruptive” feminine professions, and philanthropic engagement blatantly exposes the abovementioned contradictions of “Latin” feminism, and of the Romanian translation of its ideological grounds. The nationalist feelings suffusing the women’s column brought the discourse even further and transcended even the “Latin” roots of Romanian women and their feminism, grounding it instead in the “inextinguishable” legacy of Romanians’ “Dacian” ancestors.³⁷⁹ The continuous shift between exacerbated national pride and admiration for undeniable achievements and improvement of women’s conditions in other countries mirrored to a great extent the experience and thoughts of Alexandrina Cantacuzino. After her numerous trips abroad and the encounters with feminists from many countries, she nevertheless declared that Romania was “a star among nations”, and her travelling through “half of the world” made her even prouder of her own country.³⁸⁰

The contradictory features underpinning this form of feminism were exposed in the most blatant form in the discussions on the extension of full civil and political rights to women. The conflict was visible not only in the dissensions on this issue between men and women contributors to the newspaper, but also throughout the articles of the women’s columns themselves. While male journalists such as Toma Vlădescu deemed the rights demanded by the “feminist ladies” as “incompatible with [women’s] deeper nature”, an entire

³⁷⁷ Apriliana Medianu, “Ella Negruzzi”, *Calendarul*, 26 February 1932, I, 33, p.2; “Spicuiuri” (on Amelia Earhart), *Calendarul*, 11 August 1932, I, 124; “Calendarul feminin”, *Calendarul*, 25 August 1932, I, 138; Elste, “Femei exploratoare”, *Calendarul*, 8 September 1932, I, 152; Calliope Dimescu, “Profesiunile feminine în Anglia”, *Calendarul*, 20 October 1932, I, 194; Elste, “Poliția feminină din Polonia”, *Calendarul*, 27 October 1932, I, 201; “Calendarul feminin” (with a short article on Irène Némirovsky), *Calendarul*, 3 December 1932, I, 241; Eliana, “Paradisul feministelor” (“Feminist Paradise”, about women’s conditions in Finland), *Calendarul*, 15 December 1932, I, 247; Apriliana Medianu, “Ucigași ai entuziasmului sau ‘cazul’ Smaranda Brăescu”, *Calendarul*, 28 May 1933, II, 377.

³⁷⁸ V. Voiculescu, “Femeia de țară”, *Calendarul*, 10 March 1932, I, 46, p. 3; N. Crevedia, “Săteanca”, *Calendarul*, 1 September 1932, I, 145; Apriliana Medianu, “Probleme rurale”, *Calendarul*, 1 September 1932, I, 145; Maria Mihon, “90% analfabete între femeile Moațe”, *Calendarul*, 24 November 1932, I, 229.

³⁷⁹ Apriliana Medianu, “Cu prilejul articolului săptămânii”, *Calendarul*, 1 December 1932, I, 235.

³⁸⁰ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I, p. 25.

series of articles from the women's column dealt with the issue of emancipation, in Romania and abroad.³⁸¹ Among these women journalists, however, emerged a shift between support for women's emancipation on one hand and, on the other, claims for women's non-participation in political activities. This shift mirrored the internal divisions of the CNFR and the conflicts among Alexandrina Cantacuzino and other feminists on this issue.³⁸²

Calendarul (The Calendar) was also, in 1932-1933, among the first important newspapers to support the Legionary Movement (at that time mostly called "Iron Guard"). Some articles of the women's column show that these legionary sympathies were shared within the CNFR's wing grouped around Alexandrina Cantacuzino. One of the most active journalists of the column, Apriliana Medianu, emerges as particularly close to the Legion and its activity.³⁸³ Her reportage from the student congress held in Braşov in 1932 is permeated with admiration for the *élan* of the youth and the groups of girls participating in the congress. Supposedly, someone explained to her that those girls were legionary women, and she expressed her desire to know those girls more deeply. At some point during the congress, two women students participated in a discussion about the countryside "question", and in their opinion their purpose, as educated women, was to become teachers in the countryside. For Medianu, that was a most beautiful ideal to be pursued by young women students and she praised the nationalist "flame" animating "thousands of souls" among the Romanian youth.³⁸⁴

The sympathy of Apriliana Medianu for the Legion was not expressed only in writing; she also participated personally in some legionary events. In late September 1933, at the Green House (at that time still unfinished and called "The House of Wounded Legionaries"), the sports section of the Iron Guard, called the "Sport Legion" (Legiunea Sportivă) celebrated its first seven months of activity. Apriliana Medianu was mentioned among the guests and she awarded the athletes medals and prizes.³⁸⁵ Medianu's sympathy for the Legion was thus openly exposed, as was her admiration for Fascist Italy, and, to a lesser extent, for Nazi Germany. In her short reportage from Germany, she mostly underlined the order and absence of violence reigning under Hitler's rule. On the other hand, she devoted many articles to

³⁸¹ Toma Vlădescu, "Apărarea familiei", *Calendarul*, 22 August 1932, I, 135, p. 1.

³⁸² Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I, p. 31.

³⁸³ Apriliana Medianu is mentioned among the members of the Criterion Association, the same intellectual circle of Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Marietta Sadova, and others, see Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania*, p. 92, 123, 130.

³⁸⁴ Apriliana Medianu, "Fără ideal!", *Calendarul*, 15 December 1932, I, 247.

³⁸⁵ "Serbarea legiunii sportive", *Calendarul*, 24 September 1933, II, 480.

Fascist Italy, where Mussolini, in her opinion, “gave the fascist woman a capital role in the regeneration of the country”.³⁸⁶

In the second half of the year 1933, support for the Iron Guard in the pages of *Calendarul* (The Calendar) grew steadily, with articles devoted to the Legion in almost every issue. In this period, male journalists wrote several articles about legionary women and other general contributions on women’s roles within the family and the nation.³⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the women’s column dealt with less “politicized” subjects, in particular art and history, but also the more familiar philanthropic issues. At the end of December 1933, after the assassination of Prime Minister Ion G. Duca, the newspaper was suspended and ceased its publication. The editor Nichifor Crainic was arrested as a “moral” accomplice to the assassination, together with many other supporters of the Legion belonging to the intellectual circles and the press.

In this changing political atmosphere, the CNFR lost a precious space, in which it could address its feminist issues and campaign for its demands. However, one year later the Legion was reorganized under the name of “Everything for the Country”. Concomitantly with the Legion’s growing success in the second half of the 1930s, the political sympathies of Alexandrina Cantacuzino also seem to have shifted more powerfully towards the Legionary Movement. An exacerbation of her authoritarian tendencies in the leadership of the SONFR and the CNFR accompanied this political shift.³⁸⁸ Her version of feminism, firmly grounded in nationalism and Orthodox faith, was not so far from the Legion’s ideology. Moreover, the apparent contradictions in her political attitude toward women’s roles, shifting incessantly between the wife-and-mother model and a more active role in public life, paralleled the Legion’s attitude in this regard. Indeed, most legionary discourses, centered on motherhood and family life, were often contradicted in practice by many legionary women members, who did not conform to these ideal gender norms.

Beyond the sharing of a similar “disorderly” attitude towards the relationship between women and politics, the “elective affinity” between Alexandrina Cantacuzino and the Legion had also a more personal origin. Her son, Alexandru Cantacuzino, was an important legionary commander and Alexandrina Cantacuzino’s closeness to the movement seems to have become even stronger after his death. Alexandru was assassinated in prison in 1939, during

³⁸⁶ Aureliana Medianu, “La donna fascista”, *Calendarul*, 3 November 1932, I, 208; see also, Apriliana Medianu, “O zi în Germania hitleristă”, *Calendarul*, 5 May 1933, II, 361.

³⁸⁷ N. Crevedia, “Sacru cult al familiei”, *Calendarul*, 18 July 1933, II, 422; N. Crevedia, “Garda de Fer la lucru! – Legionarele”, *Calendarul*, 27 August 1933, II, 457; Pr. Dr. Potcaș, “Mama creștină”, *Calendarul*, 19 August 1933, II, 450; Nichifor Crainic, “Demimondena și mama”, *Calendarul*, 3 September 1933, II, 463.

³⁸⁸ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I, p. 15-16; see also, Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, pp. 290-294.

the mass killing of legionary members perpetrated by the authorities after the assassination of the Prime Minister Armand Călinescu in September 1939. This episode seems to coincide with an intensification of his mother's support for the Legion, and her growing isolation from the feminist networks to which she had belonged. According to a letter sent to the Belgian feminist Marthe Boël by the vice-president of the CNFR Ethel Pantazzi, it emerges that Alexandrina Cantacuzino also spent a period under house arrest imposed by King Carol II, during which she had to resign temporarily from her duties within the CNFR.³⁸⁹

After the king's abdication in September 1940, the political situation changed again, and Alexandrina Cantacuzino returned to her activity. In the immediate aftermath of the legionary rebellion of January 1941, she wrote a brief, but heartfelt memorandum on the event. In this piece, titled "Examination of Conscience" (*Examen de conștiință*), she blames the older generation for the recrudescence of violence that had raged across the country during the previous ten years, and which saw its peak in the rebellion. While acknowledging the mistakes and the deviations of the legionaries, her belief in the "purity" of their intent emerges unshaken. Corneliu Codreanu is described as a "great mystic", with a "pure heart", animated only by good will and by his "apostolic" mission. The younger generation followed him, and in the legionaries the last flame of "heroic affirmation" burned, as they never hesitated to sacrifice their lives for their ideals.³⁹⁰

In her memorandum, Alexandrina Cantacuzino seems to have combined her probably sincere support for the Legion with an apologetic discourse grounded in the condemnation of the "older" generation and the ruling class. The young legionaries emerge from her work as not completely responsible for their own wrongs and violent actions, since, as she stated, "anarchy occurs when the ruler is not able to rule".³⁹¹ The strategy of victimhood, and of violence as a necessary form of defense, was common in the legionary discourse, and in the case of the princess the violent and unlawful assassination of her son might have played a major role in her unshakable support. After the rebellion however, and especially with the entrance of Romania into the war alongside Nazi Germany, all her activity was absorbed in this major national endeavor. Despite her age and fragile health, she traveled to the front in Ukraine and Transnistria in 1942 and 1943.³⁹² Eventually, she died in October 1944, just a

³⁸⁹ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I, pp. 31-32.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

³⁹¹ Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I, p. 83.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85, 91-96, 100-101.

few months after the coup d'état against the Antonescu regime and the continuation of the war on the side of the Allied forces.

Conclusions

The stories of the women analyzed in this chapter show how gender and class intermingled with social status, personal choices, and networks to produce different forms of political involvement. Freedoms and limits depended on the combination of multiple factors and belonging to the same class or network did not necessarily result in similar actions. The choice of dividing women into three groups, intellectuals, noblewomen, and feminists, was driven not only by analytical criteria, but also by the desire to explore the variety of feminine participation within any group. Women from the circle of intellectuals, or from aristocratic families, surely shared several features, but their different paths expose different approaches to and considerations about politics, and what politics meant for women. Personal choices and inclinations played a role, but this freedom was strongly intertwined with dynamics of power, gender relations, and economic independence.

The divergent paths of Nina Eliade and Marietta Sadova shed light on exactly this combination of power dynamics, gender relations and the importance of economic independence, in certain circumstances, in shaping a woman's freedom of choice. Both Nina Eliade and Marietta Sadova – and ultimately all women – fell under the gender stereotypes of some intellectuals in their circle of friends; stereotypes that at times verged on open misogyny. From Eliade's writings the image of women as the means for men to fulfil their own destinies emerges strongly. Women might be extraordinary, they might be objects of strong and passionate love, but they are not actors, they are recipients, of men's love, expectations, and sufferings.³⁹³ In a similar fashion, Eliade's fervent nationalism was rooted in “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope”.³⁹⁴

In his novel *Marriage in Heaven* (Nuntă în Cer), written during his internment in 1938, Eliade was searching for the Romanian “eternal feminine”.³⁹⁵ Men are the makers of the nation; women are the nation's symbols. If, ultimately, the feminine is “eternal”, the

³⁹³ “Every man, in relation to the Cosmos, *behaves like a woman*: he waits to be fecundated, so that his self may be revealed, so that he may accomplish his mission”, Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, p. 99 (my emphasis).

³⁹⁴ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, p. 93.

³⁹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume II: 1937-1960. Exile's Odyssey*, pp. 72-73.

feminine is also ahistorical, and, therefore, apolitical. The unbridgeable gap between women and history, and ultimately politics, was expressed blatantly and violently by Emil Cioran, in an article from 1933 published in the newspaper *Vremea* (The Times) and quoted extensively in the newspaper *Calendarul* (The Calendar), belonging to the same far-right milieu. For Cioran, the woman was “an animal incapable of culture and spirituality”, and he declared “categorically and irremediably that the woman is not an historical being”.³⁹⁶

While the harshest edges of this misogynist intellectual atmosphere were softened somewhat by personal relations of friendship and affection among most members, it was nonetheless quite complicated for women to act politically. This situation was complicated further by the power dynamics that shaped their personal lives. Nina entered the circle of intellectuals as an “outsider”, and only through her relation to Mircea, who portrayed Nina as a self-sacrificing, devoted wife. Her legionary beliefs, which emerge from different sources as openly and passionately supported, seem never to have been translated into direct action. Despite being informed of her sympathies, the authorities did not take measures against her, even in the periods when the legionaries were most harshly persecuted. Her political beliefs seem to have been considered a “private” matter, and Nina Eliade herself might have thought the same. To take action might have meant to enter her husband’s terrain, to overshadow his own political engagement. But, very likely, Nina Eliade’s thoughts and motivations will forever remain unknown to us.

On the other hand, the activity of Marietta Sadova was political in a wider sense, not only in the narrower sense of exposing the gendered conceptualization of the political, as was the case for the relationship between Mircea, Nina and their legionary affiliation. Sadova’s activity also raises questions about the extent to which, within her milieu, economic independence and an established social position were vehicles for a greater freedom of choice, and for a potential political engagement undertaken intensely, even (after a certain point) dangerously. In the eyes of the men who knew her, the image of Sadova emerges as a contradictory one. For Eliade, she “lived exclusively for others” and “her life was nourished by the pleasure she gave to other people”.³⁹⁷ On the contrary, for Mihail Sebastian she was a fine social strategist, driven by opportunism and calculation.

Most likely, both images of Sadova are partial and misleading. Eliade had the tendency to overestimate women’s self-sacrificing drives, probably because this feature nourished his ideal type of woman (or, at least, one of his ideal types). In the case of Mihail

³⁹⁶ “Împotriva femeilor”, *Calendarul*, 6 September 1933, II, 465.

³⁹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume I: 1907-1937*, pp. 216-217.

Sebastian, the issue is more complicated and delicate, for he might have wished, as a form of self-defense, to ascribe his friend's anti-Semitism and legionary beliefs more to opportunism than to sincere feelings. More likely, Sadova's legionary activity was driven by manifold motivations and considerations, though nationalist and anti-Semitic feelings probably played a central role, since her support for the Legion went far beyond the point at which it was convenient. On the contrary, from January 1941 onwards her activities exposed her to continuous police surveillance at the risk of her freedom.

As far as the participation of the aristocracy is concerned, the "elective affinities" between the nobility (and other elites) and the Legionary Movement showed different levels of involvement. Aristocratic women's action in support of the movement was defined by the intersection of multiple elements: gender, class, age, wealth, family life, and profession. For some, support for the Legion might have stemmed from a sense of nostalgia for the past "stability" of their class, coupled with the uncertainties of a time characterized by abrupt changes in fortune. In his memoirs, Prince Mihail Sturdza linked his belonging to the Legionary Movement to the interruption of a political continuity with the past, for the end of the First World War brought the disappearance of the Conservative Party. In the Legion, he found "the links with times gone by".³⁹⁸

The narrative of the Legion as a connection with the past and with history was paralleled, however, by an alternative narrative, based on the image of the Legion as a "new", radical and disruptive political phenomenon. The legionary activity of Ioana Cantacuzino might have been linked to this latter narrative. Hence, Cantacuzino distanced herself from the customary activities of her class and gender, which were connected mostly with philanthropy and social work, by choosing to become a pilot. More systematic research on Romanian feminine aviation and the political activity of some of these women pilots, in particular (but not only) within the Legionary Movement, is still lacking.³⁹⁹ What little interest there is in these figures (above all in Smaranda Brăescu, but also in Ioana Cantacuzino) has been mostly journalistic, focused on the restoration of their extraordinary achievements to public

³⁹⁸ Mihail Sturdza, *The Suicide of Europe*, p. 3.

³⁹⁹ For more extensive research on early feminine aviation in different national, social, and political contexts, see Bernhard Rieger, 'Hanna Reitsch (1912-1979): The Global Career of a Nazi Celebrity'; Susan Ware, *Still Missing. Amelia Earhart and the Search for Modern Feminism* (Norton, 1993); for feminine aviation in the broader context of different national armed forces, in particular during the Second World War, see Jeremy A. Crang, *Sisters in Arms: Women in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Roger D. Markwick, Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), in particular pp. 84-116; Şule Toktaş, 'Nationalism, Modernization and the Military in Turkey: Women Officers in the Turkish Armed Forces'.

knowledge and memory. This operation, however, may silence or overlook their political engagement, either deliberately or due to the lack of a more extensive and deeper research.

