

**A CASE STUDY IN FASCIST IDEOLOGICAL PRODUCTION:
CORNELIU CODREANU'S
*FOR MY LEGIONARIES (THE IRON GUARD)***

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**Introduction – the study of fascism through
its ideological production**

The ideology of Codreanu's Iron Guard is of perennial interest to scholars of generic fascism because of its fusion of sacred recourses drawn from the Orthodox Church alongside a vicious ultra-nationalism that was steeped in the experiences of the First World War. A mood of national shortcomings marked interwar Romania, despite the fact that the country emerged from the cauldron of the war greatly enlarged thanks to the treaties of Neuilly and Trianon. During the interwar period the country had to contend with a far more diverse ethnic makeup, alongside an increasingly literate society who desired modernising reforms. Such aspirations were hampered due to an over-populated state sector, and a largely stagnant economy. In the main eschewing the left, many of the country's interwar ideologues tended forward resolutions to these tensions through nationalist politics. For his part, Codreanu offered a type of fascism that combined the regeneration of Romania with a sense of sacrifice and martyrdom unequalled in fascist ideologies. The basic premise of this paper is that a close analysis of a key piece of his ideological production, his political autobiography *For My Legionaries (The Iron Guard)*, through the lens of current thinking within generic fascist studies will cast fresh light on this topic and generate a new reading of his ideology.

However, before doing so it is important to note that the study of ideologies – and especially the complex debate concerning the nature of fascist ideology (see below) – is an inherently difficult task, one in which researchers are presented with myriad possible techniques to inform their inquiry. In short, the study of ideology is littered with many conceptual problematics of how to construe meaning in such work, and as a consequence such analysis bears a closer relation to the hermeneutical work of literary criticism than to the empirical investigations more typical of the work

of historians and political scientists¹. The reason for attempting to surmount these difficulties lies in the fact that the study of the ideologies of political actors is of fundamental importance to understanding their behaviour, alongside the behaviour of those they sought to influence. Consequently, this is an area of analysis that is too important to leave uncharted because its problematics appear to great to overcome, or because a conflicting school of thought will disagree with some assertions. To help combat such confusion, it is imperative that researchers in this field develop an acute sense of methodological self-consciousness in order to justify the findings of their assertions and demonstrate that, though their conclusions will not be founded upon the same epistemological level of truth as empirical surveys of historical events, their readings have been intelligently pursued and contain an inner logic which can be clearly grasped by those who may find the analysis of interest when conducting related research in the field. It is to this task that I now turn.

Political religion and a cluster of concepts for developing readings of fascist ideological production

As a point of departure for analysing the ideology presented by Codreanu, the designation of the work as distinctly manifesting a form of fascism may seem somewhat presumptuous. It is the purpose of this section to delineate what is, at least for heuristic purposes, meant by fascism, and to forward a set of categories whereby one can extend this working definition into a useful framework through which researchers can produce hermeneutics of fascist ideological production, such as *For My Legionaries (The Iron Guard)*.

Aside from nominalist viewpoints that deny the existence of generic patterns to the radical nationalisms of the interwar period, and mono-causal Marxist positions that insist on viewing generic fascism as a form of capitalist defence against the impending economic revolution of Marxist communism, there exists a growing pool of scholars who form another school, the “new consensus”, who see a range of interesting patterns that help researcher understand fascist ideology, and delineate between fascist and non fascist movements². Key figures in this school include Roger Griffin, who designates the core of generic fascism lying in endless permutations of palingenetic (rebirth) myth combined with “ultra-nationalism”, a highly emotive

¹ In fact, the comparison with literary hermeneutics is a fruitful one for conceiving of the task of analysing ideologically marked material. Just as a literary critic may look for a series of related themes in a work of fiction and then highlight the nuances of the way the author has dealt with them to produce a „reading” of a novel, so the analyst of ideologies uses similar techniques when studying political texts to develop their reading of the ideology contained therein. Of course, such an approach is beset with the problem of subjectivity, manifesting itself both in the various opinions presented by the author of the text, alongside the inescapable problem of the preconceptions of the analyst potentially hindering intelligent dissection of the work in question.

² Roger Griffin, *The Primacy of Culture. The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies*, in „The Journal of Contemporary History”, vol. 37, 2002, no. 1, p. 21-43.

nationalist politics that seeks to usurp the institutions of liberal democratic parliamentary procedure³; Roger Eatwell, who forwards an ideal type that emphasises fascism as a national “third way” between liberalism and communism that offers “social rebirth”⁴; and Stanley Payne who also asserts that it was an nationalist ideology characterised by “creative destruction” to usher in a new era” in his typological description of fascism⁵. The common factor between these theorists is the sense of an impending new age brought about through fascist agency as being a central factor to the highly charged nationalism of fascist movements. Other theorists of the ideology include Robert Paxton, whose *Anatomy of Fascism* suggests that fascisms, including the Iron Guard, can be seen to exhibit five stages. Through this ideal type the Iron Guard reached stage four, the attainment of power⁶. Finally, perhaps the most fruitful area of recent enquiries exploring its ideological dynamics comes from the work of Emilio Gentile, who has developed his own, influential variant on the concept of political religion to investigate the workings of the ideology. In doing so he has eschewed a simple definition of the concept and instead adopted a “cluster” concept whereby a series of interrelated phenomena (which includes political religion, totalitarianism, the new man and palingenetic myth) manifest fascism when they appear in a discrete ideological matrix⁷.

Seeking a syncretic definition of complex socio-political phenomena, the approach of clustering related concepts will be used by this paper to construct a set of categories for analysing ideological production by members of the fascist intelligentsia (though the term is used here somewhat loosely). This is consciously pursued in order to highlight that, following Gentile, fascist ideology can be seen to comprise of a cluster of interrelated traits, yet in isolation these qualities can also be seen in a wide variety of other political ideologies. Therefore, in contrast to using the defining terms for the ideology in an exclusivist fashion, a clustering approach allows researchers to approach problematic areas with a methodologically plural strategy derived from a range of political theorists. Further, this approach explicitly rejects the exclusivist and essentialist atmospheres so often associated with the defining of political concepts. The cluster that I am forwarding will unpack the following description of interwar fascist ideology:

A series of ultra-nationalist ideologies that in their external manifestations and historical reference points were profoundly affected by the events, and

³ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, Routledge, 1993.

⁴ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, London, Pimlico, 2003.

⁵ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, London, UCL Press, 1995, p. 8.

⁶ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, London, Penguin, 2004.

⁷ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism*, in „Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions”, vol. 1, 2000, No. 1, p. 18-55. For a more detailed summery of the principles of clustering ideological characteristics, see Roger Griffin, *Cloister or Cluster? The Implications of Emilio Gentile's Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism*, in „Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions”, vol. 6, 2005, No. 2, p. 33-52.

especially militarised nationalisms, of the First World War, and saw themselves as modernising forces. These ideologies were highly sensitive to a sense of *iiberfremdung* (literally being overtaken by foreign and alien forces) that placed the organic idea of the nation in a state of danger and decadence. This inculcated a lack of trust in the mechanisms of the state and necessitated its replacement with a modern totalitarian state to secure what they perceived in the best interests of the future life of the nation. This sense of political and cultural crisis engendered a sense of liminality, or living between two historical epochs, fermenting the production of political myths that narrated the potential dawn of a new age for the organic nation. This sense of liminality inculcated a need for charismatic leaders and *communitas* movements to develop, which developed syncretic relationships with past myths and histories in order to inspire hope for a “purified” future for the nation. Such a process impregnated their ideological matrixes with sacred elements, resulting in these ideologies becoming political religions. In their extreme form these ideologies also sought an anthropological revolution and the creation of a nationalised “new man”.

We will begin to unpack this cluster with the impact of the First World War. It is clear that, across all the belligerent nations, the effects of total war created a series of nationalised myths. Also, the war not only demonstrated the immense destructive power of the modern state, but also highlighted the ability for them to make large incursions into an individual’s life in the name of a “sacred duty” towards the nation. Across Europe during and after the war national myths developed that sacralised the nation, often through the cult of the fallen soldier. A diverse range of historical analyses have explored this trend⁸, and many have commented on how the war was understood in eschatological terms as a great purging and rejuvenating event for Europe, sanctifying the use of extreme violence as the will of God. Gentile continues this line of enquiry by asserting that the

symbolism of death and resurrection, dedication to the nation, the mystic qualities of blood and sacrifice, the cult of heroes and martyrs, the “communion” offered by *comeraderie*, all of this led to the diffusion among the combatants of ideas of politics as a total experience, and, therefore, a religious experience that would renew all aspects of existence⁹.

Therefore, many – though by no means all – who found themselves caught up in the whirlwind of Europe-wide war responded by crystallising the events through the lens of decadence and regeneration. This was often combined with the belief that

⁸ See Annette Becker, *War and Faith: the religious imagination in France, 1914-1930*, Oxford-Berg, 1998; Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: chivalry, sacrifice, and the Great War*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2004; Roland Stromberg, *Redemption by War: the intellectuals and 1914*, Lawrence, Regents Press of Kansas, 1982.

⁹ Gentile, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

the war marked the end point of the liberal systems of the nineteenth century, which conferred a form of normative value to the cataclysmic events. This sense of an ending of an old order was given objective qualities by events such as the destruction of the *ancient regimes* of the Habsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov monarchies, and further, the fact that in Russia this process actually led to the institution of the first Marxist state. Also, this mood found expression in philosophies that manifested the archetype of death and renewal that became popularised by events, a trope of interwar culture typified by the success of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Such sensitivity to national or even European decadence could often lead to the sublimation of profound senses of existential crisis into programmatic visions for the total transformation of western society. Therefore, also key to Gentile's observation was the "total" conception of life that the war engendered, and fascists were heavily influenced by the idea that all aspects of life could be governed by a single, massive event. The totalitarianism of fascism can be understood as attempts to recreate this total sense of life, both among its ideologues at the stage of political movements and, when in power, they attempted to impose this vision upon entire national populations by generating modern totalitarian states.

Another historian whose book explored the politicisation of culture as a result of the war is Modris Eksteins. He too asserted that for many the war presented

the idea that the world was in the throws of destruction, which now seemed irreversible, but was also in the process of renewal, which seemed inevitable. In this latter process lay a reality of astounding implications: the soldier represented a creative force. As an agent of both destruction and regeneration, of death and rebirth, the soldier inclined to see himself as a "frontier" personality, as a paladin of change and new life¹⁰.

Eksteins demonstrates the connection between the idea of the creative artist and the creative soldier, and the elision with the concept of modernism in art and modernism in politics. In its defining quality of ushering in the new, modernism in politics infused itself with the spirit of the creative soldier after the war. The thesis of his book, *Rites of Spring*, took this idea to argue persuasively that the modernist ideology *par excellence* to emerge from the war was Nazism. With its emphasis on breaking through into the future for the nation, it epitomised the instincts of revolt characteristic of the *avant-garde*. Following this perspective, we can view the expression of the desire to forge a new era for the nation through varieties of totalitarian para-military politics, when infused with palingenetic mythology, as modernising forces in interwar politics, ones that sought to create their own, alternate modernities. Further, although they drew heavily on the myths of the past to create their sense of nationalism, they produced a new type of national

¹⁰ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, London, Papermac, 2000, p. 211.

consciousness that, in their brutality and religious parallels, were dramatically unlike previous incarnations of nationalism. This is an important point to grasp when attempting to understand the dynamics of the militaristic nationalisms that were created by the war, and their impact on the European political dynamic.

Of course, this was a process influenced by the inescapable fact that a new generation came of age, constructed identities, and became politically conscious during and immediately after the war. It was this generation, who had tasted war either through limited battlefield experiences or through the myths of nationalism and heroism that developed in the home front, which were particularly susceptible to the vainglorious dimensions of militarised nationalism. Therefore, their politics were often shot through with tropes of this milieu, though of course not all of these developed into fascism. By analysing this uniquely nationalised culture, George Mosse has developed the concept of a “myth of war experience” to help understand the impact and mass trauma of the war on interwar politics and society.¹¹ In sum, he found that the experiences of war were often either trivialised through ephemeral cultural products, or turned into secular transcendental nationalisms, a response that both strengthened the concept of the nation as a civic religion as well as normalising, domesticating and often trivialising the idea of war and political violence. Further, the strengthening of the national community through extreme wartime propaganda – often predicated upon “us verses them” dichotomies – created a trend for people to construct increasingly homogeneous identities after the war. In turn this led to the role of those considered “other” in many national societies, for example Jewish communities, to become increasingly seen as nomadic, international and alien presences by nationalists. This produced the space to make populist appeals to resolve senses of *überfremdung* in nationalist politics to hold widespread appeal, because such figures could be presented as the enemies of the rooted nation (and thereby paradoxically became key figures in the definition of that concept). This trend resulted in the creation of political myths that offered exclusive concepts of national community, sometimes dependent on scientific blood theories, such as the Nazi model, or myriad cultural or pseudo-religious theses to construct exclusivist national communities.