While these two different narratives, one of continuity, the other of disruption, were based on the diversity of elements present in the legionary ideology, the movement also developed its own vision of the elite classes and their role in the legionary “world” during the second half of the 1930s. In the magazine *Însemnări Sociologice* (Sociological Notes), edited by Traian Brăileanu, appeared an important article on the place held in legionary ideology by the current (and future) elites. In December 1936, also inspired by the recent foundation of the “Friends of the Legion”, Brăileanu underlined how the Legionary Movement, though born among the youth, had managed to overcome generational conflict and incorporate in their political project the older members of the elites. Their common goal became the “regeneration of the Romanian elite” under the leadership of the Legion. In this sense, the “Friends of the Legion” would “complete the consolidation of the national elite”.⁴⁰⁰

Lastly, the exploration of the relationships between legionary ideology and political programs and a wing of Romanian interwar feminism is only at an incipient state. Much more extensive research would be necessary on the understudied subject of Romanian feminism, with all its currents and ramifications. This kind of research is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the first windows opened on the interactions between some feminist wings and the Legionary Movement shed some light on the complex and heterogeneous paths followed in different and difficult contexts by advocates for women’s rights. Moreover, the definition of women’s rights, emancipation, and feminism have been at the center of a decades-long debate, as delineated in Karen Offen’s influential article “Defining Feminism” (1988). In an effort to “define feminism”, the author compiled a brief but comprehensive summary of different feminist currents and ideologies elaborated at various times and in various contexts, all of them considered by their supporters to represent the one, “true” feminism.⁴⁰¹

Long before the elaboration in Fascist Italy of the so-called “Latin” feminism, centered mostly on the roles of women as mothers and caregivers, a polarity between “relational” and “individualist” feminism was already in place, with French feminists representing the former and Anglo-American feminists the latter, “individualist”, strain. The “relational” approach privileged the differences and the complementarity of the two sexes,

⁴⁰⁰ ANIC, fond MI-D, dosar 11/1930, ff. 27-29. Traian Brăileanu was professor of Sociology at the University of Cernăuți and a legionary supporter. He was appointed Minister of Education in the National Legionary State (September 1940-January 1941).

⁴⁰¹ Karen Offen, ‘Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach’, *Signs*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 119-157.

within the family and in society at large; the latter, on the contrary, was centered around the belief that the individual, irrespective of sex, had equal rights. These two approaches, though apparently at odds, have been, and still are, combined, juxtaposed, and re-adjusted, resulting in what appear to be “contradictory” positions. These seeming contradictions are perfectly exemplified, in this case, by the figure of Alexandrina Cantacuzino, who centered her feminism on motherhood and nationalism, but also advocated for the gradual extension of full civic and political rights to women.

Amidst many “unhappy marriages” between feminism and political ideologies, the one between feminism and the far right is the unhappiest of all.⁴⁰² However, in the general context of interwar Romania, this flirtation, more than a proper marriage, might have appeared convenient to some feminists. In the general indifference toward the so-called “women’s question” and the limited (in terms of class and numbers) emancipationist and suffragist current supported by the National Peasant Party, the Legionary Movement might have appeared radical and disruptive in this aspect. Women were widely present and visible, and the ideological underpinnings of feminine participation often showed the same “contradictory” features, promoting concomitantly the images of the mother, the housewife, the fighter, and the soldier. Ultimately, there was no contradiction between all these elements. Despite the perceived “disruptiveness” of legionary ideology, all the roles envisaged for women, the “new” and the “traditional”, were not meant to free and empower women *per se*. All freedoms, of men and women alike, were subordinated to legionary political projects. But within these projects, the position of women, though no longer treated with complete indifference, was nevertheless subordinated not only to the Legion’s ultimate goals, but also to the decisions, the policies, and the opinions of male leaders and ideologues. In some contexts, however, even a partial, imperfect, and contradictory political participation might have appeared more appealing than complete invisibility. And some feminists might have seen in this visibility an opportunity to raise the question of women’s rights without conflicting with the dominant, nationalist atmosphere that surrounded them.

⁴⁰² The famous expression ‘unhappy marriage’ is taken from Heidi Hartmann, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union’, *Capital & Class*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, Summer 1979, pp. 1-33.

“Sisters in Arms”: Military Values and Violence in the Feminine Section

Women as Fighters: A Legionary Perspective

“We find ourselves today in a moment of great transformations, of fight. From this honorable battle, the women of our times can’t be missing. We want the woman of our generation to be a fighter. *We want her to be a comrade.*”⁴⁰³ With these words, the prominent legionary commander Ion Banea, in a booklet called *Rânduri către generația noastră* (Lines for our generation), called for the participation of women alongside men in the great legionary battle. In the movement’s rhetoric, political action was often equated and conflated with being at war, composed of a series of “battles” which legionaries had to fight (and possibly win) on the way to the final victory. In this war, the role of legionary women as “fighters” and “comrades in arms” became an increasingly important theme in legionary gender discourse. The meanings and implications related to the potential role of women as fighters were analyzed at various times, in particular in the mid-1930s, signaling thus a need for this issue to be addressed more deeply by legionary ideologues.

As was often the case in legionary discourse, ideological elaborations and rhetorical choices were constantly reshaped and modified by actual circumstances and practices. The attention given to the issue of the woman fighter in the mid-1930s was very likely fostered by the growing number of women who joined the Legion, and by the discussions on various role models these women found available or desirable for them within the movement. Legionary ideologues seemed particularly concerned with the education and training deemed appropriate for women. In this sense, in a document meant for internal use it was stated that women’s education should be in accordance with the “feminine” spirit and should encourage and privilege “feminine” predispositions, at professional and social levels.⁴⁰⁴ However, inflamed by the rhetoric of battle, the spectrum of appropriate options became wider, and

⁴⁰³ Ion Banea, *Rânduri către generația noastră*, 1935, p. 15, [emphasis in the original], in ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 279/1938, f. 21.

⁴⁰⁴ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, f. 99.

potentially included the role of the woman fighter, even if this was presented as a fighter of a very special kind.

Thus, what did it mean for the women who joined the Legionary Movement to have different, if not contradictory, models to conform to? Was the idea of fighting and contributing to the defense of the nation appealing to women? Could women militate alongside men? Could they be violent? Could they be heroes? The legionary poet and ideologue Radu Gyr tried to find an answer to these and other questions in a booklet published in 1936 and developed from the text of a lecture he gave at the University of Iași in December 1935. In this relatively long and elaborate booklet, rich with literary and cultural references, the author considered the ways and forms of women's participation in the "spiritual, moral and national heroism" that he ascribed to the "revolutionary" legionary youth. Starting from the premise that women had a crucial role to play in the heroic endeavors of the Legion, Gyr analysed these roles and "missions".

The grounds of his theses comprise a wide range of presumptions and stereotypes about feminine "psychic" qualities and women's "natural" superior morality and intensity of feelings. As a result, for Gyr women were naturally inclined toward self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, and these virtues, central to the legionary ethos, could be stimulated by women, first and foremost in their roles as wives and mothers. But being wives and mothers were not the only roles available, given the inexhaustible qualities of women. They could be intellectuals, and at the same time, cultivate the arts and crafts inherited from their grandmothers, and they could even potentially defend their own homes and their country "weapons in hand". Enumerating a wide range of role models, from Joan of Arc and Antigone to the Virgin Mary, what the author envisaged in the booklet was the quasi-absurd ideological construct of a "heroine" or better, a "super-heroine" expected to fulfil a variety of duties and roles in virtue of her extraordinariness and spiritual greatness.⁴⁰⁵

The booklet of Radu Gyr represents the most systematic attempt to offer an ideological framework for the roles and models available for women in the Legionary Movement. Previous interventions, such as the abovementioned booklet of Ion Banea, as well as an article of the same author from 1935, brought forward the theme of the woman fighter, but with few further clarifications and descriptions.⁴⁰⁶ Thus, the concept, though presented in highly rhetorical or metaphorical language, might have created a certain degree of confusion

⁴⁰⁵ Radu Gyr, *Femeia în eroismul spiritual, moral și național*, Ed. Cetățuia Legionară, București, 1936.

⁴⁰⁶ Ion Banea, "Vrem femeia română luptătoare", *Flori de crin*, February 1935, 3.

on what a woman fighter actually was and on what was expected from her in terms of practices and actions. Radu Gyr took the discussion a step further, trying to present a clearer and more comprehensive description of women's roles, though maintaining at the same time the rhetorical language and tropes commonly used by legionary ideologues when addressing gender issues.

In the end, however, the operation of Radu Gyr did not succeed in bringing clarifications or descriptions, or any kind of directives in practical terms. His discourse got caught in the unsolvable contradictions related to the participation of women, as political subjects, as citizens, and as warriors. This conundrum sprang directly from the "disorderly" belonging of women to the world of politics and to the world of war, two inextricably interwoven worlds philosophically conceptualized and designed by men, for men. Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her classic work on men, women, and their relationships with war and organized violence, has analyzed the complex participation of women to the "body politic". Like Carole Pateman, she has grounded her analysis on the rereading of foundational texts of Western political thought, from Machiavelli to Rousseau and Hegel, enriched with insights from Plato and Aristotle.

What emerges from Bethke Elshtain's insightful analysis is, unsurprisingly, women's concomitant centrality to and exclusion from the body politic. For the woman is not a full citizen, her relationships with politics are less straightforward and more complex than those of men. However, the exclusion from full citizenship, meant here also as the possibility for women to participate in the defense of their nation, is counterbalanced by women's centrality in connecting the private with the public, the realm of the family with the realm of politics, through their ideal embodiment and transmission of personal and civic virtues. Through a woman's most important role, the mother, she is central to the body politic in both symbolic and literal ways, since she is the one in charge of actually bringing to life the citizens-to-be.⁴⁰⁷

The Legionary Movement was confusedly aware of this centrality of women and incorporated them in a fashion that was disruptive in multiple ways in the context of interwar Romania. The legionary ideology, however, struggled to construct a coherent discourse in this sense. The result was an on-going shift from more "traditional" to more "disruptive" elements, and at times, like in the booklet of Radu Gyr, all these elements were used concomitantly. Significantly, the booklet contained at the end, as an appendix, a long poem

⁴⁰⁷ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 47-91.

dedicated to Ecatarina Teodoroiu, the soldier-heroine of the First World War. The “Ballad of the Maiden from Jiu”, written by Gyr like the rest of the book, is an overly romanticized description of Teodoroiu’s short and intense life, and of her death in battle.

The choice of including this poem at the end of a book devoted to feminine heroism is not surprising but introduces nevertheless elements of complexity to the discourse developed by Gyr throughout the booklet. The ballad praises Teodoroiu as a modern Joan of Arc, a virgin dressed in military attire willing to sacrifice her life for the country. The death of Teodoroiu in battle is depicted in softly sexualized terms, with her body penetrated by the bullet, which became her only spouse. The sexualized language is devoid of any potential vulgarity not only by linguistic choices, but also by the virginity and purity of Teodoroiu. She represents in this sense the ultimate role model of the woman fighter, who could be a heroine by virtue of her renunciation of “natural” feminine qualities and predispositions.

The poem brings us back to the analysis of Teodoroiu’s figure made by Maria Bucur, mentioned in chapter three. The exceptionality of Teodoroiu served the purpose of reinforcing gender norms, for the vast majority of women were not, and should not have been, like her.⁴⁰⁸ As Bethke Elshtain has also remarked, the woman fighter is “an identity in extremis, not an expectation”.⁴⁰⁹ However, the legionary woman depicted by Radu Gyr in the booklet transcends the separation between the exceptional woman fighter and “ordinary” women. The legionary woman can be a fighter, if necessary, but without giving up her “feminine” and “maternal” inclinations and duties. The archetypal virgin combatant is still present, and she serves as a source of inspiration, but her exceptional qualities are mitigated and diluted in a sort of “ordinary exceptionality”.

The model of legionary woman emerging from the writing of Gyr is comparable to some extent with the model of woman constructed in fascist Italy, in particular during the 1930s. This model, which has been called “virile woman” (*donna virile*), presents a combination of heterogeneous factors, in which the centrality of motherhood was accompanied by a sort of militaristic mindset. This mindset was fostered by physical education, rallies, use of uniforms and, from a more ideological point of view, the general rhetoric of permanent mobilization for war, to which women were called to contribute

⁴⁰⁸ Maria Bucur, ‘Between the Mother of the Wounded and Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War’, pp. 30-31. See also above chapter three, pp. 149-150.

⁴⁰⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 173.

alongside men.⁴¹⁰ In the case of the Legionary Movement, its whole political action was conceptualized as warfare, and military language was widely used to describe its activities, which were “battles” on different “fronts”, paving the way to victory.

Thus, ideologically speaking, every legionary member was a fighter, men and women alike. However, the multiplication of roles expected from women put on them an even greater burden, for their ideological centrality was often translated in practice through an expansion of their duties. This aspect was much more visible and more documentable in the case of the Italian fascist regime, since an entire state apparatus, though sometimes inefficient, was implemented for this purpose.⁴¹¹ The Legionary Movement, lacking the resources and the bureaucratic infrastructure necessary to develop into practice its gender ideological stances, shared nevertheless a similar understanding of women’s roles. In this much more flexible situation, there are two significant and intertwined aspects related to the feminine participation in the Legion. Firstly, enrolling in the movement was a choice, often a dangerous and disruptive one. Secondly, the ever-changing situation of the Legionary Movement, from sudden successes to violent persecutions and underground operations, in practice left more space for negotiations on and redefinitions of feminine roles.

This unstable situation of the Legion, together with its politics-as-warfare organization, also generated a more varied and complex definition of what a “fighter” was. This aspect emerges more clearly during the periods of underground activity, during which the movement was persecuted by the state or was at risk of persecution. In these periods of crisis, the battle for victory was transformed into a battle for survival, which had many different fronts. In this situation, a “fighter” could contribute to the survival of the movement in various ways, from communicating orders to keeping contacts with imprisoned members, to fundraising and propaganda. Legionary women, as we will see in the sections of this chapter, were “fighters” on many of these fronts, at various degrees of involvement.

It is possible to be “at war without weapons”, as the title of a book on feminine participation in the Italian resistance movement has suggested.⁴¹² As far as women are concerned, this becomes even more applicable, since their participation in underground

⁴¹⁰ Marina Addis Saba, *La scelta. Ragazze partigiane, ragazze di Salò* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2005), p. 9. See also, Marina Addis Saba (ed.), *La corporazione delle donne: ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio fascista* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1988).

⁴¹¹ On women’s multiple real and ideal roles under the fascist regime, see Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945*. On particular categories of women and their conditions in Fascist Italy, see Perry Wilson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy. The Massaie Rurali* (London-New York; Routledge, 2002), and Perry Wilson, *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴¹² Anna Bravo, Anna M. Bruzzone, *In guerra senz’armi. Storie di donne (1943/1945)* (Bari: Laterza, 1999).

movements is often less visible, less spectacular, but often of vital importance. Additionally, the risks and dangers related to this participation were very high. In a section of this chapter, I will explore the dangers and the consequences of legionary women's activities, which for many led to imprisonment, and in a few cases, to extremely violent ends, such as torture and assassination. If the concept of the woman fighter could have been an ideological construct of legionary discourse, its translation into practice led at times to extreme and irreversible consequences for women's lives.

Lastly, a section of this chapter is devoted to the engagement of legionary women in violent actions, of different kinds and at various levels. By designing its political activity as warfare, the Legion was an inherently violent movement, as emerges from an analysis of the role assigned to violence and the ideological justifications and legitimization of its use. In the exploration of the participation of women in legionary violence, I do not only consider the direct physical violence, but also a more general sharing of a violent "life", as the legionary life was designed to be by its ideologues and leaders. Violence was inextricably linked to legionary political action. It acquired an ordinary dimension through violent language and attitudes, and the creation of a state of fear and uncertainty among their targeted "enemies", in particular the Jewish population. Additionally, the exploration of legionary feminine violence is inseparable from a deeper insight into the complex relationships between women and violence at large. The practice of violence results in often disturbing, uncanny, and shocking events if ascribed to women. Constructed as life-givers and peace-oriented beings, women engaging in violence emerge as particularly monstrous, or (and) driven by irrationality, emotions, and passions. What emerges from the involvement of women in the Legion is also the use male leaders deemed appropriate or desirable regarding women's violent potential, which they tried to keep under control.

Women's "Fortresses" and Military Organization

The Legionary Movement envisaged a women's section from its inception, in the years of its first steps as a marginal political movement. As already explored in chapter one, the feminine section was envisaged as an "auxiliary" organization, with specific tasks and duties, related in particular to the roles of women as wives, mothers, and educators. However, during the formative months and years between 1927 and 1928, the Legion's ideological

frameworks were of a more experimental nature. Constant elaborations and redefinitions were very common, as well as the construction of a specific legionary language and imaginary. Ongoing ideological and discursive shifts were mainly driven by actual situations and events, all immersed in an unstable political situation.

As far as the feminine section was concerned, the initial accent on motherhood and the envisaging of women's meetings as afternoon tea discussions were almost immediately abandoned. In chapter one, these changes were briefly analyzed in relation to the presence of young women, mostly students, and the much more informal form taken by the feminine involvement in the movement at the very beginning. These women, young and potentially oriented toward a future professional life outside their homes, did not correspond to the ideal image of the mother as depicted in the first articles that outlined the legionary program.

Some awareness of the contrast between ideological formulation and actual practices and forms of feminine involvement seemed to have emerged from concern about the difficulties of recruiting women followers. This issue was raised by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in an article published in the movement's magazine *Pământul Strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land), where he presented the example of the home front as a means to stimulate women's participation. In the Legion's "battle", women were to represent a sort of "home front", as guardians of morality and tradition, child-bearers, and supporters of the fighting men. The parallel with the First World War and the home front was also made to offer a familiar model of participation for women in a country where they were almost absent from the political scene.⁴¹³

However, the parallel with the war years was probably deemed as insufficient by the movement as a way to appeal more to women. The "home front" imagined by the Legion's leadership at this early stage offered an oversimplified vision of women's potential roles and contrasted with the actual presence and activities of women within the movement in those early years. At this point, in spring 1928, a new language started to emerge, a language aimed at incorporating women into the militaristic world of legionary ideology and discourse. As already mentioned in chapter one, in this period the Legion's magazine *Pământul Strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land) announced the creation of the first formal feminine organization within the movement, the "sisters of the Legion" in Iași. The women of the section were presented as a group of "fighting women".⁴¹⁴ The idea of the woman fighter appeared here for the first

⁴¹³ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, "Un apel către toate 'surorile Legiunii', doamnele și domnișoarele române", *Pământul strămoșesc*, February 1, 1928, 4-5.

⁴¹⁴ See above, chapter one, p. 34.

time in legionary language and was immediately followed by even more militarized accents accompanying the foundation of another feminine group.