One consequence of this trend was that fresh life was bestowed upon the concept of the nation as an organic community, as opposed to the legalistic view of the nation as an entity comprised of lawfully defined citizens in possession of rights. Organic nationalism saw the nation as an entity with a life of its own and could literally be healthy or unhealthy, and ultimately one that could either live and die. Therefore, what appear on first inspection to be metaphors of the organic qualities of the nation were actually often meant in literal terms, and originate from the secular yet metaphysical conception that fascists conferred onto their conception of the national homeland. This concept was in direct conflict with the legalistic ideas of liberal

¹¹ G. L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

democratic governance, and formed the basis of fascist critiques of the institutions of constitutional governance and the various institutions of the state. This theory of the nation also allowed for ideas of alternate models for rendering the state to develop among fascist ideologues, which were more closely aligned with the ideals of organic ultra-nationalism. This form of organic nationalism, which sought to radically alter the constitution of the state, was not only fundamentally incompatible with the institutions of liberal states but also was characterised by actively seeking to “go beyond” these limits. This explains the use of the “ultra” prefix employed by political theorists as it allows a differentiation between this form of nationalism and those entirely compatible with liberal democratic institutions. One way in which this was characterised was through the appeal to communal rights over individual rights, which both highlights the primacy of the community over the individual in such an ideological system, alongside demonstrating how these nationalisms conceptualised their opposition to the liberal notion of the individual – a creation fascists often blamed on the French Revolution. Therefore, fascism can be seen as a response to the failure of legalistic approaches to politics to produce a satisfactory psychological homeland, leading to grassroots movements to develop, usually among those sensitive to modern *anomie*, *ennui* and rootlessness, to find in organic nationalism a way to construct a new, seemingly authentic sense of community.

Underpinning this forward looking sense of their psychological homeland, which was viewed as in a state of crisis due to the presence of nationalised enemies, yet contained the potential to be reborn into a new maturity and strength, was the sense of living between two historical epochs. We can flesh out some of the dynamics of this sense by drawing on the social anthropology of Victor Turner and his concept of *communitas*, or revitalisation, movements. Turner’s concept proposed a dialectical relationship between two forms of community, which he termed structured society and *communitas*. The former represented ordered and stable communities, whereas the latter state was generated when these became “an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders”¹². This was a dialectic found at all levels of human existence, and was not exclusively applicable to the revitalisation movements that he discovered in primitive tribes. Turner observed how such societies, when the sense of community of a tribe was placed into crisis by a dramatic event – e.g. devastation by a flood or after a highly destructive battle with another tribe – resulted in the spontaneous creation of new myths and rituals that served to re-root their sense of community in a new reality. He highlighted that until this process was completed, they remained in a state of liminality, living neither in the structured society that characterised the reality that existed before the crisis, or were able to inhabit the new reality and structured society that a *communitas* movement needed create and render

¹² Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1997, p. 96.

stable. Living between two epochs, they lacked a mythic system to confer a sense of order upon their community and sought from a *communitas* movement new myths synthesising old and new to fill this void.

Roger Griffin, one scholar who has highlighted the synergy between this anthropological concept and the dynamics of fascist ideology¹³, has asserted that a sensitivity to an impression of liminality, the feeling of living during a period of disenchantment, and of national society seemingly being uprooted by modernising trends within the political and cultural milieu, among other factors, caused fascist ideologues to develop an ultra-nationalist political religion because for them, as for the primitive tribe, the world is

experienced as out of joint or descending into chaos. This may provoke an intensified bout of ritualistic activity in which the tribe or people symbolically re-centre (re-ground, re-root, re-embed) themselves in reality, and thereby ensure that the symbolic axis of the world which has become dislodged once more runs through the heart (the sacred middle) of the life of the community¹⁴.

This role of re-rooting society through myth and ritual is key to helping explain why many fascist ideologues felt they were responding to sense of existential crisis of some description, as well as informing us how the ideology was allowed to develop its “total” dimension. Broadly, this was because fascism’s various ideological fantasies were motivated by offering a system of politics that rationalised all thought and behaviour as a praxis that pursued the single, ultimate end of national regeneration. This provided a simplistic and unifying response to complex political issues, alongside answers to questions of a religious nature, such as faith in personal destiny. Also it could offer a renewed sense of community, and conveyed a metaphysical dimension that conferred meaning onto their lives life through the idea of the organic nation. This perspective also highlights the modernising dimension of the ideology as one presenting a synthesis of old and new properties offering its adherents a pathway through a seemingly unconquerable sense of crisis, one that presents both a sense of continuity with the past while also ushering in a new era.

Such systems in modern politics can also be associated with the need for charismatic figures to provide such leadership, predicated upon emotional rather than legalistic legitimacy. Yet even Max Weber, whose work fluently explored this charismatic form of legitimacy, leaves its exact causes under defined¹⁵. Charismatic appeal consists of an “x-factor” conferred onto a heroic figure of some description

¹³ Another analysis of First World War culture has also highlighted the notion of liminality as a heuristically useful concept. See Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: combat and identity in World War I*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

¹⁴ Roger Griffin, *Ideology and Culture*, in „Journal of Political Ideologies”, 2006, forthcoming.

¹⁵ See especially Max Weber, *The Sociology of Charismatic Authority* in *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills eds., London, Routledge, 2004, p. 245-251.

during a time of crisis, and is a force that will eventually ebb away if the leader fails to come up with the goods, which in this case is the rebirth of the nation.

A further facet to this world of politicised mythology worth briefly highlighting was the development of a circular rather than linear conception of time, a feeling of living during a period of profound endings and beginnings, epitomised by the sense of liminality. When we acknowledge the centrality of this aspect of the ideology we can more fully comprehend the ruthless logic of fascism's spin on the idea of "creative destruction", as they sought to hasten the end of the "old" and usher in the "new". From this we can appreciate how various surface characteristics of fascism – e.g. militarist style, political violence, hatred of parliamentary politics and even the charismatic leader cult – were not the defining point or the end goal of the ideology, but rather were adopted by fascist movements, either consciously or intuitively, as the means to act out the myth of rebirth, of decadence being overcome by new fertility. Also, it is likely that, for all their surface conviction of being devout Christians, fascists who combined their ultra-nationalist ideology with their Christianity drew on the Bible and Christian theology to confer a sacred dimension onto their politics, rather than using them to genuinely move closer to spiritual enlightenment – a delusion that they themselves often appear not to have been aware of.

Another key aspect drawn out by fascist movements' worlds of myths is the employment of hero mythology in order to construct the fascist "new man". For fascists, this was a figure who believed himself to be living at a special time – or moment of *kairos*, a time infused with mythic possibility – in which he must enact a mission where he would go beyond the subjectively conceived normal boundaries of everyday life, either through a metaphoric sense of conversion or by enacting this in a more literal fashion with initiation rituals and unlawful political activity, such as political violence¹⁶. Once "outside" these normal boundaries, the "heroic" fascist believed that he must battle with the enemies of the nation, as conceived by their ideology. By living out this mythology, even though it may be of great personal risk, fascists believed that they would confer a boon on their national community in order to, through their eyes, redeem it from a destructive evil (of course, fascists conceived of their actions as the forces of good). Therefore, by enacting the role of the mythic hero through the lens of their ideology, fascists could rationalise their relationship to the national community and divide it into a

¹⁶ For an exhaustive exploration of this archetype see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London, Fontana Press, 1993). In this fusion of anthropology and psychoanalysis Campbell forwards an ideal typical description of the hero archetype as follows: „A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a religion of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.“, p. 30. For a history of how the concept of male heroism has been integrated into the construction of male identity throughout the twentieth century, see G. L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: the creation of modern masculinity*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Manichean division between good and evil. This variant of the palingenetic myth could sometimes be pursued to the point of personal death and martyrdom, indicative of the levels of faith that the political religion could draw out in its protagonists.

Many theorists of fascism have noted the fascist hero figure, or the fascist variant of the new man, was an archetype that has many precursors. For example, it can be found in the Pauline doctrine of Old and New Adam, Enlightenment concepts of progress, such as Rousseau's education of Emile, and also its presence in Soviet the idea of the new Soviet man. Nevertheless in its fascist permutation the archetype does have some distinctive characteristics, especially its propensity towards "creative" violence. For fascists, the new man was a belligerent figure who privileged decisive feats over discussion and reasoned action, either peacefully through sport (which was conceived as a prelude to fighting), or violently through combat and war. The cult of military combat created by the First World War allowed him to demonstrate a healthy body that distinguished him from, in their eyes, the decadent bourgeoisie. This characterised the tropes through which the interwar fascist leaders often sought to refract their charismatic appeal when presenting themselves to their followers. Further, fascism seized upon the notion that healthy and disciplined men symbolised the metaphysical "health" of the nation, and sought to extend the concept onto the new political constituency of twentieth century Europe: the masses. The concept of a heroic, masculine vanguard would enact the ideology's revolutionary dimension: an anthropological revolution that would transform diverse populations into homogeneous units. Fascists often believed that they could lead the masses by seizing the power of the modern state in order to redeem them from the "decadence", which they had fallen into under the liberal and bourgeois political systems. This would transform the national masses into a healthy, disciplined and unified body of people, revitalised through a reconnection with the idea of the organic nation.

This highly condensed summary of key concepts in fascist ideology is far from exhaustive, but represents many of the important characteristics of interwar fascist politics. Therefore it provides a useful map of the generic qualities of the ideology that researchers should arm themselves with before venturing into the confusing landscape of fascist writings. As already stated, this paper argues that researchers can make sense of fascist ideological production by highlighting how these generic features were expressed in fascism's idiosyncratic settings. However, the point of this map is that it is a means to an end, not the end in itself; though historians should be aware of generic features and the importance of wider patterns, they should ultimately be concerned with drawing out unique and idiosyncratic aspects of their subject matter. Therefore, now suitably endowed with the correct exploratory equipment, this paper will now leave the comfortable realm of generic patterns in order to traverse the more difficult terrain of Codreanu's permutation of fascist discourse.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *For My Legionaries (The Iron Guard)*¹⁷

Codreanu's book comprises of a series of first person narratives which tells the "inspiring" and "heroic" story of how he and his followers took a leading role in a series of political movements – The Guard of the National Conscience, League of National Christian Defence, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and the Iron Guard – in order to defend the newly constructed Greater Romania from a heavily demonised set of national enemies. It is interspersed with clippings from contemporary journals, as well as quotes from relevant intellectuals. The narrative starts in the Dobrina forest in the spring of 1919, where a group of students are preparing to defend the nation from a potential Bolshevik invasion. From these opening pages, we learn how, for the young Codreanu, military education was vital to forming his personality. This training would "be with me all my life" we are told; that discipline and military values "moulded my blood from an early age"; and, rejecting bourgeois values, that he "learned to love the trenches and to despise the drawing room."¹⁸ These assertions are followed by a short description of how he joined his father at the front in 1917, only to be sent back due to the army's age restrictions. By the time he was of fighting age, he informs us "we, the children ready to die, were scattered, each to his home"¹⁹. All of this adds up to an idealisation of soldierly comportment and a generalised sense of European disruption that is typical of inter-war fascisms, and demonstrates how First World War mythology was formative in the mindset of Codreanu's politics.

Key to this rhetoric is Codreanu's belief in the creative power of the war, and therefore of war in general. To give some examples, in one early proclamation he tells soldiers that: "With your weapons you have carved for eternity your country's

¹⁷ The following texts were of general help in writing this section: *Native Fascism in the Successor States, 1918-1945*, ed. Peter F. Sugar, California, ABC-Clio, 1971; Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel. Fascist Ideology in Romania*, New York, East European Monographs, 1990; Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*, California, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1970; Zeef Barbu, *Psycho-Historical and Social Perspectives on the Iron Guard, The Fascist Movement of Romania, Who Were the Fascists, Social Roots of European Fascism*, S. U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J. P. Myklebust eds., Bergen, Universitetsforlaget, 1980, p. 379-394; Eugene Weber, *Romania*, in *The European Right: A Historic Profile*, H. Rogger and E. Weber eds., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965, p. 501-574; E. Weber, *The Men of the Archangel in International Fascism, 1920-1945*, W. Laqueur and G. L. Mosse eds., New York, Harper and Row, 1966, p. 317-343; Constatin Iordachi, *Charisma, Religion and Ideology: Romania's Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael* in *Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth Century Southeastern Europe*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2004; Zvi Yavetz, *An Eyewitness Note: Reflections on the Rumanian Iron Guard* in „Journal of Contemporary History”, vol. 26 (1991), p. 597-610; Radu Ioanid *The Sacralized Politics of the Rumanian Iron Guard* in „Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions”, vol. 5, no. 3 (2004), p. 419-453.