The foundation of the first feminine nucleus – called *cetățuie* (small fortress) – in Galați, an important port city on the banks of the Danube, was greeted from the pages of *Pământul Strămoșesc* in enthusiastic terms. The language of the article is permeated by military metaphors, and the “fortress” is defined as a “soldierly” organization. Legionary women should share a spirit of “fraternity” and “love each other”. They should serve their ideals and be ready, if necessary, to die for them, because “in this country, also women are soldiers”.⁴¹⁵ Very likely, the ideological shift from maternal to soldierly roles was part of a rhetorical choice aimed to enrich the image and the discourse about women within the Legion. However, the introduction of a new language and a new potential role for women represented an important moment. Language can be disruptive, and it can make thinkable categories and actions previously unimaginable. In this case, the equation woman/fighter, even if it was initially meant in a symbolic or rhetorical way, had the potential to produce different forms of envisaging feminine participation.

The incorporation of women into the legionary fraternity is discussed above, in chapter two, in relation to marriage and its impact on the “fraternal” bonds between legionary men and women.⁴¹⁶ The conceptualization of women’s nests as “soldierly” organizations of “sisters”, in which all women were (potentially) “fighters”, adds new elements of complexity to the legionary relationships of fraternity. Ideologically speaking, the Legion was presented as an army, and every member as a soldier. In this army, men were not supposed to fight for their “womenandchildren”, on the contrary, men and women were supposed to fight together for a greater and almost millenarian purpose, the “salvation” of the Romanian nation. The concept of “womenandchildren”, introduced by Cynthia Enloe in her analysis of war, feminism, and international politics, represents metonymically the sum of reasons and explanations used at various times in history to wage and justify wars.⁴¹⁷

On the contrary, the Legionary Movement engaged in an attempt to mobilize what they defined as the Romanian nation, men and women (and children), in its battles for victory and/or survival. In this sense, the Legion defined its war as a defensive one, and justified it strategically as a form of resistance, which required the contribution of everyone. The choice of the word “small fortresses” to define the feminine groups conveyed this element of defense

⁴¹⁵ “O cetățuie a surorii Legiunii la Galați”, *Pământul strămoșesc*, April 1, 1928, 8.

⁴¹⁶ See above, chapter two, pp. 44-45.

⁴¹⁷ Cynthia Enloe, ‘Womenandchildren: Making Feminist Sense of the Persian Gulf Crisis’, *The Village Voice*, 25 September 1990, quoted in Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 114.

and presented the women's section as a sort of rampart against the various "enemies" of the movement. The incorporation of women as "sisters in arms" was a move of capital importance in the Legion's political choices. For women are, philosophically, the first and foremost "internal enemy" of men's "order", as Jean Bethke Elshtain has put it in her analysis of the writings of Hegel and Rousseau.⁴¹⁸ An enemy of a very distinctive kind, however, because given women's vital importance, they can't be destroyed, unlike other enemies, but only co-opted, incorporated, and controlled.

The ideological elaborations of the Legionary Movement and the introduction of a different and disruptive language in relation to feminine participation did not mean the actual involvement of women on the same grounds and in the same forms as men. Nor was this desirable, and very likely not even possible, at least not in great numbers, during the time of the Legion's political existence. The legionary "battles" were fought on multiple fronts, which meant that different groups of members were engaged in different tasks and were "fighters" of different kinds. If the respect of hierarchies was a central element of the legionary organization, this was even more important in the case of the feminine section. The activities of the "fortresses", while at times actually organized in quasi-militaristic ways, were ultimately subordinated to the male leaders' control.

This control over the feminine section was directly exercised until December 1934. During the first years of activity, from 1927 to the beginning of the 1930s, the reduced number of followers did not require a clear and formal definition of roles and leaderships. Between 1930 and 1933, however, the movement's move to Bucharest and its increasing popularity led to a reorganization of the Legion's structure. In this period, the feminine section was put under the leadership of Mihai Stelescu, a prominent member and close collaborator of Codreanu.⁴¹⁹ Additionally, Stelescu was also the leader of the "Cross Brotherhoods" (Frății de Cruce), the organization of adolescent boys (and from a certain point onward also girls) aged 13 to 17. The two sections, one composed by women and the other by teenagers, were coupled together and considered as "minor" groups, from the point of view of numbers and from the point of view of political maturity.

In Bucharest, the activity of women, particularly students, became increasingly intense and well organized. Closer to the Legion's central direction, the political training of girls and women was faster. Attendance at frequent meetings, personal relationships with male legionary leaders and students, and, moreover, the communal living fostered by student

⁴¹⁸Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 74.

⁴¹⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 7/1933, f. 2.

dormitories, led to more engaged forms of involvement. The issue of political maturity might have represented, on the contrary, a more problematic aspect in provincial towns, let alone in the countryside. The scarce familiarity of women with political activism, accompanied by greater social control, led the legionary leadership to consider women's groups as in need of guidance and closer supervision.

This complex process of women's gradual political training was also hindered by gender-biased attitudes and the beliefs of legionary male members and leaders. Themselves not familiar with the presence of politically engaged women, legionary men often followed various stereotypes about feminine "nature" in their reasoning and considerations. In a report from the legionary organization in the counties of southern Moldavia, the local leader Christache Solomon gave some advice on appropriate behaviors toward women. Feminine "fortresses" were relatively present and active in this local organization, thus a regulation of relationships with them appeared as necessary to their leader. According to Solomon, legionary men, while in general required to be respectful and foster a "harmonious" atmosphere among members, needed to be even more thoughtful and well-behaved toward women members. As they were more "sensitive", women would be flattered by men's "decorous" attitudes. Moreover, their behavior toward women was part of the general evaluation of members made by the nest leaders in their weekly or monthly reports, becoming thus a sort of "requirement".⁴²⁰

Two aspects emerge from this report, in relation to the complex integration of women into the legionary world. While not directly mentioning any form of misbehavior or "disrespectful" attitudes toward the members of the "fortresses", there is a certain concern about the peaceful coexistence of the different sections. Most likely, at the time of the report in spring 1933, men and women would have been sharing the same spaces and would have been in close contact, also given the male leadership over the feminine section. The requirement of behaving well with women might have sprung from an uneasiness of legionary men with their presence, which was still relatively unusual. Relationships between men and women might have been fragile, accompanied by a certain degree of distrust or a lack of consideration for women's potential engagement.

The accent on women's "sensitivity" marked them, however, as members of a "special" kind, requiring an increased attentiveness and careful attitude. Respect and "fraternal love" were indeed demanded from any legionary member, and conflicts between

⁴²⁰ ANIC, fond DGP, dosar 67/1932, ff. 4-7.

them were severely sanctioned and ascribed to the responsibility of the nest leader.⁴²¹ But women were not only sensitive, but they were also “flattered” by men’s careful attitudes, thus they couldn’t be treated in the same way as their other “brothers”. Besides the stereotypes of feminine sensitivity, this element was very likely also required in order to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for women. Their participation, though increasing, was still built on fragile grounds, related to favorable situations, personal acquaintances, and women’s social backgrounds.

The attitude of the legionary leadership toward the feminine section in moments of crisis further contributed to this unstable and complicated involvement of women. In January 1934, during the period of persecutions following the outlawing of the movement and the assassination of the prime minister, legionary women were excluded from most of the underground activities. This decision, taken by the legionary leadership, was motivated by women’s supposed inability to keep the underground operations secret.⁴²² Thus, besides being “sensitive”, women were also deemed unready and not fit for more difficult activities and tasks. While at a later stage this policy would be reversed, one element emerges powerfully from this report. The activities of the feminine section were directed, prevented, or encouraged by the male leadership not only in relation to strategic choices, but also in light of supposed “feminine” qualities or defects.

Despite the complexities related to women’s recruitment and activities, the development of the feminine section was nevertheless steady. In 1933, the “fortresses” received an official “statute”, in which the legionary (male) leadership outlined the fortresses’ principles, organization, and regulations on various issues. The *cetățui* were defined as associations of “young Christian Romanian” women, and their members, at least ideally, were recruited among secondary school and university students. All the other girls and women who wanted to join the Legion could associate themselves with the movement, but in simple “nests” and their activity was more of an “auxiliary” nature. The membership in a *cetățuie* was depicted as a demanding and total activity, thus marriage and other “social demands” were deemed as incompatible with full membership and required such participants to step back from the “first line”.⁴²³

The clear divisions between different forms of participation at different life stages were very blurred in practice, and to some extent, throughout the same statute. After a period

⁴²¹ Ibid., ff. 5-6. The local leader Christache Solomon intervenes here on this issue in relation to a fight between two members of a nest.

⁴²² ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 7/1930, f. 1.

⁴²³ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, ff. 84-85.

of four months of “intellectual and spiritual” testing, and when considered ready for action, a woman could become a member. A “solemn” oath-taking ceremony marked her transition to becoming a legionary “sister”. The oath pronounced tied the member “for her entire life” to the Legion and its ideals.⁴²⁴ Moreover, the rules of the so-called “Decalogue of the Legionary Sisters”, stated that a member would devote herself, her family, and her future to the Legion.⁴²⁵ Thus, not only was the active membership a totalizing endeavor, but a member’s whole life, present and future, was envisaged as a “legionary life”.

The ultimate purposes of the “fortresses” were also listed in the statute. Besides supporting the Legion with any available means, the “fortress” was also a center of self-education for all its members. They were in charge of keeping the national conscience and solidarity among all Romanian women alive, and of establishing relationships with women from other nationalist parties and movements. Most importantly, the “fortresses” had the purpose of giving Romania a “new woman”, “a hardened and strong soldier”. Moreover, the members were supposed to fight for the affirmation of women’s equality “in the life and struggles of society”.⁴²⁶ The issue of “gender equality” was also stressed in another section of the statute, where it was powerfully declared that between legionary men and women “soldiers” there was no difference in rights and duties.⁴²⁷

The kind of “gender equality” envisaged by legionary ideology was at odds with the battles for women’s emancipation led by the Romanian feminists of the time, mostly revolving around suffrage. In the eyes of the movement, parliamentary democracy was *per se* ill-suited for the “Romanian soul”, and it represented a foreign import devoid of “spiritual” meaning. Thus, the feminist battle for equal electoral rights was an “idle” endeavor, a “fashionable” devotion to a “superficial” principle.⁴²⁸ On the contrary, in the world envisaged by the Legion, women would be part of the great spiritual and national renovation and their missions would be of a superior nature. According to the statute of the “fortresses”, and (even more) from the booklet of Gyr, legionary women would be educated, and would work, fight, and actively take part in all aspects of society.

All this, of course, for the Legion and in accordance with legionary principles. The educational and formative purposes exposed in the statute regulating the *cetățui* were meant to create obedient and devoted members. The supposed “equality” of men and women

⁴²⁴ Ibid., f. 84.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., f. 81.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., ff. 83, 85.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., f. 81.

⁴²⁸ Ion Banea, *Rânduri către generația noastră*, p. 16; Radu Gyr, *Femeia în eroismul spiritual, moral și național*, p. 11.

“soldiers” was already skewed by placing the feminine section under male leadership, and, more importantly, by one, additional duty that women had in comparison with men: motherhood. This was presented as a woman’s “supreme” duty, ultimately their most vital contribution to the life of the nation, the “renovated” and “heroic” Romanian nation the Legion epitomized.⁴²⁹ Despite its contradictory elements, however, the statute of the “fortresses” contained several “radical” sparkles, offering the picture of the legionary woman as an educated, politically active social actor. Moreover, at least until marriage and motherhood, a member of the *cetățuie* could imagine herself as a “fighter”, “fraternally” taking part in the legionary “battles” with the rest of her legionary brothers and sisters.

An impulse in this direction and a salient moment in the organization of the feminine section was represented by the ascension of Nicoleta Nicolescu as its leader, or chief commander, in legionary terminology. This decision was not the result of an active choice in this direction by the legionary leadership, but rather was made in response to a situation of crisis. The leader of the feminine section Mihai Stelescu withdrew from the Legion. He then founded a new movement and became, from close collaborator and friend, an archenemy of Codreanu. This “act of treason” shook the legionary leadership to its core and produced an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust.⁴³⁰ The feminine section lost its leader and according to the statute, the second person in the hierarchy was supposed to take over the role. Nicoleta Nicolescu, who was then the commander of the “central fortress” in Bucharest, thus became the new leader.⁴³¹

Nicoleta Nicolescu was 22 years old in 1934 and had advanced to the rank of “legionary commander” in July that year.⁴³² Nicolescu was one of the key figures of the legionary student movement at the University of Bucharest (see above, chapter one). Moreover, she was a prominent figure in the local legionary branch of the Oltenia region. Born in Craiova, the main town of this region, Nicolescu was also very active there, in addition to her tasks in Bucharest.⁴³³ Lastly, she was Codreanu’s personal courier. Besides trusting her, Codreanu and Nicolescu were friends.⁴³⁴ Thus, in the moment of crisis following the withdrawal of Stelescu, Nicolescu was a suitable candidate for leadership of the feminine

⁴²⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, f. 82.

⁴³⁰ On Mihai (spelled also as Mihail) Stelescu, his withdrawal, and his subsequent assassination in 1936 as a “punishment” for having “betrayed” the movement, see Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, pp. 108-109.

⁴³¹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, f. 78.

⁴³² AN-Cluj, Fond IP, dosar 208/1934, f. 87; ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17 vol. I/1934, f. 14.

⁴³³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 228.

⁴³⁴ AN-Cluj, Fond IP, dosar 208/1934, f. 87; see also, Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, pp. 205-206.

section. Instead of another male leader, her commitment, activity, and personal ties with Codreanu led her to become the first woman chief commander of the Legionary Movement.

In taking over the leadership of the feminine section, Nicolescu addressed her “comrades” from all over the country through a circular. As the only woman leader, hers are among the few circulars, orders and communiqués written by a legionary woman (at least until the second half of the 1930s). In the circular communicating her new position, Nicolescu underlined the great responsibility of her new role and, as a general commanding an army, she called all the “fortresses” to join the great legionary battle, strong and united. In line with the legionary discourse, she depicts this “battle” in epic tones, as a fight for the life of the Romanian people, now “on its death-bed”, under threats and attacks from everywhere. To these legionary tropes, Nicolescu added a “feminine” dimension, by underlining the vital roles and tasks of legionary women within the movement and for the nation.

During those hard times, when everything sacred was disappearing and all good things were dying, women were called upon more than ever, said Nicolescu to her sisters. The only hope was represented by love, faith, and sacrifice. Women had to give the Romanian nation the thing it lacked the most: love. A love described in resounding terms, as “great, constructive, limitless”. For this great mission, legionary women had to be “virtuous, honest, serious, loyal, faithful”, but also “fearless” and “ready to die”. The issue of sacrifice, of being ready to die for the Legion, was not present in the statute of the “*cetățui*”, where motherhood was still presented as a woman’s “supreme” duty. In the circular of Nicolescu, however, the theme of life sacrifice emerged as a potential outcome for any fighter, men and women alike.

In militaristic terms, Nicolescu called on her “comrades” to give Romania a “great woman”, who would understand her nation’s aspirations, and devote herself, her mind and her heart to her people, taking any risk, and ready to die to defend the movement’s ideals. The greater the difficulties, the greater their sacrifice, for the “sisters” would raise a “blockade of woman souls”, who would defend their country “until death” and would “glorify it through death”. The theme of self-sacrifice and of “embracing death”, embedded in legionary rhetoric, was also extended by Nicolescu to women, in strong and relatively disruptive terms. The image of a violent death was presented in her circular as a potential outcome, and to some extent, also as a desirable one, if the difficulty of the battle required it.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 269.

This first circular was followed by a second one on the organization of the “fortresses”, in which Nicolescu delineated roles, tasks, and activities of the members. While some of the roles were already present in the statute of 1933, in Nicolescu’s hands they acquired a new level of importance. Aside from the “fortress” leader, the “more experienced”, the “more correct”, and “wiser” of the group, the secretary and the courier were the other main roles. The former was responsible for the entire archive of the “fortress”, which she was supposed to defend at all costs, even with her life. The courier was in charge of bringing orders and information to all the members and was supposed to execute her orders at any risk, “through fire and water”.⁴³⁶ Even for the more bureaucratic roles, such as the one undertaken by the secretary, Nicolescu assigned a new meaning. All activities were presented as including some sort of danger and risk, and the members had to be ready to confront all the risks with courage and determination.

For this purpose, the educational aspects of the “fortresses” envisaged by Nicolescu became more detailed and complex than those presented in the statute. During their meetings, members were supposed to discuss a wide variety of topics, naturally through the lens of legionary ideology. The relationships with other political parties, the “Jewish question”, freemasonry, and communism were among the topics to be addressed during the meetings, supported by the reading of legionary magazines and booklets. Additionally, members were instructed on all aspects of legionary doctrine, ideals, programs, and goals. Lastly, a fundamental issue was represented by the roles of women within the movement. The first role listed by Nicolescu was the “fighter”, followed by the roles of mother, wife and sister.⁴³⁷ In Nicolescu’s hierarchy of roles, the “fighter” seems to be of capital importance.

Accordingly, Nicolescu’s circular introduced a new activity among those performed by the “fortresses”: physical training. Members were supposed to train, when possible (from time to time), by marching outside the towns, “in the fields”, and “preferably at night”. In addition, during the meetings women were supposed to learn basic first aid. The training of the legionary women that Nicolescu envisaged was more of a defensive nature, in line not only with the general ideological stances of the Legion, but also with the centrality of self-sacrifice mentioned in the first circular. Legionary women, as fighters, were supposed to be prepared and trained, they not only built a defense, but they were a defense in themselves, a “fortress”. As an extreme outcome of battle, death was a possibility, and legionary women

⁴³⁶ Ibid., f. 271.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., f. 272.

had to be ready to embrace it. However, strategically (and ideologically) speaking, they were not actively waging war, but they knew how to react to the “attacks” of enemies.

An additional novelty introduced by the circulars of Nicolescu related to the opening of the “fortresses” toward different kind of members. While the statute of 1933 defined the “*cetățuie*” as a group composed ideally only by secondary school and university students, the new organization of the feminine section was wider and more inclusive. Peasant women, workers, and “ladies” could become members of fortresses. The meetings were also tailored according to their different social or geographical backgrounds. While in the countryside more attention was given to issues such as how to cook better food or save money, in working-class environments topics related to workers’ rights, in particular for women and children were addressed.⁴³⁸ While the statute of the “*cetățui*” from 1933 reflected the political experience of the Legionary Movement at the beginning of the 1930s, the reorganization of the feminine section in December 1934 followed the new strategies of the Legion. While students maintained their fundamental role, the movement planned an expansion toward different social strata: the peasantry, the working class, and, as analyzed in chapter three, the elites.

From the standpoint of the feminine section’s activities, however, the wider variety of women’s occupations and backgrounds did not bring much disruption, at least not immediately. The quasi-militaristic accent of Nicolescu’s circulars were much more diluted in practice, and raising money was still the most pervasive and urgent activity required from the fortresses. Financial difficulties had haunted the Legion since its foundation and was still a vital issue between 1934 and 1935. Fortress members were required to sell legionary propaganda items, sometimes in great numbers, like photographs, icons, and crosses, generally sent from Bucharest to the various local organizations.⁴³⁹ Moreover, all legionary nests, men and women, organized events, balls, lectures, and parties, in order to raise money.

Propaganda was another important activity performed by the members of the fortresses. Besides selling legionary-themed items, a form of propaganda in itself, legionary women were required to spread the legionary ideology and found new nests of members and sympathizers. Propaganda campaigns were generally undertaken during the summer months, principally because students were on holiday. In addition, good weather made it easier to reach countryside areas and remote villages, where legionaries could address the locals on the streets, at the markets, and in the fields. As analyzed in chapter two, work camps and summer

⁴³⁸ Ibid., f. 270, 272.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., f. 269.

camps became in the mid-1930s one of the Legion's most powerful propaganda sites. Serving also as a way to tighten and strengthen the bonds between members, uniting legionaries from different places and backgrounds, the camps facilitated connections and meetings with local communities.

The statute of the "*cetățui*" from 1933 envisaged an annual congress for legionary women, to be held in a convent, followed by two or three weeks of summer camp.⁴⁴⁰ At that stage there was still no mention of propaganda campaigns, and the idea of the work camps, while already in development, was not yet part of a coherent strategy. Moreover, the fortress congresses were meant to be attended only by women who would have strengthened their bonds as "comrades" and experienced communal living, separated from legionary men. The implementation of the work camps broke down this gender segregation and created a different environment with its own gender divisions in roles and tasks.

In one of Nicolescu's circulars, however, participation in the work camps emerged not only as the experience of "true legionary life", but as a propaganda campaign for legionary women as well. Girls were supposed to travel around the region where the camps were set, propagandize legionary ideology and found new "*cetățui*".⁴⁴¹ While it is hard to assess how many girls and women actually engaged with these propaganda campaigns, Nicoleta Nicolescu clearly imagined an active role for legionary women. This role, of active propagandists, convincing other women to establish "fortresses" and instructing them in this sense, was disruptive in many ways. Nicolescu thought about young women travelling from village to village, probably in groups, or accompanying legionary men in their propaganda campaigns; women talking with other women about politics, ideologies, programs, mostly in the countryside, where the vast majority of work camps were established.

During the winter months, the propagandistic activity was undertaken in the cities, as indicated in a police report from January 1935 on a meeting of legionary women in Bucharest, presided over by Nicolescu. The main focus of the discussion was on the activity of legionary women students within and outside universities. Students were expected to bridge the gap between themselves and women from other social environments, to attract women from different backgrounds. Great importance was given to mothers, as once "converted" to the legionary ideology they would be able to educate their children "to become legionaries". A student claimed she managed to attract 27 women in the Obor neighborhood, a popular area with one of the most important markets of the city. These

⁴⁴⁰ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 17/1933, f. 78.

⁴⁴¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 268.

women were all wives and mothers, who were “looking forward to becoming legionary members”.⁴⁴²

The reorganization of the “fortresses” under the leadership of Nicolescu was part of the general legionary strategy of gaining support by widening the spectrum of its potential followers. The Legion envisaged itself as a movement able to attract “the masses”, and from the beginning of 1935 and throughout the two following years, all efforts pointed in this direction. Under the aegis of the “Everything for the Country” Party, the presence of the Legion in the political arena became increasingly powerful in the mid-1930s, and an increased feminine participation was part of this process. At the end of the abovementioned meeting of legionary women, Nicolescu said the Legion was “the only political organization that understands the meaning of unity”. Thus, in the future “legionary state”, an important role was envisaged for women as they would “spiritually prepare the future legionary army”.

By spring 1937, the expansion of the Legionary Movement in its following and variety of members and sympathizers led Codreanu to think about yet another reorganization of the feminine section. At the time, the Legion was at the height of its popularity, benefiting from the aftermath of the funerals of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin and the wave of sympathy for the movement that was created by the impressive ceremonies held throughout the country. The feminine section seemed to have reached such a wide range of members that it required a new structure. While the archival sources are patchy, it is very likely that the directives and leadership style of Nicolescu were deemed no longer applicable to the many different categories of women who had recently joined the Legion, at various levels of involvement.

According to a police report, Codreanu envisaged the division of the feminine section into three groups. The first, composed of the “fanatic legionary women, the “desperate” ones”, led by Nicoleta Nicolescu, with a maximum of thirty members. A second group was composed of “good mothers and good housewives”, ready to support the Legion at any time, in any way they could. Lastly, a third group would comprise women of “not very strict morality” and “unstable character”, who needed to be educated “in the legionary spirit”. The latter two groups were to be led by the legionary commander and painter Alexandru Bassarab. In the case of the third group, he was supposed to be joined by “a very strict lady”, who would supervise the legionary education of the women.⁴⁴³

While strict divisions among different groups of the feminine section were less likely to be applied in practice, the categories proposed reveals the visions and ideas of the

⁴⁴² ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. I/1935, f. 42.

⁴⁴³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 9/1937, ff. 226-227.

legionary leadership about feminine participation. The legionary women under the command of Nicoleta Nicolescu were described as “fanatics”, thus attaching to these women the label of exaggeration, of abnormality, and, given the restriction in the number of members, of exceptionality. The qualities praised by Nicolescu, her militaristic style, her ambition in creating an army of legionary women “ready to die”, marked her and her followers as “fanatics” in these men’s eyes. Not surprisingly, the dividing line between the two major groups of legionary women seems to have been marriage and motherhood. While the “good” housewives and mothers represented the vast majority of legionary women, the “fanatics”, were a paradoxical sort of elite group, the loony “avant-garde” of the feminine section, at least in the view of Codreanu.

In practice, the organization of the “fortresses” was less formal and the divisions more blurred. For, as we will see, marriage and motherhood were not necessarily incompatible with some degree of “fanatic” militancy, in the sense of strong commitment to the Legion and of active engagement in various dangerous activities. Of great interest but unfortunately much harder to research is Codreanu’s third group, made up of women “of questionable morals” and “unstable character”. It is not clear what he meant by these expressions, but they might have described a mixture of a lack of education, possibly a reputation for promiscuity and in general, some degree of freedom from social control. Similarly, it is hard to define what education “in the legionary spirit” was meant to bring them; whether it was meant to transform them into “good housewives and mothers”, or (less likely), into legionary “fanatics”: women heroes.

These concerns about the fortresses’ “moral hygiene” and the relationships between family duties and political engagement emerged in a report that described the situation of the Legion during its four months in power. Written by a legionary member, probably in 1942 or 1943, the report is an account of the legionary organization during the months of the National Legionary State, from September 1940 to January 1941, in Galați and its county. As far as the “fortresses” were concerned, the observer mentioned, on the one hand, the “unprepared” and “uneducated” leaders of the “*cetățui*”, mostly fiancées of legionary members; and, on the other hand, the married legionary women and the “serious girls” who neglected their duties by performing activities that were “incompatible with family life”.⁴⁴⁴

While the writer of the report presented the fiancées of legionaries as uneducated and “non-serious” girls, “shamelessly” displaying affection in public, legionary wives were, on

⁴⁴⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 263/1940, f. 26.

the contrary, discreet and demure, even travelling in separate coaches during train trips with their husbands. Marriage seems here not only to be a demarcation line in roles and activities, but the basis of a “moral” difference between women, as if marriage fostered a “metamorphosis” of a woman’s character and behavior. Moreover, if the young leaders of the “*cetățui*” were un-serious and unprepared, while the “serious” women performed tasks incompatible with family life, feminine political activity inevitably results in a conundrum. Because if a woman is “serious” and politically active, she will neglect family life, while if a woman is not “serious” she may be a leader, but not a good one, given her lack of “seriousness”. The “disorder” brought by the political presence of women was unsolvable in the men’s world.

The period from September 1940 to January 1941, during which the Legion was in power together with General Ion Antonescu, was brief and chaotic, for the movement was deprived of most of its “old guard”. At that time, the feminine section was ideally meant to become an official women’s organization at a national level. As often happens in periods of transformation, the feminine section was immediately reorganized yet once more. This time, the division followed class lines, to which would correspond different roles and activities. With the denomination of “legionary women’s corps”, the rank-and-file legionary women fell under the leadership of Lucia Trandafir.⁴⁴⁵ But the reorganization of the nests, the expansion in numbers, the training and “legionary education” of the new “*cetățui*”, were abruptly interrupted in January 1941. The outbreak of the so-called legionary rebellion from January 21 to 23 led to the final outlawing of the movement, which from that point onward became an underground organization.

Despite the chaotic situation of the Legion in the aftermath of the rebellion, the reorganization was fast. In mid-February 1941, less than a month after the events, a police report had already mentioned a division among legionary women, given that commander Anastasia “Sica” Popescu was supposedly pushing the “fortresses” toward a reconciliation with General Antonescu. On the contrary, commander Lucia Trandafir, (former) leader during the Legionary State, continued to follow the line of permanent rebellion against the regime.⁴⁴⁶ This division mirrored the general fracture within the Legionary Movement at large, divided between the “moderates”, who supported a reconciliation with Antonescu, and the “rebels”, who supported permanent opposition.

⁴⁴⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 12/1940, f. 79.

⁴⁴⁶ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 13/1939, f. 238.

The leaders of the rebellious faction, who were also the “official” leaders of the Legionary Movement, first and foremost Horia Sima, fled the country after the rebellion. The majority of them found refuge in Germany, and Lucia Trandafir was among them. In July 1941, the “command in exile” of the movement appointed a new temporary leader of the feminine section, Nicoleta Nicolicescu, assisted in her role by the central “fortress” in Bucharest.⁴⁴⁷ The situation of the Legion at that time was more difficult than ever, with the central command in exile, a large number of members in prison, and the movement divided across two factions supporting irreconcilable positions. Moreover, all activities took place underground, with the constant risk of being caught and arrested. In this moment of extreme difficulty, the “fortresses” had an important role, despite the internal divisions within the feminine section.

The strategic use of the “fortresses” was decided by the central command, and despite the confusion about who was actually leading the movement, the “rebellious” faction received orders from the leaders exiled in Germany. In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, it was strongly advised that only women be used as couriers, according to a police report. The different nests or “families of nests” were supposed to keep contact and communicate orders and information through legionary women. This order sprang very likely from the idea that women were less “visible” and could move more easily, “unnoticed” by the police. The Legion had already pursued this strategy in an earlier period of underground activity, in 1938. At that time however, opinions on this issue shifted more often between the “use” of women because of their supposed invisibility and their exclusion on account of “feminine weaknesses”, which, it was feared, might compromise the secrecy of legionary activities.⁴⁴⁸

In 1941, doubts over the “use” of legionary women, as well as concern over their “feminine weaknesses” were widely overshadowed by a hard situation that required urgent solutions. The central command was in exile, many legionaries were imprisoned, and from June 1941 onwards the entry of Romania into the Second World War alongside Nazi Germany carried a considerable number of men off to the Russian front. In this context, women’s “fortresses” and the legionary youth organization, the “Cross Brotherhoods”, became the most active sections and to some extent, vital for the survival of the Legionary Movement. According to a police report from December 1941, the “Cross Brotherhoods”

⁴⁴⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 24/1940, f. 146.

⁴⁴⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 16/1938, f. 62; Fond MI-D, dosar 38/1938, f. 76; dosar 79 vol. II/1941, f. 133.

were still very active and well organized throughout the country, with a central command in Bucharest led by older members who had militated in the “Brotherhoods” in their youth.⁴⁴⁹

The same report mentioned the tight relationships between the “Brotherhoods” and the “fortresses” and in July 1942 the central command continued to order the “fortresses” to intensify their activity.⁴⁵⁰ Another report from March 1942 described the activities of the “*cețăui*” as “not properly political”, for legionary women were mostly engaged in collecting money for the imprisoned legionaries and their families.⁴⁵¹ This activity was vital for the survival of the underground organization of the Legionary Movement. The efforts of all the members to help, assist and support the entire legionary “family” were central to the movement’s ideology and political project. Far from being “not properly political”, this activity of support was labelled in another report as “economic resistance”. The expression mainly referred to legionary women’s engagement in raising money and helping legionary members in difficulty and their families.⁴⁵²

In the introduction to this chapter, I called the “resistance” undertaken by the “fortresses” in the underground organization as “being at war without weapons”. The economic support of legionary members was vital in the period following the rebellion. After January 1941, the persecution of the movement, the risks involved and the general economic hardships that intensified with Romania’s entry into the war could have easily led the Legion toward complete destruction. In addition, the internal divisions of the movement itself, with two factions both claiming to be the “true” leaders and the most “truthful” heirs to Codreanu’s legacy, was already menacing the continued existence of the Legion. Between 1941 and 1944, the survival of the movement was mostly due to the activity of the youth and the feminine sections. Once considered “minor” or “auxiliary” sections, their “resistance” during these difficult years, especially from the economic point of view, kept the Legion alive.

The reasons behind this prolonged resistance are not easy to grasp, given the situation of extreme risk and with the Legion’s so-called “final victory” becoming a more and more distant chimera. The women of the “fortresses” continued to provide support, to collect money, to act as couriers, while the movement underwent a gradual but inexorable political destruction. Similar questions have been raised in relation to the women who voluntarily joined the “Female Auxiliary Service” (*Servizio Ausiliare Femminile, SAF*), the feminine

⁴⁴⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 26/1941, f. 113.

⁴⁵⁰ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 32/1938, f. 16.

⁴⁵¹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 37/1941, f. 21.

⁴⁵² ANIC, Fond MI-D, 127/1941, f. 62.

corps of the Italian Social Republic. The decision to follow Mussolini and the “fascist dream” until the end, without any promise of victory, appeared puzzling, and, especially in relation to women, bewildering. Historians, however, have tried to explain at least some of the reasons behind this choice, and one important element has been located in the long and thorough mobilization and militarization of women’s lives undertaken by the Fascist regime.⁴⁵³

In the case of the Legionary Movement, women’s involvement had always been voluntary, and the feminine section received a new impulse under the leadership of Nicoleta Nicolescu in 1935 and the following years. However, the decision to continue their activities after the rebellion was very likely due, among other reasons, to the specific forms of recruitment and to the organization of “legionary life”. Personal relationships and the formation of variably large networks, made of relatives, friends, co-workers and neighbors represented the main channel of legionary propaganda and recruitment of members. These ties were ideologically grounded in and promoted through the concept of the “legionary family”, as already analyzed in chapter two.

In particular, during the periods of crisis the “legionary families” and the networks of which they were part became a sort of safety net. Mechanisms of support and solidarity had already been experienced in the periods 1933-1934 and 1938-1940, but after January 1941 the maintenance of these safety nets represented the major political activity of the movement. The so-called “economic resistance” undertaken by the “fortresses” in the years following the rebellion was largely due to the personal ties most members had with their “comrades” and their families. “Personal” might in this case take a broader meaning, implying not only relations of kinship and friendship, but the sharing of the same beliefs and even more importantly, of the same hardships.

The “resistance” undertaken by the “fortresses” after January 1941 was one of the “battles” women fought alongside men for the Legion and its survival. The preparation of the legionary feminine “army” had its starting point under the leadership of Nicoleta Nicolescu. The concept of the woman fighter developed over the second half of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s in unforeseen and unforeseeable ways. While the analysis has been devoted so far to the woman fighter “without weapons”, the two following sections will focus on the involvement of legionary women in violent actions, both as perpetrators and as victims.

⁴⁵³ Marina Addis Saba, *La scelta. Ragazze partigiane, ragazze di Salò*, pp. 135-148.

Violent Acts, Part One: Legionary Women as Perpetrators

“We endorse violence. We accept it not as a brutal means for immediate material gains, but as a form of national education, as a force aimed to arouse the virtues of the Romanian people.”⁴⁵⁴ These romanticized words are extracted from the brochure *Cum Suntem* (How We Are), written by the prominent legionary leader Alexandru Cantacuzino in 1937. In this small booklet, the author tried to condense what the Legionary Movement “really” was, to describe the essence of the movement’s ideology and practices. Violence makes its appearance from the very first paragraphs, marking not only its importance as a political weapon within the movement, but also demonstrating it to be a problematic issue, one which required constant explanation and conceptualization.

Even before its official foundation as the “Legion of the Archangel Michael”, in June 1927, violence represented a distinctive feature of the Legionary Movement’s first nucleus of members. A violent language, permeated by virulent anti-Semitism and by attacks directed toward various “enemies” was accompanied by physical violence, displayed in street riots, student protests and, ultimately, in political assassinations. Several assassinations marked the history of the movement, starting with the murder of the police prefect of Iași by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in 1924. At that time, the future leader of the Legion was taking his first political steps and the assassination and the subsequent trial, which ended with an acquittal motivated by “legitimate defense”, boosted his popularity at a national level. To this first, almost initiatory assassination, others followed, and some of them became part of a legionary “mythology” of violence. These events were then used politically to present the violence of the movement as a form of (self) “defense”.