¹⁸ Corneliu Codreanu, *For My legionaries (The Iron Guard)*, Reedy, WV, Liberty Bell Publications, 1990, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

borders. With your blood you have perfected and sealed your sacrifice”²⁰. We are also told that the first students’ congress meeting in Cluj in September 1920 was marked by a great atmosphere, due to “the unification of the Romanian people by force of arms and their sacrifice”²¹. Moreover, it is clear that he understands that “sacrifice and fighting create the state”²². And after Codreanu had formed the Iron Guard, he circulated a pamphlet that railed:

A New Romania cannot be born from the back rooms of political parties, just as *Greater Romania* was not born from the calculations of politicians, but on the battlefields of Marasesti and the deep valleys upon which cannon rained steel...
A *New Romania* cannot be born except by battle; from the sacrifice of its sons... *Soldier! Rise up! History calls you again! As you are. With your broken arm. With your fractured leg. With your bullet ridden chest...*²³

Creativity and war are constantly elided in this way in the text. Elsewhere, we are told how, after the war, “peasants returned home from the front resolutely desiring a new life”²⁴; and

that:
Their sacrifice of blood on all fronts created Greater Romania. But to their great chagrin and disappointment Greater Romania did not meet their expectations... Greater Romania abandoned them to further Jewish *exploitation* and brought down upon their heads the whiplashes of politicians who would send them into prison when they tried to reclaim their stolen political rights²⁵.

It is from this final quote that we see the key conflation of Codreanu’s views on the role of the First World War in the construction of a “Greater Romanian” homeland. Here he also introduces his vicious critique of the Jews. On the one hand, he presented the war as the creative act leading to the possibility of a “true” Greater Romania, drawing on the heroic comportment of the soldier as the creative force capable of regenerating the nation. Yet on the other hand, this process was constrained by an enemy that, in his view, had infiltrated the entire Romanian body politic, and consequently for Codreanu, the journey to a pure Greater Romania was being stymied by the presence of Romania’s Jews. This tension was where he often appealed to senses of injustice being perpetrated against the nation to justify his anti-Semitic stance.

By definition for Codreanu, the Jewish population lacked the ability to be a part of the nation as “true Romanians” (essentially because he believed that their

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 305.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 283.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

blood was different in that it was not directly descended from “national ancestors”, see below), also he criticised Romanian “traitors”, who, either consciously or unconsciously, were believed to be in league with Jewish conspiracies. We are treated to lengthy descriptions of such “treason”, especially in reference to officials at his various trials. One can deduce from all of this that Codreanu’s conception of the role of Jews in Romanian life was pivotal to the ideology that he sought to promote, and the way he defined his national identity. Further, underlying Codreanu’s whole ideological stance is the idea of an intense sense of *überfremdung*, the perception of a foreign culture overrunning a subjectively constructed “indigenous” one, which can create a sense of profound anxiety and dread. For Codreanu, the issue of anti-Semitism should be viewed as the core component of his ideological matrix: the consistent teleological point of his ideology was that this subjective sensitivity to *überfremdung* needed to be eliminated. This allowed him to find a fixed object of hate, which appears to have given focus to the generalised anxiety he felt to the lack of trust in the political and state institutions of post-war Romania. This catalysed Codreanu’s readings of past Romanian anti-Semitic intellectuals into a new ideological construct that made sense of the antinomies of modern life. The nuances of this point are worth tracking further.

The core of Codreanu’s argument was that Romania’s Jewish communities were united and involved in a conspiracy to colonise the Romanian nation through economic means, thereby reducing “true” Romanians to economic slavery. For a newly formed nation-state, whose territory and population had experienced a long history of control from external powers, the colonial rhetoric that he gave to this perceived “Jewish threat” is especially significant. Early on, Codreanu outlined his basic theory, arguing Jews were latecomers to Romania, arriving from the early 1800’s onwards. This “infiltration”, as he dubbed it, saw Jews gain control of “Romanian small commerce and industry; then, by using the same fraudulent tactics, they attacked big commerce and industry.” He continued that: “Successfully attacking the middle class meant breaking the Romanian people in two.” This would result in a future comprised of: “a) *The collapse of the ruling class...* b) *the imposing of its reconstitution* [by a Jewish vanguard, presumably], c) *the confusion and animalisation, the vanquishing and enslavement of the peasant class*”²⁶. Therefore, Codreanu’s meta-narrative details a Jewish colonisation of Romania that involved the Jewish community gaining control of local economies in the towns before subjugating “true” Romanians to subordinate positions, thereby enslaving the entire nation. The strategy of this “infiltration” was primarily economic, in Codreanu’s view, and he argued that, “Whoever controls the towns controls the means of subsistence, the wealth of a nation”²⁷. From this position, a sense of generalised paranoia and lack of trust in modern commercial life was easy to attribute to a Jewish influence.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 59-60.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

Consequently, this meta-narrative formed the founding blocks upon which Codreanu could repeatedly assert that all state apparatus, and of the dynamic of liberal democratic politics and its entire philosophy in general, were fundamentally discredited – further, that they were untrustworthy. The lack of trust Codreanu could find in the post-war civil and political society was not only “explained” through the “infiltration” of Jews, but also, once this perception gained genuine verisimilitude in Codreanu’s mind, it meant that the teleology of his ideology was for Romania to reach a sort of post-Jewish post-colonialism. All reasoning emanated from this ultra-nationalist idea, a theory that Codreanu believed was as the core truth of his age.

To give some examples of how all encompassing a threat Codreanu believed this to be, one only has to read the subtext to the narratives of battles between his “organic”²⁸ political movements and the state. At his first arrest in spring of 1923, we get a range of elisions surrounding the issue of this sort of corruption, with examples of officials “betraying” the nationalist vanguard that he attempted to represent. Later, he makes particular play of a report that supports his claims of state violence and torture committed by a policeman. Despite the claims being backed up independent investigators, the policeman eventually received a promotion. This flagged up, for Codreanu, a corrupt policing system and legislature, and he constantly tried to illuminate this point with emotive examples of injustice when discussing his dealings with the Romanian state²⁹. (Arguably the courts treated him leniently, he was acquitted both in 1924 after he shot dead the prefect of Iași, and again in 1933 after instigating the death of I.G. Duca.) Further, as a self-styled defender of the nation, he offers an idea of how he saw the Jewish threat in metaphysical terms. He describes how “the Jews will apply a truly unique and diabolical plan”, which contains the sacrilegious act of “breaking the spiritual ties of the Romanians to *heaven* and *earth*”. He continues that the Jewish population will attempt to spread atheistic material, including – somewhat ridiculously, considering his elision between Judaism and advanced capitalism – international communism. All of this was perpetrated by Jewish agency in order to sever “the roots of their [i.e. Romanians] spiritual life”³⁰.

Later, we learn that democratic politics was yet another aspect of this matrix of reasons for developing distrust in modern society. For Codreanu, “The Romanian People will not be able to solve the Jewish problem unless it first solves

²⁸ The allusion is to Gramsci, and his dichotomy between „organic” and „traditional” intellectuals who operate within modern civil society. He understood organic intellectuals to be those who generate ideologies that seek to subvert the status quo and enact radical new futures through wars of manoeuvre followed by wars of position; and traditional intellectuals to be those who seek to maintain the status quo and existing power structures, and whose power they are often under the sphere of influence. See Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1998.

²⁹ Codreanu, *For My Legionaries*, p. 150-182.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

the problem of political parties."³¹ When Codreanu delivers narratives in which he himself contested elections, we are given further examples of his impressions on the corruption of democracy. When he was on the campaign trail, crowds of "noble" Romanians were painted as "corrupted" by partisan election officials using drinks as bribes so that "over the serene and clean life into villages there descend the floodtides of political corruption"³². The binaries he invokes here are clear: the decadence of modern democracy destroying the nobility of the peasant and the "true" Romania, a rhetorical strategy that was typical of his ideological construction of an idealised Romanian identity by opposing it to a demonised other. Therefore, this portrayal of the peasants as a key aspect of national identity was far from unique to Codreanu, for example it was epitomised by the nationalist poetry of Eminescu, yet Codreanu's use of the idealised peasant was an extreme variant of this aspect of Romanian nationalist identity. The 1907 Peasant Uprising, an event well within living memory for many Romanians of the era, had further augmented the widespread appeal of an agrarian populism marked by a Christian political dynamic, and such use of the peasantry by Codreanu can be seen to be broadly in line with that tradition. Finally, such a concept of the peasant also chimed with the thought of Constantin Rădulescu-Notru and his theory of *Românismul* or Romanianism. Like Codreanu, Rădulescu-Notru believed the Romanian nation had a unique cultural role in the modern world that lay in preserving the village community and eventually developing a new peasant state, which he combined with a profound distrust of bourgeois parliamentary institutions.

We can see such an anti-politician standpoint in Codreanu when he was elected to Parliament. Here we are told that his strategy was to paint himself as a righteous and honest figure the face of corrupt career politicians. He tells us that he:

...tried to show them that our country had been invaded by Jewry; that where the invasion is greatest, human misery is most frightening: in Maramures; that the beginning of the Jewish existence on our soil, foreshadowed the death of Romanians; that as their numbers increased, we would die; that finally, the leaders of Romanian nation, the men of the century of democracy and of political parties, have betrayed their people in this fight by placing themselves at the service of great national or international finance³³.

He then delivered a report to the Parliament that argued the Romanian state had been defrauded to the tune of some 50 billion *lei*, before listing his own anti-corruption and nationalising agenda. Here we have it all: the elision between foreign invasion and the image of Jewishness to argue the presence of an existential threat to his idea of the nation, and the more general notion that nations

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 194.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

can literally “die”; Codreanu’s Jewish colonial theory used to give a racist and caricatured image to a more general and complex state of corruption and institutional problems in the developing public and private national institutions³⁴; and the presentation of his own persona as one providing a constructive and redemptive counterpoint to the political “decadence” of democracy.

By deriding the political process so comprehensively, the subtext of Codreanu’s ideology articulates a sense of living in a state “outside” of normal society, and during a period of national existential crisis. He paints this as a period of national liminality necessitating the creation of political movements that responded to the crisis within “structured society” and which sought to revitalise the nation. We can find examples of this desire for a politics of redemption throughout the text. An early account of a student movement gives a description of Codreanu realising himself as a part of a liminal collective of disaffected youths, and runs as follows:

A great collective electrifying moment, with no preparation beforehand... A great moment of collective enlightenment like the lightening in the middle of a dark night, in which the entire youth of the country recognised its own destiny in life as well as that of its people... All the millions of dead and of the martyrs of the past are with them, as well as the nation’s life tomorrow³⁵.

Of especial interest in this excerpt is the way he links the present to an, essentially imagined, sense of connection to past national ancestors as well as to future generations, thereby generating a sense of time marked by a mythic sense of past and future that impacts on, informs and inspires the present. Also, along the same sacralising lines, we can see in Codreanu’s description of the role played by the League of Christian National Defence in the emergence of a politics of conversion. Indeed, members were expected to enter “villages to organise them and to win them over to the new faith”³⁶.

Revealingly, this sense a sub-community developing a politics of deliverance from “evil”, or revitalising *communitas* movement, was expressed through the symbolism of flags used by the L.A.N.C. He describes that:

³⁴ Of course Romania’s political life was shot through with problems. For more on the political dynamics of the development of modern Romania, see *Social Change in Romania, 1860–1940*, K. Jowett ed., Berkeley, Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1978; and *National Character and National Ideology in Inter-War Eastern Europe*, Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery eds., New Haven, Yale Center for International & Area Studies, 1995, especially the essays *National Ideology and National Character in Inter-War Romania* by K. Verdery, *Orthodoxism: Polemics Over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania* by K. Hitchins, and *The „National Essence” in Interwar Romanian Literary Life* by M. Papahagi.