The assassinations of the Jewish industrialist Tischler Mohr and of the Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Duca, in May and December 1933, respectively, became paradigmatic in this sense. The Legion defended the Romanian people from the Jewish “threat” and concomitantly defended itself and its activities from the incessant “attacks” of the state. This ideological and propagandistic issue became an increasingly important feature of the legionary self-portrait, in particular during the years 1936 and 1937. During this period, the movement pursued a strong commitment and dedication to “constructive” activities and

⁴⁵⁴ Alexandru Cantacuzino, *Cum suntem*, Sibiu, Editura Curierul, 1937, p. 3.

enterprises. “Constructive” was understood by the Legion in both literal and symbolical endeavors, which found expression in the great number of work camps opened throughout the country. In legionary propaganda, this work represented only the first bricks, real and metaphorical, of the great reconstruction of the country and of its future of greatness.

However, violence was an unavoidable aspect of this great project of moral and national renovation, and it required a more refined and coherent conceptualization and legitimation (in legionary terms). Two booklets, published in 1936 and 1937, dealt, among other things, with the issue of violence: *Naționalismul Tineretului* (The Nationalism of Youth) by Dumitru C. Amzăr and the abovementioned *Cum Suntem* (How We Are) by Alexandru Cantacuzino. In a subchapter of the first booklet, under the title “Violence and Terror”, the author presented legionary violence as a necessary defensive action, which occurred when the “soul” and the “honor” of a legionary member was repeatedly beaten and offended. Thus, any violent act by a member of the Legion was never an act of aggression, but rather a punishment, a revenge, or a response to a previous enemy strike.⁴⁵⁵ Against the accusation of using “Balkan methods”, the author opposed what he called the legionary “Carpathian methods”. In contrast with the pure “acts of terror” perpetrated against the Legion, its members responded with a violence rooted in higher moral stances, selfless sacrifice, and uncompromising love for the Romanian nation.⁴⁵⁶

To these themes, the booklet of Alexandru Cantacuzino also added a more romanticized and idealized vision of violence as a personal and national vital force, a stimulant of virtue and courage. Only a new form of education and the building of what the author calls a “new tradition” would bring the Romanian nation to “the heights of history”, and these processes were inevitably violent.⁴⁵⁷ Last but not least, Cantacuzino introduced a religious dimension, through his analysis of the Christian message as one that is not exclusively based on submission and resignation. Even when the violent actions of the legionaries undoubtedly constituted a sin, these actions were “a necessary sin”, and ultimately served a good aim and that sought revenge for current injustices.⁴⁵⁸

Thus, in these two booklets, violence is conceptualized and legitimized through a combination of heterogeneous elements. The necessity of self-defense and appeals to the landscape of Romanian and its ancestors through the “Carpathian” element in Amzăr, and Cantacuzino’s more “mystical” tones are nevertheless inextricably linked. A common

⁴⁵⁵ Dumitru C. Amzăr, *Naționalismul tineretului*, București, Rânduiala, 1936, p. 26.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁵⁷ Alexandru Cantacuzino, *Cum suntem*, 3-4.

⁴⁵⁸ Alexandru Cantacuzino, *Cum suntem*, 5-7.

ideological standpoint animates both writings, and it lies in the transcendence of any personal, material, and immediate gain in favor of the rebuilding and future greatness of the Romanian nation.

As we have seen, the concept of the woman fighter took shape in the legionary ideology in the mid-1930s, through the elaborations of the movement's (male) ideologues and the reorganization of the feminine section under the leadership of Nicoleta Nicolescu. However, in both cases, the direct connection between women and violence was not directly exposed. While legionary women were depicted as potential fighters, heroines, and "comrades in arms" the exercise of violence by women did not emerge in a straightforward way. Radu Gyr briefly hinted at this possibility when he presented legionary women as able to defend their country "weapons in hand", if necessary. In Nicolescu's circulars women under her command were supposed to be "ready to die" for their ideals, and yet, significantly, there was no mention of their potential readiness to kill.

Nevertheless, committing acts of violence remained a taboo, Nicolescu's militarized language and women's participation in legionary "battles" notwithstanding. This taboo was primarily an ideological one, but also a practical one. The issue of self-sacrifice, on the contrary, was more in line with legionary discourse and its passive character made it more suitable for women as well. As Jean Bethke Elshtain has observed, the construction of women as "naturally" not violent, mostly in relation to their role as "life givers", has often excluded women from the very conceptualization of violence, especially collective violence.⁴⁵⁹ In this sense, the incorporation of women into the legionary "army" was not taken to its extreme, and in legionary discourse there was no ideological room for women to commit violent acts.

This taboo, however, was mostly valid in the case of physical violence. Nonetheless, the legionary political project was inherently and overtly violent. Not only was its political activity envisaged as warfare, but the entire legionary ideology and the future "legionary world" the movement strove to build were grounded in violence. Anti-Semitism was the backbone of legionary ideology, thus various forms of violence against the Jewish population constituted an integral part of the movement's political activity. To this violence legionary women members and sympathizers contributed to in manifold ways, through their support to the Legion and the adoption of a violent language and attitude toward the Jewish population.

⁴⁵⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War*, pp. 163-193.

Women's voices were seldom present in legionary publications and propaganda material. In the very rare cases when they were, women proved to have incorporated the violent anti-Semitic language promoted by the legionary discourse. The first article written by a legionary woman, the student Maria Vieru, contained all the elements of typical legionary propaganda. Despite what would come to be called (by legionary men) women's "sensitivity", the violence of her language was not sweetened because it was written by a woman or directed to woman readers. The references to "Jewish dirt" were as crude and straightforward as the ones written by male authors.⁴⁶⁰

A similar example is offered by the songs written by Viorica Lăzărescu, seemingly the only woman songwriter of the movement. Songs were a very important element in the legionary rituals, and they were sung at meetings, events, and commemorations. There were songs dedicated to various regional groups, to the "legionary youth", to the "heroes" who had died in battle, like Ion Moța and Vasile Marin. Songs marked important moments and figures of the Legion and collective singing reinforced the bonds of legionary fraternity. Many songs were composed by Ion Mânzatu, while the lyrics were often written by Radu Gyr, author of the booklet about feminine participation and the "official poet" of the Legion. Besides them, other authors wrote songs about specific events, personalities, and sometimes regions of Romania. Rivers, mountains, and the landscape in general constituted central elements of what might be called the legionary political geography.⁴⁶¹

The lyrics composed by Viorica Lăzărescu are the only songs written by a legionary woman that I have found so far. Interestingly enough, and differently from the article of Maria Vieru from 1928, the main legionary themes are not "feminized" or translated into gendered terms. While Vieru's article referred to historical figures of women from the past and drew parallels between women and flowers or other elements of the landscape, the songs of Lăzărescu are not distinguishable from those composed by her male counterparts. Many of her lyrics featured "calls to battle", indicating their composition in a period when the concept of politics as warfare was well-established, as was women's contribution to the legionary struggle. Other songs are dedicated to the "land" and the river Mureș, following the incorporation of geographical elements into the legionary narrative. Moreover, in the song

⁴⁶⁰ See above, p. 33.

⁴⁶¹ On the role of songs and collective singing in the Legionary Movement, see Roland Clark, 'Collective Singing in Romanian Fascism', *Cultural and Social History*, 10:2, 2013, pp. 251-271.

Înainte (Forward), Lăzărescu mentions the “vile pagans”, who were bringing the Romanian people only “injustices and tears”.⁴⁶²

The expressions used in these lyrics, and others such as “leeches” (lichele), though not all of them originally meant to define Jews, became standard words in the Romanian anti-Semitic discourse. Moreover, the pejorative word “jidani” to indicate the Jewish population was so widespread in the interwar period as to be used indiscriminately, even in police reports. This makes it difficult to tell if police were just reporting the anti-Semitic language of a party or movement or were adopting it themselves. These expressions were not invented by the anti-Semitic parties of the interwar period, nor by the Legionary Movement, but belonged to Romanian authors, writers and poets from the second half of the nineteenth century.

As we have seen, anti-Semitism was the underpinning ideology of an important stream of Romanian nationalism. The Legion and other political factions during the interwar period incorporated this tradition and used it to legitimize their own anti-Semitism. Most of the anti-Semitic language and tropes used in legionary discourse were not original but derived from this “authoritative” tradition based on the writings of Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, Vasile Alecsandri, and others who are still praised today as part of the national literary pantheon. Their virulent anti-Semitic language and beliefs were incorporated into legionary discourse, and the legionary press and leaflets were peppered with quotes from these authors, transformed into anti-Semitic slogans.

In the legionary war against Jews, women fighters were as important as men. Indeed, even more important here than their male counterparts, thanks to their central role in the education of children. The adoption of the same violent language was only a first step, after which followed many different forms of exclusion and violent behavior toward the Jewish population, and everything believed to be of “Jewish” invention and import. Especially from an economic point of view, women were asked to contribute to the legionary “battle” by boycotting Jewish shops. Women were generally in charge of the daily grocery shopping and of the provisions for the household, thus this aspect of the “battle” was pushed onto them. Under the slogan “Not even a needle from the Jews [jidani]!”, women were asked to fight the battle against Jews on the economic front.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶² ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 221/1940, ff. 6-7, 29-32.

⁴⁶³ For the image of the “Jewish trader” and a brief history of the boycott of Jewish shops by Romanians, see Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004, pp. 132-155 (for the English translation, see Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew: anti-Semitic stereotypes in Romanian and other Central East-European Countries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

As far as physical violence is concerned, and in particular assassinations, the participation of women takes on more complex features. An aspect that emerges more clearly is the absence of women from the forefront of violent actions. The assassinations committed by legionary members, some of them spectacular, were perpetrated by men who became legionary heroes. The assassins of Prime Minister Ion G. Duca, who were known as the “Nicadori”, and the team (composed of ten members) who killed the “traitor” Mihai Stelescu in 1936, the so-called “Decemviri”, were celebrated in songs and praised during meetings and ceremonies. Moreover, in prison they received support and gifts from legionary members, mostly women, who sent or brought them food and clothing. Similarly, their families had a support network for their needs, with the Legion providing not only financial help, but also legal assistance and, no less important, a sympathetic circle of “friends” to rely on.

The element of support seems to have represented a non-negligible aspect in the case of other violent actions which involved the leaders Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Ion Moța at the beginning of their political career. In this period, the circle around Codreanu, Moța and a few others was relatively small and included mostly friends, relatives, and girlfriends. As already explored in chapter two, Codreanu’s sisters (in particular Iridenta), Elena Ilioiu and Elvira Ionescu (later Gârneață) were part of this intimate circle of friends and political companions. The first violent and radical plans elaborated by the group, like the famous “plot” of 1923 to assassinate important political and Jewish personalities, revealed the active role of women and the support they received for their actions.

During the police interrogations that followed the detection of the “plot”, Elena Ilioiu was heard and asked about her involvement in the group. Ilioiu admitted her active involvement in Codreanu’s movement, signaled also by the swastika she wore on her necklace during the interrogation, which she declared she would not take off until her death. However, it seems she was not aware of the plot, and though she was not a supporter of the assassinations, she was nevertheless convinced that politicians and Jews should at the very least receive “a lesson”. During the interrogations she also added that, in Corneliu’s place, before getting arrested, she would have “stabbed the prime minister in his chest” and then surrendered to the police.⁴⁶⁴

At the trial of the conspiracy’s plotters, Ion Moța shot and hurt the “traitor”, a student named Vernichescu, who had informed the police about the plan. It seems that Moța had received the weapon in prison, secretly, from someone on the outside. According to the

⁴⁶⁴ Quoted in Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*, p. 73.

memoirs of legionary Petre Pandrea, the author knew from Radu Mironovici, one of the participants in the plot, that the weapon was introduced into the prison by Iridenta Codreanu, who would later become Moța's wife. Supposedly, she hid the weapon in a box of sweets from a luxury confectionary shop in Bucharest.⁴⁶⁵

It is impossible to establish the truth of this story, and to some degree the truth is unimportant to the analysis of the relationship of women to violence, in this specific case but also more broadly in the legionary experience. Different but interwoven elements emerged from Elena Ilinoiu's deposition during the police interrogation and Iridenta Codreanu's supposed smuggling of a gun into prison, hidden in a confectionary box. Ilinoiu, who according to her own statements was very active in Codreanu's political group, was nevertheless excluded from the plot, not only as an executioner, which would have been unimaginable, but even from the discussions about it. The belief about women's inability to keep secrets, which emerged later in regard to the feminine section, might well have played a role in this exclusion. In 1923, this decision was even more surprising, for the group was very small and the commitment of women already established. As we saw in chapter one, Elena Ilinoiu, Elvira Ionescu and at times also Iridenta Codreanu participated in restricted meetings and travelled with men to Bucharest and to student congresses.

The tone used by Elena Ilinoiu during the interrogation emerges as provocative and was very likely surprising to the police officers interrogating her. She did not entirely approve of the assassinations, but, at same time, she declared she would have "stabbed the prime minister in the chest" if she were Codreanu. But she was not Codreanu, nor a man, and her participation in these actions was virtually excluded given the contextual gender norms. Moreover, her words did not only appear strong or provocative to the police in 1923, but, to some extent, also to Codreanu's biographer. He probably chose to quote Elena Ilinoiu's declaration in order to show the violent and extremist environment in which the future leader took his first steps. And this environment appears all the more extremist if women too, were involved and expressed themselves in violent, provocative terms.

Natalie Zemon Davis once underlined how female violence has been often considered as "sparked by defiance, vindictiveness, and disobedience".⁴⁶⁶ These ideas about male and female violence, elaborated mostly in early modern Europe, had crystallized and had become stereotypical beliefs about the different "qualities" attributed to the masculine versus

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁶⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Men, Women, and Violence.: some Reflections on Equality", in Dorothy G. McGuigan (ed.), *The Role of Women in Conflict and Peace* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Continuing Education of Women, 1977), p. 21 (reprinted from *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, April 1977).

feminine exercise of violence. During the police interrogation, Elena Ilinoiu's tone was characterized as "defiant" and "disobedient" in ways a men's declaration would have never been characterized. The expectations about women's responses to and opinions about violence and violent behavior were contradicted by Ilinoiu's choice of words, her tone, and the swastika she wore on her necklace.

While men discussing and plotting the assassination of important political figures was surely considered as "extremist" behavior, women's support for these actions, when openly expressed, emerges as "more extremist". Through a similar process (as we have seen), women who wanted to be involved in the Legion in ways resembling men's participation were called "fanatics". The distinctive element of feminine violence, or of women's proneness to violence, was characterized by a certain degree of passion, irrationality, and uncontrollability conveyed by words like "provocative", "fanatic" and "desperate"; words used by the legionary leadership (and legionary men in general) and by the police in their reports as well.

To these elements, the story of Iridenta Codreanu and the gun, true or fabricated, adds other aspects often stereotypically related to feminine violence and support for violence. Secrecy, cunning, and aestheticization are all recurrent features in tales of female violence, from myths to movies, from plays to novels. Hindered from exercising direct violence by gender and social norms, women are often depicted plotting in the background, instigating, supporting, and advising men, who are often but not always the actual executors of the action.⁴⁶⁷ The use of a luxury confectionary box by Iridenta Codreanu to smuggle the gun into prison without being detected by the police is also paradigmatic of the aestheticizing features of feminine participation in violence. The act is not only beautified but also concealed in ways that does not raise suspicion, presented as harmless and innocent. Iridenta Codreanu, Elena Ilinoiu, Maria Beiu Palade were very likely aware of all the beliefs, the stereotypes, and the expectations the men's world had of them, including the legionary men they were supporting. To various degrees, most of the women who supported the movement were aware of this. Though it is hard to reconstruct the women's feelings about it, they might have also consciously used these same gender norms and stereotypes to tailor for themselves a form of involvement denied to men.

⁴⁶⁷ An example of these features related to "feminine" violence can be found above, in chapter three, when the leader of "The friends of the Legion" Maria Beiu Palade confessed her desire for the legionaries to kill the king's mistress, Elena Lupescu.

While it is hard to reconstruct women's own uses of these beliefs, from the sources we see the use that legionary men wanted to make of the women's violent potential and the ideas attached to it. We have seen how the legionary leadership included or excluded women from their activities at their discretion, at least theoretically. After the rebellion of January 1941, the opinions and thoughts about women's involvement in the violent actions of the underground organization followed most of the stereotypes described above. Exclusion from activities was not a viable nor a desirable decision in the underground context, given the importance of the women's fortresses for the survival of the movement.

According to a police report from February 1941, the Legion was planning to continue its activity after the rebellion through "individual terrorist acts". These acts were supposed to be executed by legionary women and the Legion would have tried to make them appear as "driven by passion" and without any "political feature".⁴⁶⁸ While the report might have been based on rumors circulating in legionary circles in Bucharest, the rumor itself is meaningful for the way it identified women as the executioners who could conceal their political cause under the semblance of passion. The element of "irrationality" and most especially, the alleged prevalence of personal motivations over political ones are the two tropes about feminine violence that most likely played a role in shaping these ideas about the use of legionary women.

Another rumor from the same period corroborates this interpretation, for a supposed legionary plan to assassinate General Ion Antonescu included legionary women, literally "girls", as executioners.⁴⁶⁹ In envisaging these plans, or in spreading rumors about them, the legionary leadership considered general opinions about female violence. While these opinions might have been shared within the Legion, this does not mean that legionaries lacked a more refined awareness of how these beliefs might be used. The acts of legionary women were meant to be political but were fabricated as acts of "passion" by legionary propaganda and by the women themselves. However, as it is often the case, it is extremely hard to know or reconstruct what legionary women themselves thought about these plans, or if they had any role in spreading these rumors.

Another significant aspect of the idea, real or supposed, of using women as executioners of violence is interrelated with the prevalence of "passion" over politics. Caught in a web of emotions and uncontrollable feelings, the acts of violence perpetrated by women could be sanctioned as not entirely conscious. As Natalie Zemon Davis has observed in her

⁴⁶⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 152/1940, f. 41.

⁴⁶⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 45/1940, f. 41; see also Fond MI-D, dosar 13/1939, f. 161.

abovementioned article, women, “as the lustful, disordered and unstable sex” are “not fully accountable” for what they do.⁴⁷⁰ This element emerges powerfully from the work Cecilia Nubola has devoted to the trials of women who supported in various forms the Italian Social Republic, or Republic of Salò, the fascist entity led by Mussolini which fought alongside Nazi Germany from 1943 to 1945.⁴⁷¹

The cases analyzed in Nubola’s work are of women involved in various activities of the Republic of Salò, above all, their collaboration with fascists and the Nazi army to assist the capture of partisans and arrest of Jews. Many of these activities, called at that time by Italian law “collaborationism with the German invaders” were often characterized by a great level of violence, comprising torture, assassinations, and participation in massacres. The women judged for various forms of collaborationism were not many, but their cases reveal all the problematic aspects of the relationship between women and violence. One attitude adopted by the judges during the trials of collaborationist women was related to the so-called concept of *infirmitas sexus*. This juridical principle, which the author has deemed as “ancient, but always recurrent”, diminishes and downplays the seriousness of women’s violent deeds on behalf of their weakness, “natural immorality”, and uncontrollable nature of their passions.⁴⁷²

This concept, besides being crystallized in a juridical principal, is a common belief as well, shared by men and women alike, and as Nubola has observed from the trials, sometimes used by women themselves in their own defense.⁴⁷³ Similarly, in the experience of the Legionary Movement, despite all the differences in context and events, legionary men and women alike used gender norms and stereotypes on women’s so-called “feminine nature” in various ways. While the use legionary men envisaged for women is easier to explore, given their leadership role and the consequent speeches and writings on the subject, it is much more difficult to assess the use that women made of gender stereotypes to create for themselves roles and importance that were clearly political but hidden under the cover of emotions, feelings, and aesthetics.

According to a police report from 1941, legionary women had weapons sewn into their dresses. Had the police made close body searches of women in public and on the streets, they would have caused indignation and reprobation among bystanders. In this way, legionary women would have become “victims” of the police’s disrespectful behavior and

⁴⁷⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Men, Women, and Violence.: some Reflections on Equality”, p. 24.

⁴⁷¹ Cecilia Nubola, *Fasciste di Salò. Una storia giudiziaria* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2016).

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. VII-XIII; 170-171.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

thus fostered the idea, central in the strategy of the legionary underground organization, that the Legion was being “persecuted” by the authorities.⁴⁷⁴ The incorporation of women into legionary political activity thus displays a combination of “radical” and “new” ideas with more crystallized, so-called “traditional” beliefs and stereotypes. The contextual gender norms prescribed to men and women produced different potential relations with politics and with violence. And, in a violent movement such as the Legion, the two aspects were closely interwoven. As in a double mirror, legionary men wanted to strategically use women, and women at times tried to strategically use gender stereotypes to obtain some room for political action.

A crucial event in the history of the Legionary Movement epitomizes most of the aspects, contradictions, and complexities already analyzed in relation to women, violence and the perceptions and discourses around this issue. The participation of legionary women in the violent events that occurred during the days of the rebellion, between January 21 and 23, 1941, is still a problematic and under-researched side of this tragic event. During the rebellion, Bucharest witnessed a massive pogrom, with extreme violence unleashed against the Jewish population and the Jewish neighborhoods of the town. Torture and assassinations, which resulted in hundreds of victims, were accompanied by the destruction of more than a thousand Jewish stores, houses, and workshops. The Coral Temple (Templul Coral), the main synagogue of the city and symbolic heart of the Jewish community of Bucharest, was devastated, together with most of the other smaller synagogues.⁴⁷⁵ The dimensions and violence of the pogrom led Jean Ancel to write, in his extensive work devoted to the Holocaust in Romania, that, “had this pogrom been committed in some period other than the Holocaust, it would probably have gone down in history as the largest pogrom against Jews since Kishinev (1903)”.⁴⁷⁶

The participation of legionary women in the rebellion does not come as a surprise, given the active role played by women in the underground organization before the seizure of power in September 1940. However, from a long but unfortunately incomplete list of participants in the rebellion compiled by the police, legionary women were far less numerous

⁴⁷⁴ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 13/1939, f. 177.

⁴⁷⁵ Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln-Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press-Yad Vashem, 2011), pp. 149-164; an extensive collection of documents and primary sources in twelve volumes has been curated and edited by Jean Ancel, see Jean Ancel (editor and curator), *Documents concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986). The documents concerning the Bucharest pogrom are published in volume two, *The Regat and Southern Transylvania, 1940-1941*.

⁴⁷⁶ Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, p. 160.

than men. This is partially due to the specific nature of this list, which includes mostly legionaries and sympathizers who had a prominent role in the organization and supported the rebellion. Not only is the list partial and incomplete, but insofar as women's involvement is indicated, their role in the rebellion is not described, unlike many of the roles and actions of legionary men. Out of a list of ten pages, only nine women are mentioned. Among them were Alexandra Fălcoianu, organizer of the "legionary families", the aviatrix Ioana Cantacuzino, and Elena Constantinescu Dancu.⁴⁷⁷

The latter is also mentioned in an article published by the newspaper *Universul* (The Universe) on the violence and the assassinations perpetrated during the rebellion. Elena Constantinescu Dancu was the wife of the legionary mayor of Jilava, a small town on the outskirts of Bucharest. The town was renowned for its prison, mostly for political prisoners, which was the scene of a massacre of political opponents and "enemies" undertaken by the legionaries at the end of November 1940. The forest around Jilava also became a place of terror where part of the Jewish pogrom victims were brought to from Bucharest and shot. Elena Constantinescu Dancu seems to have taken an active part in the discussions and the decisions regarding the fate of the few survivors of the massacre, who tried to return to Bucharest on foot. After being caught once again by legionary guards, there was uncertainty on how to proceed in their case. According to the article, Elena Constantinescu put on the table twelve bullets, suggesting to her comrades that they should kill all the survivors, though she did not take an active part in the shootings.⁴⁷⁸

A report on the involvement of the workers at the metallurgical factory "Parcomet" in the legionary rebellion mentions six women. Among them, two had more prominent roles, Fodor Maria and Fodor Anuța, who were very likely sisters. They took part, revolvers in hand, in the occupation of a police station with a group of legionaries. The other four women involved were what can be called "passive" supporters, since they did not participate actively in the rebellion, but were found guilty of "insubordination" and listed as "recalcitrant" workers.⁴⁷⁹ While a much more extensive and comprehensive archival research would be necessary on this understudied issue, it is possible to assume, from this scattered evidence and from the membership patterns of the Legionary Movement, that the women who took active part in the rebellion were far less numerous than men. Much harder to reconstruct are

⁴⁷⁷ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 79, vol. I/1941, ff. 36-46.

⁴⁷⁸ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 10/1939, f. 159.

⁴⁷⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 25, vol. I/1937, f. 144, 200.

their roles, their actions, their motivations, and their beliefs about violence and their relationships with it.

This supposed small number of legionary women involved in the rebellion does not mean their exclusion from potential participation in the extreme acts of violence that were perpetrated during the rebellion, especially against the Jewish population. Jean Ancel, in his already mentioned work on the Holocaust in Romania, has underlined that legionary women “tortured, murdered, and looted their Jewish victims”.⁴⁸⁰ His claims were based also on the analysis of a poem written in the aftermath of the pogrom by the Romanian Jewish poet Arthur Axelrad. The poem, with the title “The town of Bucur during those three days” is a dark, heartfelt account in poetic form of the violence and torture that occurred during the pogrom. Permeated by a bitter and despairing irony, the poet included and reversed some of the most romanticized slogans of the Legionary Movement.

The mention of women perpetrating violence is contained in eight verses, describing the shooting of a group of Jews in a forest. The poem speaks of a wounded Jew who asked for water, and a legionary woman, “a gentle feminine soul”, served him a “rare beverage”. With her “tiny, white, delicate hand”, with a beautiful emerald ring stolen from a Jewish banker, she offered him “a cup filled with warm Jewish blood”.⁴⁸¹ The participation of legionary women in the squad responsible for the torture and assassination of 94 Jews, led by the legionary member Topliceanu, is very probable. Morbid details of the torture circulated in Bucharest, reported also in the diary of the Jewish intellectual Mihail Sebastian. On February 4, 1941, Sebastian wrote about the torture perpetrated against Jews at a slaughterhouse on the immediate outskirts of the city, one of the most infamous episodes of the pogrom. The bodies of the victims were hung on the hooks for slaughtered animals. On each dead body a piece of paper was attached, on which the words “kosher meat” was written.⁴⁸²

In this spiral of extreme violence, the episode of the legionary woman giving her victim a cup of blood, narrated in the poem, is not impossible to imagine. However, the contrast between the feminine attributes of the woman and the morbid violence she perpetrates might have also been a poetic image, powerful enough to epitomize the degree of violence the Legionary Movement was capable of. A woman, a “delicate soul”, performing torture and gruesome acts of violence is often interpreted as the uttermost manifestation of

⁴⁸⁰ Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, p. 161.

⁴⁸¹ Jean Ancel (editor and curator), *Documents concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol.II, *The Regat and Southern Transylvania, 1940-1941*, pp. 201-205. Bucur, mentioned in the title of the poem, is the shepherd who, according to the legend, founded the city of Bucharest.

⁴⁸² Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal 1935-1944*, p. 297.

evil, as a perversion of “nature”. As Cecilia Nubola has observed from her analysis of the trials of fascist women in Italy, their participation in torture and assassinations and the details that emerged during the hearings, represented to some extent a “cultural shock” for the public and for the juries. While women’s actions were sometimes downplayed by using the argument of the *infirmetas sexus*, in the cases of torture and massacres women were often accused not only of the crime, but also for the betrayal of their “sex” and of their “nature” and thus considered “more guilty”.⁴⁸³

To assess the participation of legionary women in the massacres perpetrated during the pogrom of Bucharest would require much more extensive research. The collection of information and documents on the facts and on the roles played by women, on their direct or indirect involvement would only be the first step toward a deeper understanding of this tragic event. For all the participants of the rebellion that were put on trial at the Military Tribunal, the archives of this institution may not only offer detailed accounts of their actions and deeds, but also wider perceptions of discourses regarding the relationship between women and violence. Even if it were to emerge that legionary women did not participate directly in torture and assassinations, the existence of rumors and widespread beliefs about their involvement maintains its analytical value. A dreadful crime seems even more dreadful, for the witnesses, for the observers, and for the historical record, if it was perpetrated by a woman.

Violent Acts, Part Two: Legionary Women as Victims

Victimhood was a hallmark of the legionary self-portrait and a central trait of the movement’s ideology and propaganda. As already observed from different angles, victimhood was used discursively to various ends. In presenting themselves as “unjustly” persecuted by the state and the authorities, legionaries justified their perseverance, their violence, and their methods. Religious and “mystical” tones often colored these ideas, with the Legion presenting itself as undergoing a “passion”, similar to the passion endured by

⁴⁸³ Cecilia Nubola, *Fasciste di Salò. Una storia giudiziaria*, pp. 10, 76, 172-175.

Jesus Christ, which would ultimately lead them toward victory. Sacrifice was an important element of this narrative. “Ordinary” suffering, being followed by the authorities, beaten, imprisoned, and ultimately sacrificing their lives were all experiences of “passion”. In this way, a “true” legionary member proved his or her devotion to the movement’s ideals, the strength to endure difficulties, and his or her belief in an ultimate goal which transcended one’s own life and sufferings.

Imprisonment was transformed by the legionary ideology from a penalty resulting from breaking the law into a quasi-spiritual experience. The initiatory period in prison of Codreanu, Moța and the other three founders of the Legion in 1924 became a sort of foundational myth in the legionary narrative. Thus, during the following years and throughout all its history, the movement turned imprisonment into a form of legionary education. Moreover, in periods of mass imprisonment, in 1933-1934 and especially in 1938-1939, sharing the same prison experience was considered a supreme way to strengthen the bonds between members. Prison diaries and prison notes were often published in the legionary press at the end of the periods of “persecution” and took the form of exemplary tales of collective suffering, support and solidarity among legionary members, inside and outside the prison.

Alongside imprisonment and placed at a superior level, the sacrifice of a legionary’s life represented the utmost service to the movement’s ideals. Following the usual combat language prevalent in legionary discourse, to die as a member was equivalent to “dying in battle”, and the dead comrades were celebrated with solemn ceremonies, like proper “fallen soldiers”. The centrality of death in legionary ideology was often defined as a “morbid” trait, and the ceremonies, especially those celebrated during the National Legionary State, were macabre displays of rituals and performances. However, legionary ideology and rituality took the rituals and beliefs of the Romanian Orthodox Church to extreme forms.

The Legion created a blend made of exacerbated Orthodox rituals and popular understandings of the tight relationships between the world of the living and the world of the dead. To this mixture, the legionary ideology added its own elaboration of legionarism as a quasi-religious belief and not a political choice. In this sense, the most “morbid” traits of legionary songs and rituals sprung from a combination of heterogeneous but interrelated elements, in which death was the unifying feature. The creation of a specific legionary “martyrology” became an integral part not only of the ideology but also of the legionary propaganda and had its first spectacular display during the funerals of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin in February 1937.

The incorporation of women into the discourse of victimhood and martyrdom followed more complex paths, as often happened in relation to women's presence and actions. The more common conceptualization of a woman's sacrifice was related to her role as a mother, considered, as already analyzed above, a woman's "supreme duty". Selflessness and self-sacrifice were deemed "natural" feminine qualities, which women were supposed to put at the service of the Legion. Being harmed, beaten, imprisoned, and killed were not imagined as sufferings meant for women to endure. The distance of women from the violence analyzed in the section above was mirrored by the idea of women not being exposed to physical violence, at least not as a result of political involvement.

Gradually, however, with the emergence and development of the concept of the woman fighter, legionary discourse started to include women in its narrative of sacrifice. The circulars of Nicoleta Nicolescu from 1934 openly spoke of women's "readiness to die". Some activities, like the protection of the legionary archive and the tasks of the courier had to be performed under any circumstances often with great risk. In general, however, the dangers women faced as legionary members or supporters did not include serious threats to women's lives, at least not before 1938. During the 1920s, only a few women, in particular those very close to Codreanu and his circle, were interrogated by the police at various times. Mothers, sisters, wives and fiancées were, in the beginning, the most exposed to various risks, for they were under constant surveillance and subjected to police interrogations.

The situation was already very different in 1933 and 1934, when after the assassination of the Prime Minister Ion G. Duca by the Nicadori, some women were arrested and imprisoned. Alongside wives and fiancées, Nicoleta Nicolescu and other girls were arrested for their legionary activity. A first important shift occurred during this period, from the perspectives of both the Legion and the police. The reorganization of the movement in 1934 gave the feminine section more independence and more importance, under the leadership of Nicolescu. The authorities, for their part, became more aware of the roles women sometimes played in the Legion's activities, and that these roles were changing into something more than the supposed personal support for husbands and fiancés.

The first woman to die "in the legionary faith" was Elvira Gârneață, born Ionescu, the wife of legionary founder and prominent member Ilie Gârneață. As we have seen, Elvira Ionescu was close to the group which became the Legion's first nucleus in the early 1920s. Her involvement had been strong from the very beginning, and her commitment to the legionary ideal continued long after she had finished university. She became a renowned gynecologist in Iași and she and Ilie Gârneață remained in Iași after the move of the Legion's

headquarters and center of activities to Bucharest. In Iași, the couple represented the “old guard” of the movement. They were among the few prominent legionaries in town to have participated to the student unrest of the 1920s and they maintained close relationships with Codreanu and the legionary leadership.

The story of Elvira Gârneață and her inclusion in the legionary “pantheon” of “martyrs” followed a peculiar path. Gârneață committed suicide in November 1935, and her death was the first violent event involving a prominent legionary woman. The delicate aspect of her suicide was not easy to handle given its religious implications as a mortal sin. In the legionary discourse built around this case, however, victimhood was used to transform Elvira Gârneață into a martyr, who died for her integrity and dignity. The Legion’s ideals were not at stake in this case, but the private events of Gârneață’s life, which supposedly led her to commit suicide, were turned into a legionary affair.

On the morning of November 13, 1935, Elvira Gârneață had an animated discussion with Mrs. Lucia Borcea, directress of the “Maternity” (Maternitatea) Institute in Iași, where Gârneață worked as a gynecologist. As a result of the violent discussion, Mrs. Borcea slapped Elvira Gârneață’s face. After the discussion, Gârneață went to the pharmacy of the institute, poisoned herself with potassium cyanide and died shortly afterward. In the first police report of the event, the authorities were advised to place a guard at the house of Mrs. Borcea and to keep the legionary leaders of the city under strict surveillance in order to prevent potential acts of revenge. As is seen in the immediate actions of the police, the reaction of the legionaries and their transformation of Mrs. Borcea into the indirect “perpetrator” of Gârneață’s suicide was predictable.⁴⁸⁴

Corneliu Codreanu, accompanied by Alexandru Cantacuzino and other legionaries, immediately went to Iași as soon as they received the news of Elvira Gârneață’s death.⁴⁸⁵ Ion Moța joined them the following day for the funeral. The legionary leaders came “to comfort their old friend for his loss”.⁴⁸⁶ Gârneață’s funeral, held on November 15, 1935, was an impressive legionary display. According to the police reports, around 1500-2000 people attended the event. Alongside the leaders from Bucharest, most of the legionaries from Iași were present, together with a student delegation.⁴⁸⁷ Among the speeches pronounced during the funeral, one was particularly significant in placing Elvira Gârneață’s death in the context of the clash between generations. Gârneață, who belonged to the young generation of

⁴⁸⁴ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 237.

⁴⁸⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 232, vol. II/1935, f. 235.