³⁵ Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

The cloth of these flags was black – a sign of mourning; in the centre a round white spot, signifying our hopes surrounded by the darkness they will have to conquer; in the centre of the white, a swastika, the symbol of the anti-Semitic struggle throughout the world; and all around the flag, a band of the Romanian tricolour – red, yellow and blue³⁷.

This symbolism reveals the consciousness of the movement clearly: its underlying desire to find hope from a world filled with despair, the centrality of anti-Semitism as the cause and focus for this despair, and the nationalisation of this condition. Also it contains the idea of a movement of more than one nation, each co-operating as anti-Semitic fellow travellers. Again, we see that the awareness of spiritual purpose is key to this sense of mission. This sacralisation of politics increases as the text progresses. By the time he created of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, we find Codreanu claiming that his ideology operated in strict opposition to the materialism of modern life:

Through our daring gesture we turned our backs on a mentality that dominated everything. We killed in ourselves a world in order to raise another, high as the sky. The absolute rule of matter was overthrown so it could be replaced by the rule of spirit, of moral values³⁸.

We are then told the four principles of the Legionary lifestyle: faith in God; trust in their mission, which would include personal sacrifice (see below); mutual love and a need for “inner equilibrium”; and legionary songs. In Codreanu’s description of the third of these points especially, we find many of the characteristics that Turner attributed to *communitas* movements: close friendships and a sense of family privileged over “cold, official life”; a “warmth” to the life within the legionary nests, where one found a “ray of love”; and also, legionaries were expected to display “propriety, faith, devotion and zeal for work”³⁹. Further, a sense of revitalising *communitas* and common spirit explained the requirement for uniforms, a characteristic that, as Codreanu notes, was common to Fascists and Nazis too. Explicitly for Codreanu, these uniforms were “the visible face of an unseen reality”, i.e. he thought they symbolised the existence of the metaphysical entirety of the organic nation.

Clear in Codreanu’s writings is the fact that he sees these features as a modernising force for Romanian politics. This is most plainly revealed in Codreanu’s explanation of the state of contemporary national politics in Europe. He viewed the Iron Guard as Romania’s variant on the new nationalist movements – with Nazism as Germany’s variant and Fascism as Italy’s. These regimes, he stated, were not “dictatorships”, and he described the novelty of this new politics thus:

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 213-214.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

If these regimes are not dictatorships or democracies, what then are they? Without defining them one must admit they represent *a new form of government, sui generis*, in the modern states...

I believe it has at its base that *state of spirit*, that state of elevated *national consciousness* which, sooner or later, spreads to the outskirts of the national organism.

It is a state of inner revelation. That which of old was the people's instinctive repository is reflected in these movements in the people's conscience, creating a state of unanimous illumination which is encountered only in religious revivals. This phenomenon could rightly be called *national oecumenicity*⁴⁰.

This nationalism represented for Codreanu the coming of age of national consciousness across interwar Europe. He claimed that this sense of national consciousness had flashed in and out of existence in the past, but was now in the process of achieving a state of permanence. For Codreanu, this was the politics of the future. In these new systems, the leader was "the incarnation of this *unseen state of spirit*, the symbol of this state of consciousness"⁴¹. Further, he was a figure that was guided by the "interests of the *immortal nation* which have penetrated the consciousness of the peoples"⁴². We can also see Codreanu drawing upon the past in a way not dissimilar to Charles Maurras concept of integral nationalism. Like Maurras, Codreanu believed the eternal concept of the real nation (*pays réel*) was under attack by the legal nation (*pays légal*), and also was subverted by foreigners, especially Jews. However, though influential, Codreanu differed from this perspective in his assertion of the need for a new order and a new elite to emerge, unlike Maurras's" proto-fascist vision for France, which rested upon the tradition of hereditary monarchy to conceptualise its "re-rooting" principle.

Further, this concept of a nation – one yet to reach full development – brought out the idea of living during a period of *kairos* and consequently heightened a mythic sense of possibility, which resulted in giving the characteristic tone of redemptive mission and purpose to Codreanu's ideology. In relation to this sense of *kairos*, we are treated throughout the text to descriptions of how national ancestors were being honoured, and how future generations will see then the present as the era in which the historic opportunity for the creation of the pure modern nation and its new elite – its new men – emerged. Codreanu's ideology makes it clear that Legionaries must fail neither party, i.e. their responsibility was to both the past and to the future. These uses of mythic senses of identification with the past that inspired visions for a new modernity were key to the rhetoric of the movement. In addition to this, we can find an explanation of the mythic sense of

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

time eliding Christian eschatology to nationalism that Codreanu wanted to alert his followers to. The clearest evocation of this ran thus:

The final aim [of a nation] is not life *but resurrection*. The resurrection of peoples in the name of Jesus Christ. Creation and culture are but a means, not a purpose [in order to achieve this]...

There will come a time when all the peoples of the earth shall be resurrected, with all their dead and all their kings and emperors... This *final moment*, “the resurrection from the dead,” is the noblest and most sublime one towards which a people can rise.

The nation then is an entity which prolongs her existence even beyond this earth. Peoples are realities even in the nether world...⁴³

The use of a mythopoeic temporal framework within the ideology’s construction of time here is clear; and we get an idea of the wider, metaphysical dimension to the construction of time within which the ideology operated. Also, to give just one example of the appeal to future action in this world, we can find toward the end of the text the following: Codreanu tells the story of how the Iron Guard attempted to build a dam in the summer of 1933 to aid a local village. In the order that he issued to the Legionary Unit Leaders, he made the following claim for how the dam would serve as an inspirational metaphor for the Legionaries:

We too, want to build; from a broken bridge to a road and the tapping of a waterfall and its change into energy; from a peasant homestead into *a new type of Romanian village, Romanian town, Romanian state*.

This is the historic call of our generation, that on today’s ruins we will build a new and beautiful country⁴⁴.

The rhetoric of being involved in a process of renewal is very clear here. Also one can get a sense of how building a dam that was symbolic of modernising this world, and the idea of a final end point to time and God’s judgement in a metaphysical reality were related for Codreanu. This is because he presents time in the following fashion: the present holds a great potential, but is essentially in a state of crisis; by gaining consciousness of a national mission the future for Romania will be created anew; this itself is a process tied to the metaphysical end of time and to divine sanction. Therefore the ideology was marked by a totalising temporal framework that, by drawing on Christian theology, extended from a mythic past, through the present and up to the end of time itself.