⁴⁸⁶ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 6, vol. I/1935 f. 208.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., ff. 205-206.

idealists and nationalists, fell victim to the “selfish” and “materialist” older generation, supposedly represented by Mrs. Borcea.⁴⁸⁸

During the funeral, the death of Elvira Gârneață was incorporated into legionary narrative. The ceremony itself was transformed into a legionary event, presided over by Codreanu and other prominent leaders, with speeches held in Piața Unirii, the main square of Iași. The motivations behind Gârneață’s suicide were reduced to the fight between generations, one of the Legion’s ideological pillars. On the other hand, the violence unleashed against Mrs. Borcea reached extreme levels. Whilst the threats did not result in direct physical attacks, the psychological pressure on her was so high that she found it safer to leave the city.⁴⁸⁹

During the various legionary meetings held during the days before and after the funeral, some legionaries declared they would avenge the “great nationalist” Elvira Gârneață.⁴⁹⁰ According to a police report, Ilie Gârneață declared that he was prepared to shoot Mrs. Borcea, but someone had removed the gun from his pocket. Similarly, another prominent legionary member, lawyer Nelly Ionescu, was sure that the students would vandalize the house of Mrs. Borcea if she dared to return to Iași.⁴⁹¹ What emerges from these threats is the concept of a separate legionary justice, which entitled the members to seek “revenge” for the supposed wrongs done to another member. More than mere solidarity among comrades, the idea of a different system of justice put the Legion into open contest with the state, which ultimately had the monopoly of justice.

Despite all the threats, Ilie Gârneață ultimately decided to pursue a legal procedure against Mrs. Borcea, for battery and insults, accusing her of being “morally” responsible for Elvira Gârneață’s suicide.⁴⁹² For a few months, the case caught the attention of the Iași population. The Faculty of Medicine and the University Senate decided to exclude Mrs. Borcea from the university.⁴⁹³ Different rumors spread about the relationship between the two women, especially on the supposed love affair between Elvira Gârneață and Lucia Borcea’s husband, which was indicated as the real reason behind their rivalry.⁴⁹⁴ At the trial, which started in December 1935, Mrs. Borcea emerged from the declarations of several witnesses as a “megalomaniac, bumptious, and uneducated” woman. Elvira Gârneață, on the other hand,

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., f. 206.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., f. 205.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., f. 208.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., f. 223.

⁴⁹² ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 6, vol. II/1935, f. 74.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., f. 237.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., f. 72.

was described as a tireless worker, devoted to her patients and in good standing with everyone.⁴⁹⁵

While this Manichean difference between the two women sounds suspicious, it is also unlikely that all the witnesses were legionary sympathizers. However, more than the trial itself or the claims for “justice” made by Elvira Gârneață’s husband and other legionaries, a very significant aspect of this story is the propagandistic use of it. Starting with the funeral, the legionary propaganda machine tried to use the case for its own purposes, before losing the interest of public opinion, which, according to a police report, was already beginning to happen in early December.⁴⁹⁶

Without casting doubts on the sincere relations of friendship that existed between the legionary leadership and Elvira Gârneață, it was nevertheless clear from the beginning that the Legion sought to transform her death into a legionary event. The newspaper *Porunca Vremii* (The Commandment of the Times), which sympathized with the movement, published two articles on the case, where Elvira Gârneață was described as a “nationalist fighter”. She was “one of the greatest souls of Iași, tirelessly devoted to her work, which was for her, more a mission than a job. Ultimately, Elvira Gârneață was a “heroine”.⁴⁹⁷ The transformation of Elvira Gârneață into a legionary heroine and martyr was fast and thorough, and she was the first woman to be praised as such in the short history of the movement, because of her role as a “veteran” of the Legion.

The importance given to the trial by the legionary leadership was visible in the number of prominent members who attended the sessions. In March 1936, 150 legionaries were present, among them, important figures such as Ion Moța, Traian Cotigă, the leader of the legionary students, and the journalist and ideologue Mihail Polihroniade.⁴⁹⁸ During the days of his stay in Iași for the funeral, Codreanu also organized meetings with the local leaders of the Legion, speaking to them about the progress made by the movement in Bucharest. In particular, Codreanu underlined the importance of the summer work camps and the opening of the cooperative in Bucharest. The plan was then to open cooperatives and shops in Iași and Cernăuți as well.⁴⁹⁹

The death of Elvira Gârneață brought new attention to Iași and its local legionary organization. Codreanu and the other leaders knew this attention would not last long, thus

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., ff. 166-168.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., f. 74.

⁴⁹⁷ Laura Preda, “Cum era condusă maternitatea ieșeană, *Porunca Vremii*, 21 November 1935, IV, 262; Dragoș Protopopescu, “Cazul Elvira Gârneață”, *Porunca Vremii*, 3 December 1935, IV, 272, p. 1.

⁴⁹⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 283/1936, f. 125.

⁴⁹⁹ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 6, vol. I/1935, f. 213.

during their visit they organized meetings and gave directives to the local leaders. After the expansion the Legion underwent following its move to Bucharest, Iași remained in the background. Even as the former cradle of the Legion, Iași was rarely visited by the leaders, and its student organization gradually lost its following in favor of other nationalist parties.⁵⁰⁰ The legionary leadership was aware of the wave of sympathy raised by the tragic death of Elvira Gârneață. Codreanu met with local leaders and students, in an attempt to export to Iași the new ideas and new strategies they had successfully developed in Bucharest.

The University of Iași was given special attention because of the difficulties encountered by the legionaries in attracting new followers among students. The transfiguration of Elvira Gârneață into a “heroine” became part of a more general strategy aimed not only at attracting students, but women students in particular. The participation of women students in Iași was very likely much less intense than in Bucharest. The leadership of Nicoleta Nicolescu and the proximity of the University of Bucharest to the legionary center made it easier for the Legion to attract more women, while the situation was very different in Iași. The “sacrifice” and exemplary legionary life of Elvira Gârneață, coupled with the new concepts on women’s roles that circulated within the feminine section, transformed her into the first woman to enter the legionary pantheon of martyrs. It was probably not a coincidence that the lecture of Radu Gyr on the role of women in national heroism was held at the University of Iași at the beginning of December 1935.

Aside from Elvira Gârneață’s peculiar case, most legionary women did not get involved in episodes of violence; they did not face direct physical threats nor risk their lives. During the years 1936 and 1937, the Legion reached the apogee of its expansion and success, a period characterized by relatively peaceful forms of political activity. The “battles” fought by the Legion during this period were more of a constructive than of a destructive nature, and included the work camps, commerce, and a gradual expansion toward the working class. The great “martyrs” of this period, Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, died in the Spanish Civil War, thus their sacrifice was framed in a different, more grandiose narrative than the “persecution” of the legionaries by the authorities. However, despite this relatively more peaceful situation, the “truce” with the state, namely the government of King Carol II, was very fragile.

This fragility and the precarious situation of the Legion as a legal political organization under the aegis of the “Everything for the Country” Party became increasingly visible in Spring 1937. The impressive funeral ceremonies of Moța and Marin scared the

⁵⁰⁰ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 6, vol. II/1935, f. 98, ff. 114-116.

authorities, for the Legion organized a *de facto* “state funeral”, with the state having more of a supportive, auxiliary role than a central one. The reaction came almost immediately afterward, in the form of the closure of the universities and the enforcing of new laws to impede the Legion from organizing work camps during the summer. Codreanu was aware of the movement’s fragile position, and during spring and summer 1937 ordered all members to avoid clashes with the authorities and to respect the laws in order to prevent more serious retaliations.

The electoral success of the “Everything for the Country” Party at the elections of December 1937 precipitated this precarious situation of the Legion. In February 1938, the king abolished the Constitution of 1923 and established the so-called Royal Dictatorship. The outlawing of all political parties followed soon afterward, dramatically changing the political landscape of the country. Most of the legionary leaders, prominent members and intellectuals were arrested and imprisoned. The most spectacular act of the king and his ministers was the arrest, the trial, and, ultimately, the assassination of Corneliu Codreanu in November 1938. With these actions, alongside mass arrests and imprisonment, the king inaugurated a period of violence which reached vertiginous peaks during the following years.

During the year 1939 spiraling violence raged among the two factions. Legionaries assassinated the Prime Minister Armand Călinescu, known as the king’s “hangman”, in September 1939. The reaction of the authorities was savage, with hundreds of legionary members killed, in prisons and throughout the cities, their corpses exposed in public. This macabre spectacle was observed with horror. Episodes of extreme violence occurred also before September 1939, but without reaching the mass dimensions and exacerbated forms of this massacre. The events left the country in a state of shock. The Legionary Movement, deprived of most of its prominent members, went through a process of regrouping.

The destruction of the Legion undertaken by the king did not spare legionary women, and very probably it would not have been possible to do so. Gendered considerations on women’s marginal involvement in politics and potential hesitations in arresting, imprisoning and, in extreme cases, torturing women were put aside. The visible and established roles some women had within the movement could not be overlooked by the authorities. However, this did not mean legionary men and women were treated “equally”, nor did all legionary men, far more numerous, share the same fate. The arbitrariness of the procedures and the different roles played by different legionary members resulted in different forms of treatment which were far more complex than divisions along gender lines.

Legionary men and women were arrested and often imprisoned in relatively large numbers at various times between 1938 and 1940. The duration of the time in prison, the regime of incarceration, and the geographical location were all extremely variable elements. Moreover, class belonging, position in the Legion, and being part of powerful networks were sometimes other elements that contributed to the complexity of the situation. On top of all this, internal and external political events and decisions fostered periods of “détente” and moments of recrudescence, strategies used by both the king and the Legionary Movement.

The imprisonment of legionary women on a larger scale produced for the first time a situation similar to the one experienced by their male counterparts on various occasions. The conceptualization of the prison as a place of education and of communal suffering, where bonds were strengthened and devotion was proven, had been a male prerogative throughout the Legion’s history. As discussed above, women were arrested, interrogated by the police, and kept under surveillance, but they were not included in the narrative of the legionary prison experience, nor in the narrative of enduring persecution and mistreatment by the authorities. The risks, the dangers, and the readiness to sacrifice mentioned in the circulars of Nicoleta Nicolescu were not rhetorical ideas anymore. From 1938 onward, and in particular during the outbursts of violence in 1939, legionary women risked their freedom and their lives because of their political activity.

The regimes and the geography of imprisonment of legionary women were both convergent with and divergent from the treatment of legionary men. The main difference between the two groups was surely numerical, given the much wider involvement of men in the movement and the prominence of men in leadership positions. Some internment camps, such as the one in Miercurea Ciuc, were almost surely devoted to the incarceration of legionary men only. Other prisons and camps, or “lagers”, as they were called, had a separate feminine section, where some legionary women were imprisoned. The Văcărești prison in Bucharest and the “lager” of Târgu Jiu both had women accused of legionary activity.⁵⁰¹

The most peculiar aspect of the legionary women’s incarceration, however, was their internment in special “lagers” created at convents and monasteries throughout the country. The one that appears more often in police reports and very likely the larger one was the Sadaclia convent, in Bessarabia. Incarceration in these special “lagers” was called “forced residence” (*domiciliu obligatoriu*), a form of confinement in a place usually far removed from the convict’s town and everyday life. The convent lagers were used for the imprisonment of

⁵⁰¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 252/1938, f. 244; Fond MI-D, dosar 10/1930, f. 205.

legionary women (probably) since 1939, and they were put to use once again after the rebellion, at least until 1943. In 1939, the legionary Alexandra Jurcanu Ruso, from Chişinău (Kishinev) “former member of the “Everything for the Country” and “Iron Guard” parties was sentenced to one year of “forced residence” in Sadaclia. The charge was the continuation of political activity in the legionary underground organization after the outlawing of all political parties in 1938.⁵⁰²

That same year, three other legionary women were sent to Sadaclia for their political activity. Among them was a student, Valeria Biolaru, who after the escape to Germany of Lucia Trandafir in 1941, became one of the leaders of the feminine section in the underground organization.⁵⁰³ In a report from September 1940, after the proclamation of the National Legionary State, the list of dismantled “lagers” mentions “Suzana” alongside Sadaclia. The report very likely referred to the Suzana convent, located in the mountains of the Prahova County, about 150 km north of Bucharest.⁵⁰⁴ In 1943, legionary member Ioana Cristoiu (possible surname, the handwriting is not clear), imprisoned in Târgu Jiu, asked to be sent to the Hurezi monastery, where other legionary women had been sent.⁵⁰⁵

The Hurezi (or Horezu) was and is a monastery for monks, while both Suzana and Sadaclia are convents of nuns. These three religious institutions, two in the Prahova County and one in Bessarabia, were chosen by the state to serve as “lagers” for legionary women. As we can see from Ioana Cristoiu’s request, the legionary women imprisoned there formed a sort of community, so often described by legionary men as part of the prison experience. The authorities, despite their attempts to disintegrate the movement, often imprisoned legionary members together, who then created within the prisons and “lagers” a network of support to better cope with the hardships of prison life.

While much more extensive research on the feminine “lagers” is necessary to understand their functioning, it is possible to advance some hypotheses on the choice of imprisoning legionary women at convents and monasteries. Remoteness from the centers of political activities might have represented one motivation. The convents were (and still are) located in the countryside and in mountainous regions, and the distance from the cities made it difficult for inmates to receive visits and maintain close contacts with the world outside. Much more pressing, however, might have been considerations about controlling these women. Setting up lagers exclusively for legionary women implied the employment of

⁵⁰² ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 253/1939, f. 15.

⁵⁰³ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 12/1939, f. 117.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., f. 230.

⁵⁰⁵ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 10/1930, f. 199.

guards to keep them under surveillance. Since women guards and army officers were virtually non-existent, the idea of enclosing groups of women in remote regions with male guardians might have appeared inappropriate and dangerous in many respects.

Thus, control of sexuality and concerns over “morality” might have led to the decision to use convents for the confinement of legionary women. More difficult to assess is whether there was any correlation between the choice of the prison or “lager” and the perceived “dangerousness” of specific legionary women. A deeper analysis is for now prevented by the relative scarcity of sources, but the case of the prominent legionary figure Simona Catargi sheds some light on these not very straightforward and complex decisions. Simona Catargi was, according to the police, a “legionary leader” at the head of the nest “Rarău”. Her activity was intense and very dangerous. Through her contacts, she had managed to get access to the transcripts of telephone conversations between the minister of foreign affairs and the Peleş Castle, one of the residences of the royal family.⁵⁰⁶

Catargi’s house was searched repeatedly in 1938, and yet she continued her activity in the legionary underground organization. Ultimately, she was arrested and imprisoned at Văcărești, a prison located on the outskirts of Bucharest. Her important role in the legionary organization in the capital might have contributed to her being imprisoned close to the city, under strict control and in a highly guarded prison. However, the closeness to the city and the extensiveness of her network allowed Catargi to continue her legionary activity from prison. She used inmates from the male section and people outside to continue dissemination of propaganda, smuggling legionary material inside the prison. Moreover, according to a police report, Catargi and other imprisoned legionaries, on the days of visits, wore old legionary uniforms and assumed “the attitude of martyrs” to impress visitors and create an atmosphere of compassion toward them.⁵⁰⁷

Simona Catargi’s activity in prison and from prison and the discovery of her networks led the police investigators to advise that she be transferred to another prison in another location.⁵⁰⁸ Thus, the initial decision to keep the most “dangerous” elements under control, in prisons close to the center, had as a consequence a continuation of legionary activity from within. The networks built outside were often resistant and got tighter in periods of persecution, when the most faithful and devoted members supported each other and continued their political activity underground. In the feminine “lagers”, on the contrary,

⁵⁰⁶ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 251/1940, f. 359.

⁵⁰⁷ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 252/1939, f. 252.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 244-245.

women had their connections with the outside cut given the remoteness and inaccessibility of the convent prisons. On the other hand, the community of legionary women imprisoned together and separated from the outside world might have strengthened their bonds and their commitment, as was often the case for legionary men.

The life legionary women ran in the feminine “lagers” might not be easy to reconstruct. Much more extensive research would be needed to gather the scattered information about these prison experiences. While legionary men at times wrote and kept accounts and diaries of the periods spent in prison, it is hard to establish if legionary women ever engaged in prison diary-keeping. With the creation of the feminine “lagers”, but also with more extensive imprisonment in common prisons, women entered the legionary narrative of persecution and victimhood. From the report on the behavior of Simona Catargi and other legionary inmates, the role of the victim was actively played as a propaganda strategy. On the other hand, the hardships were real, and for the first-time legionary women endured the difficulties of prison life alongside their male counterparts.

Imprisonment and confinement were not the only dangers legionary women faced in this period. The risk of being tortured or even assassinated became for the first time a potential outcome of women’s political activity. Like the perception of violent women, the discourses on perpetrating violence upon women bring about some elements of uneasiness and complexity. The cases of the legionary women who lost their lives because of their political engagement shed light on some of these elements. The escalation of violence that characterized the last years of the 1930s also caught women in its spiral. Considerations regarding women’s “fragility”, need of protection and, especially, their being “alien” to politics and its battles all fell aside during this period of violence and retaliations. Moreover, as Cecilia Nubola has observed in her work on the women of the Salò Republic, women risked being seen as “more guilty” than their male counterparts even for the same actions, as a result of what men perceived as a “betrayal” of their femininity.⁵⁰⁹

For its part, the Legion praised its women “martyrs” in forms that equaled or even surpassed the celebration of the male martyrs. In 1940, during the National Legionary State’s few months of existence, the Legion commemorated the “heroines” who had lost their lives for the legionary ideal. The very restricted number of women to have “fallen in battle” transformed them in legionary discourse into exceptional examples of strength, sacrifice, and devotion. Moreover, the cruelty displayed by the police toward some of the legionary women

⁵⁰⁹ Cecilia Nubola, *Fasciste di Salò*, pp. 172-173.

became an irrefutable sign of the state's monstrosity, legitimizing a posteriori the legionary narrative of persecution and victimhood. Thus, whilst from one side, violent women were considered "more guilty" by virtue of their being women, on the other side, their being women made them victims of a special, if not a "superior" kind.

In November 1940, a ceremony of commemoration was held in the Carpathian Mountains on a remote, hard-to-reach peak where the legionaries and "martyrs" Fica Patrichi and Maria Vaida were found dead. Apparently, the two girls were escaping from the police, almost certainly in 1939, and they decided to hide up in the mountains to avoid arrest, or, as the priest celebrating the ceremony in 1940 said, to avoid "betraying the Legion and the Captain". The two girls seemed to have died of "cold and starvation" during their time spent on the mountain hiding from the police. Fear might have guided their choice more than devotion to the Legion, but their tragedy testifies to the dangers faced by young women who found themselves unprotected by their networks and faced with the threat of arrest and potentially torture. The legionary ceremony held in November 1940 was attended by relatives of the two girls and many legionary members from different nests and organizations from Bucharest and Braşov.⁵¹⁰

Another legionary "martyr" commemorated in autumn 1940 was Elena Petală, who died in a sanatorium after her release from the Sadaclia camp. The article dedicated to her figure in the legionary press is permeated with highly rhetorical praise of her self-abnegation and devotion to her duties. Reading between the lines of the common legionary "language of martyrdom" we can discern the role Elena Petală performed in the movement and the events of her death. She was a doctor and apparently older than the legionary "girls". She was extremely active in hiding, hosting, and supporting her "comrades" escape from the police after the proclamation of the royal dictatorship and the outlawing of political parties; a period which is labeled in the article as the "persecution" (prigoană).

Eventually, the police discovered her activity, and she was sent to the "lager" of Sadaclia, "among the legionary girls". Given her age and the hardships suffered in prison, after the release she fell ill and was hospitalized in a sanatorium, where she died soon afterwards. Among the legionary women "martyrs" she emerged as a maternal figure, a caretaker, not a fighter but an assistant, the woman "on the home front". The language of the article conveyed this element, by closing the narration of Petală's story with the image of her ascending "to the heights of heaven", where she would meet all the other legionary "boys and

⁵¹⁰ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 255/1940, f. 5.

girls”.⁵¹¹ Among the legionary women who fell victim to “persecution”, the inclusion of Elena Petală in the legionary pantheon served the purpose of showing the “persecutors” mercilessness. They emerged from the article as those who sent an elderly woman to prison for almost “innocuous” activities, which Petală performed out of affection and “maternal” care for the legionary boys and girls.

Alongside these more indirect victims of the “persecution”, the small group of legionary “heroines” also comprises victims of extreme violence, torture and assassination. Lucia Grecu died in January 1939, as a result of a fall from the police building where her interrogation was held. Almost surely, she was tortured by the police and according to the legionary hagiography, her body was purposefully thrown out of the window to simulate a suicide.⁵¹² The case of Elena Bagdad, by 1935 one of the regional leaders under the command of Nicoleta Nicolescu, was too a display of extreme violence.⁵¹³ She was the only woman killed by the police as a retaliation for the assassination of the Prime Minister Armand Călinescu, on September 22, 1939.⁵¹⁴

On the fate of Elena Bagdad, the Legion produced a eulogy, a narration of the events and hardships which ultimately led to her assassination. Described as having “the spirit of a martyr”, she joined the Legion after detaching “from a world which gave her no satisfaction”, and in the movement she found “peace and self-realization”. As a tireless courier for Codreanu, she was already strong and experienced when the “persecution” began. Sent to the lager of Sadaclia, she encouraged her “comrades” and exhorted them to stay strong despite facing a regime that was impossible to bear for “young girls brutally torn away from their families”. Shortly after her imprisonment, Elena Bagdad fell ill and was transferred to a sanatorium in Bîrnava, in north-eastern Bessarabia.

From the hospital, the morning of September 22, she was taken by the police and brought out on the roadway between Bîrnava and Iași. There she was executed and according to the legionary account, died in agony after suffering eight bullet wounds. The account goes on with more gruesome details, about her body being shallowly buried and subsequently unearthed overnight by dogs and compassionately covered over by some peasants from a nearby village. It is hard to assess if and to what extent the legionary account exaggerated the brutality of the events, but Elena Bagdad most certainly encountered a very violent death. In

⁵¹¹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 257/1940, f. 5.

⁵¹² ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 7/1939, f. 188; see also Mihai Stelian Rusu, ‘Domesticating Viragos. The Politics of Womanhood in the Romanian Legionary Movement’, p. 170.

⁵¹³ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 102/1933, f. 270.

⁵¹⁴ Mihai Stelian Rusu, ‘Domesticating Viragos. The Politics of Womanhood’, p. 170.

1940, a commemoration ceremony was held in the place where she was shot, attended by legionary women from Iași and Bucharest.⁵¹⁵

Despite the rhetorical language of this hagiographic account, characterized by religious references and quasi-mystical tones, the elevation of Elena Bagdad to the rank of “heroine” displays some interesting aspects. Her story was perfectly in line with the legionary “martyrologic” narrative, for she fell victim to the “persecution” of the authorities. Even more, she was shot in an act of retaliation, during which the authorities executed legionaries who were not the direct culprits in the prime minister’s assassination. With a perverted twist of the legionary sense of comradeship and shared responsibility, the retaliation of September 1939 punished the movement as a whole for the deeds of a few, through an operation that can be qualified as an abuse of the state’s power and monopoly of violence.

From this point of view, the brutality and violence of the events and the choice to include Elena Bagdad in the list of legionaries to kill made her an exemplary tale of martyrdom. However, some contradictory elements emerge from her eulogy. Bagdad was presented as a strong and devoted legionary woman, experienced and well aware of the dangers and perils connected to her activity. Even more, according to this account, she took the “Moța and Marin oath”, which was supposed to mark her readiness to die for the Legion if necessary. In this sense, she was almost bound to be a martyr, and, given the number of prominent legionary members assassinated in September 1939, the inclusion of Elena Bagdad on this list might not have been accidental.

However, the ascension of Elena Bagdad to the legionary pantheon was accompanied by a sort of insistence on her exceptionality. Stronger, experienced, ready to sacrifice her life, she was an example of the legionary woman “fighter”. But her celebration seems inseparable from downplaying the roles and activities of other legionary women. In the “lager” of Sadaclia, Bagdad was depicted as a tough leading figure who attempted to keep morale high and encourage the other prisoners. These other prisoners, women convicted for their legionary activity, were presented here as “young girls”, violently “torn away from their families”, as if they were unaware of and alien to any form of involvement in the movement. Whilst trying to discursively transform the state into a cruel, unlawful “persecutor”, the activities of the “girls” imprisoned in Sadaclia were in turn de-politicized and almost deprived of responsibility. What emerges is an exceptional woman fighter, who by virtue of her exceptionality became a martyr. The legionary women imprisoned in Sadaclia emerge, on

⁵¹⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 265/1940, ff. 1-4.

the contrary, as not entirely accountable for their political choices, almost as innocent teenage girls unjustly imprisoned by a mean and persecutory system.

The ultimate “heroine” in the legionary pantheon, however, was Nicoleta Nicolescu. Her role in the movement and the importance of her figure in the feminine section made her “heroic” before her actual “canonization” by the legionary martyrology in fall 1940. After the outlawing of the political parties in February 1938, Nicolescu managed to avoid arrest for a relatively long time, very likely benefiting from the extensive network she had also contributed to create among legionary sympathizers and “friends”. The “fall” of Nicolescu was a shock for the legionary circles of Craiova, her hometown, where she was a leading figure. According to rumors circulating among the legionaries in Craiova, Nicolescu was betrayed by the sister of the painter and prominent legionary member Alexandru Bassarab. Even more, supposedly she was “sold” to the police for the sum of one hundred thousand lei.

These rumors contributed to the creation of the myth of Nicoleta Nicolescu. Betrayal was considered in the legionary ideology to be one of the most despicable sins, punished with expulsion if not death. To sell a “comrade” for money was even more serious, given the legionary insistence on honesty and on the fight against greed. According to a police report from Craiova, Nineta Săndulescu, one of the legionary women of Nicolescu’s organization, received a note after the capture of Nicolescu, with the words “Nicoleta has fallen. Like so many others, Nicoleta is in the jaws of death”.⁵¹⁶ And she was, for after the arrest she was tortured and assassinated by the police in July 1939.

In fall 1940, among the incessant ceremonies, memorials, and commemoration of dead legionaries, Nicoleta Nicolescu received constant attention. As the ultimate legionary woman fighter, she became the paradigmatic figure of the legionary “heroine”. An article from the time even used the expression “Nicoletele”, a collective plural name to designate the legionary “heroines” as a group.⁵¹⁷ In November 1940, the legionary newspapers followed the trial of Nicolescu’s murderer, assistant police commissary Pavel Patriciu. According to the reconstruction of the events, after being shot dead, Nicolescu’s body was cremated.⁵¹⁸ Her ashes, along with those of other legionary “martyrs” were reburied in Predeal (in the Carpathian Mountains) at the end of October 1940, with a solemn ceremony.⁵¹⁹

The inclusion of women “martyrs” in the legionary pantheon followed to some extent the established narratives of persecution and victimhood that had begun toward the end of the

⁵¹⁶ ANIC, Fond MI-D, dosar 12/1939, f. 160.

⁵¹⁷ Mihai Stelian Rusu, ‘Domesticating Viragos’, p. 169.

⁵¹⁸ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 256/1940, f. 7.

⁵¹⁹ ANIC, Fond DGP, dosar 257/1940, f. 9; dosar 262/1940, f. 97.

1920s. The great degree of violence experienced at the end of the following decade strengthened this narrative and enriched the victimhood paradigm. But the case of the women martyrs also followed different paths, necessary to accommodate the uneasy involvement of women in violent actions, both as perpetrators and as victims. The exceptionality of the legionary “fallen soldiers” from the feminine section was accompanied by a sort of downplaying of the roles and activities performed by a relatively large number of women, who risked their freedom, their lives, and their social status because of their political involvement.

In the cases of both the women martyrs and the other legionary women who faced arrest and imprisonment the tendency of legionary discourse, especially in 1940, was to downplay their agency and de-politicize their choices and activities. Whilst Nicoleta Nicolescu, Elena Bagdad, and the other few women who fell victim to the extreme violence unleashed by the regime were celebrated as martyrs, other legionary women were presented as unaware innocent “girls” who had been unjustly persecuted. The insistence on the victimhood of the female martyrs’ and on the persecution from the authorities shifted the focus away from the decision of many women to join the Legionary Movement, to engage in its different activities, and to face the consequences of their involvement. It was surely hard to withdraw in 1938 and 1939, for the authorities and the police had information on almost every member and their activities. But the Legion used the undeniable violence of the state to side-line the active political choices of many legionary women, and to celebrate with grandiosity the few exceptional victims.

Conclusions

This last chapter addresses one of the most complex issues related to feminine participation in the Legionary Movement: their incorporation into what were, and still are, considered eminently male domains, namely warfare, military values, and violence. However, the conceptualization of warfare in legionary ideology and in its practical outcomes, was much broader and encompassed a wider meaning than the bare and immediate act of waging war. Political activity at large was imagined by the Legion as a war by proxy, and in particular, a defensive war, hence the abundance of defensive military metaphors in legionary discourse. Resistance, revenge, retaliation, fortresses, redoubts, and sacrifices were all concepts and words used extensively in the political language of the movement. This

defensive war was fought against the Legion's designated archenemies: the mainstream political class and the Jewish population. The presence of Jewish communities in Greater Romania was transformed by the Legion's ferocious anti-Semitism into a proper "invasion", justifying thereby the need for "defense" and the calls for battle.

Conceptualizing politics as warfare meant that legionaries envisaged political activities and campaigns as "battles", to be fought and hopefully won, paving the way for the great final victory, a legionary Romania. Proper militarization, military training and attitudes were only one element of their political warfare, the most immediate and the most visible. But all actions, from the humblest to the most important, were envisaged as "battles", to which all legionaries were called to contribute according to their means and the forms available to them. Similarities with the language and the concepts of Fascist Italy are evident, though the direct and precise links and means of transmission would need a more thorough reconstruction or demonstration. The atmosphere of "permanent mobilization", as well as the great campaigns envisaged as battles, such as the so-called battle for grain and the demographic battle, resounded in the language of the Legionary Movement. In the Legion's case, however, lacking the power structures and infrastructures of a regime, the battles were humbler, smaller, and their fighters contributed through ordinary activities as well.

In this context, the expansion of the category of fighter made the inclusion of legionary women less problematic, at least in principle. To be a fighter in a legionary battle meant many different things, from raising money to buying something vital for the movement, from ordinary grocery shopping to collecting scrap iron. As far as women were concerned, however, their contribution was potentially of a much superior nature, as emerges from the booklet of Radu Gyr. Motherhood and education of children in the "legionary spirit" were among the most praised forms of feminine participation in the battles and in the defensive war. Moreover, the supposedly superior qualities of women, their love, carefulness, and their higher moral standards, were to be infused in the Legion at large, in order to transmute its political actions into existential experiences.

The concept of the fighter, after entering the discourse in a more metaphorical and symbolic way, became nevertheless an option, a viable option, even in its more literal sense. Once there, once openly expressed, the appropriation was inevitable, at least in the case of some women. During the reorganization of the feminine section under the leadership of Nicoleta Nicolescu maternal feelings and love were not entirely dismissed, but more active roles and more militaristic elements tended to prevail, nonetheless. Legionary women were not only asked to train in the fields at night, but they were also imagined wandering through

the countryside and the villages campaigning for the movement, talking to other women about politics, about activism and about women's roles. Moreover, Nicolescu's circulars openly spoke about sacrifice and about the readiness to die, thus incorporating women into the legionary world of violence, a world full of taboos and mixed feelings in relation to women's involvement.

Violence permeated legionary ideology, legionary language and legionary political projects. The very existence of the movement was grounded in violence, justified and legitimized by the narrative of defense against the mainstream political parties and the Jewish population. In the warfare-like political style of the Legion, there were many layers of violence: linguistic, cultural, and in some cases, physical. In accordance with the gender norms accepted within and outside the movement, the involvement of women in violent actions was of a more passive nature. Legionary women tacitly supported the movement's violent mindset, and they engaged in violent and anti-Semitic language and behavior. Physical violence, however, was a gendered boundary, a boundary that, once crossed, had the power to produce disturbing feelings. The involvement of women, both as victims and as perpetrators, in physical suffering, torture, and assassination seemed to bring the perception of violence to a different and more disquieting level.

Nevertheless, legionary women got caught in the spiral of violence that raged across the country for a few years, from the proclamation of the Royal Dictatorship in February 1938 to the definitive outlawing of the movement in January 1941. The thorough destruction of the Legion by the authorities and in return, the Legion's spectacular acts of retaliation, like the assassination of Prime Minister Armand Călinescu in September 1939, led to a situation of systemic violence. In this context, the more direct involvement of women in the Legion's activities and the increased feminine participation resulted in arrests, imprisonment, and in some cases, the torture and assassination of legionary women. The scale of those first "mass" imprisonments and of the acts of violence were, naturally, in accordance with the number of legionary women, and in particular with the number of the more active and engaged among them. As we have seen, many supporters, informal members, wives and fiancées of legionaries, even when their closeness to the movement was known and proven, were not imprisoned in great numbers. On the other hand, the so-called "fanatics" were more likely to be arrested, imprisoned or confined and in some extreme cases, killed.

There are still many unknown elements in this story. Many pieces, aspects, and nuances are still to be discovered in relation to the experiences lived by legionary women during this period. At this stage, it is only possible to grasp some of these elements. It is clear

that the treatment of women was different in many ways from that which was reserved to men, not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of strategies and measures. The criteria on which the arrest and imprisonment of women were based are starting to emerge, and these criteria were more arbitrary and chaotic. The potential “dangerousness” of women, their roles within the movement, their activities, their marital status, their personal lives, their “inclinations” and their “morality” were all elements very likely taken into consideration in deciding who to arrest, imprison, confine, and where. The prison experience of legionary women was mostly lived in remote convents, in “prison-sanctuaries”, where they were kept away from political activism and from contacts with the underground organization. On the other hand, within the convents the prisoners, who already shared political views and commitment to the Legion, might well have strengthened their bonds and radicalized their stances.

With the abdication of King Carol II and the proclamation of the National Legionary State in September 1940, the prisoners were released, the “martyrs” were commemorated, and legionary cadres both old and new tried to resurrect the Legion from its ashes. But violence was not abandoned, on the contrary, the sufferings, the narrative of “persecution”, the vengeful elements that had always characterized legionary discourse led to a new round of violent acts. The few months of the regime were characterized by chaos, incompetence, arbitrary violence, revenge against former “enemies” and the creation of a state of terror for the Jewish population. On the contrary, the feminine section, together with supporters and sympathizers from the elites and the nationalist circles, were presented by the legionary propaganda and emerge from the sources as the organizers and the managers of the welfare service (as we saw in chapter three). The “constructive” activities of these legionary women overshadow and conceal any other form of feminine participation during this period. At this stage, there is not much information on what roles, if any, legionary women played in the violence and abuses perpetrated under the National Legionary State.

Suddenly, however, in the immediate aftermath of the legionary rebellion, rumors started to circulate on the involvement of legionary women in the massacres of the Bucharest pogrom, as well as rumors on their savage cruelty. To bridge the gap between the invisibility of legionary women in anything but welfare during the previous months and their direct and extremely violent participation in the rebellion and the pogrom would require extensive research. Myths, rumors, and established narratives need to be contextualized, deconstructed, and complicated in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of these tragic events. The image of legionary women’s devotion, or maybe relegation, to the welfare sector during the

National Legionary State might have been fabricated by the regime itself. The need for a more suitable and appropriate role for women might have emerged in this period, when the Legion found itself in power alongside older, more established and conservative political and military elites.

Similarly, the rumors about the ferocity of legionary women might have sprung from the state of shock and chaos produced by the devastation and the assassinations perpetrated during the Bucharest pogrom. The degree of violence reached extreme levels, but the participation of women had the power to characterize this violence as even more horrifying, more shocking. A movement, a political ideology, able to induce women to commit such acts is perceived as the utmost aberration. The reconstruction, if possible, of the potential roles played by legionary women during the rebellion emerge from this preliminary analysis as a necessary future step in the historical research on the Legionary Movement. This step, together with a much deeper inquiry into the involvement of women, both as victims and perpetrators, in the events that occurred between 1938 and 1941, might shed light upon the paths undertaken by women toward political activism and visibility. On how far these paths were and might still be destructive and painful.

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