We saw earlier that Turner noted how the notion of liminality was also tied to a sense of suffering. In Codreanu’s text, we are repeatedly treated to examples of how the Legionary members must physically and mentally suffer in order to

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 315.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 341.

awaken the wider conscience of the nation. This sense of suffering is usually given a sacred dimension and we can again see Christian theology and suffering elided with nationalist ideology. To give some examples of the way he justified suffering in the present for a better future, when he was imprisoned he made statements such as:

I looked well and saw the misery of the cell. I told myself “difficult situation.” A wave of pain ripped through my heart. But I consoled myself: “It is for our People”⁴⁵.

And:

Lord! We take upon ourselves all the sins of this nation. Receive this our suffering now. See that a better day for this people be forthcoming through this suffering⁴⁶.

By the time he had formed the Legion of the Archangel Michael, this rhetoric became even stronger, though the underlying justification remained a perceived altruism, divinely sanctioned. For example, Codreanu describes how he, along with Ion Moța and others, came to the realisation that the Legion of the Archangel Michael should be formed as an esoteric, vanguard style movement, rather than a populist one, and that each member of the new movement had to have accepted their own death and martyrdom as part of the regeneration of the national cause. Drawing on the mythic qualities of the sacrificial hero, his palingenetic reasoning for such an ideology ran thus:

It cannot be that this sacrifice of ours will not be understood by Romanians, that it would not make their souls and consciences tremble and that this will not constitute a starting point, a point of resurrection for Romanians. Our death, in this fashion, could eventually bring this people more good than all the frustrated endeavours of our lifetime... There are others among our ranks who will avenge us. Not being able to win while alive, we will win by dying⁴⁷.

Later we are given a description of the motivation for forming the Iron Guard’s famous “Death Teams” that crystallises the – initially counter-intuitive – idea that one can escape from a world of alienation and despair into one of hope and community through an ideology that fetishises the notion of death:

But in the face of these obstacles, blows, intrigues and persecutions... this terrible feeling of aloneness, having nowhere to turn, – we oppose all this with a firm *determination to die*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 124

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 226.

“*The death team*” is the expression of these inner feelings of the legionary youth throughout the whole country, *to receive death*; its determination to go forward, through death⁴⁸.

The idea of a nationalised hero figure who goes beyond the everyday boundaries of life and who martyrs themselves for their national community demonstrates how the hero mythology was utilised as a sacralising force in Codreanu’s text. Other, less profound, aspects of suffering are also painted in a romantic light: lack of money, lack of leisure time, a constant sense of persecution, and so on. Codreanu constantly privileged a sense of suffering and asceticism in the present over self-gratification, and when he did so, he usually added an acknowledgement of a better world to come. By doing so, he heightened the contrast between present and future, and therefore the attractiveness of the ideology’s narrative of national regeneration. Consequently, by emphasising suffering in the present, the idealised future becomes even more appealing, thereby augmenting the motivation for members to continue with their “mission” as a boon to the national community.

To turn more squarely to how Codreanu developed his sense of a mythic Romanian homeland, we find definitions of the Romanian people as those who have inhabited the geographical region of Romania, and who repeatedly had fought off the various “external races”, which could be seen to have historically populated the land. Note again how such a meta-narrative generates a sense of *überfremdung* by describing the nation through a process of conferring the other with a variety of negative properties. The positive origins of Romanians themselves were given rooted, as opposed to nomadic, characteristics and were described far more poetically. For example:

We were born in the mist of time on this land together with the oaks and the fir trees. We are bound to it not only by the bread and existence it furnishes us with as we toil on it, but also by all the bones of our ancestors who sleep in its ground. All our parents are here. All our memories, all our war-like glory, all our history is here...⁴⁹

Of course, a sense of the fragmented life, intrinsic to modernity, was presented as an existential threat to his idea of a sacred homeland and people. As we have seen, for him both democracy and Judaism were the destructive agents of the national homeland. Another quotation emphasises this point:

...democracy will break up *the unity* and the spirit of the people, which, faced with the perfect unity and solidarity of Judaism in Romania... once divided into *democratic parties*, thus fragmented, will be defeated⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 336.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

So, because democracy has multiple parties it was too heterogeneous a phenomenon to be tolerated by Codreanu's ultra-nationalism and had to go. In its place a single party with a totalitarian ideology would be a uniting force that would re-root the national community.

Codreanu also gives descriptions of how one could gain consciousness of the nation through the collective ecstasis (literally transcending oneself), found in the dynamic of crowds during perceived historic moments:

Crowds sometimes establish contact with the soul of the people. A moment of vision. Multitudes see the nation, with its dead and all its past... they feel the future seething. This touch with the whole immortal and collective soul of the nation is feverish, full of trembling.

...national mystique is nothing more than *man's contact*, or that of the multitude, with the soul of their people, through a jump outside of personal preoccupations into the eternal life of the people⁵¹.

And finally, it is also worth quoting at length his most articulate definition of the nation, which offers the clearest idea of how Codreanu conceived of the idea of "Romania" as offering an ontological homeland in the face of rootless modernity:

The nation includes:

1. *All the Romanians presently alive.*
2. *All the souls of our dead and the tombs of our ancestors.*
3. *All those who will be born Romanians.*

A people becomes conscious of itself when it attains the consciousness of this whole...

The Nation possesses:

1. *A physical, biological patrimony* – her flesh and blood.
2. *A Material patrimony* – the soil of her country and its riches.
3. *A spiritual patrimony* which contains:
 - a) *Her concept of God, the world and life.* This concept forms a... spiritual property... There exists a country of the national spirit, a country of its visions obtained by revelation or by her own efforts.
 - b) *Her honour...*
 - c) *Her culture...* This culture is not international. It is the expression of her blood...

Each of these patrimonies has its importance... *The most important however is the spiritual patrimony, for only it carries the stamp of eternity, it alone endures through the centuries...*⁵²

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 179-180.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 313-314.

From this statement describing the properties of the nation, we can see how Codreanu conflated spiritual and biological dimensions in his conception of the Romanian homeland.

He also repeatedly sought to sacralise the concept by using various legendary figures and intellectuals as nationalist precursors – sparks on the road to national self-consciousness. Early on, we get an extended piece of idealisation of a contemporary figure that appears to have inspired Codreanu, Constantin Panu. He is described as a “hero”, down to earth and likable, typical of an honest Romanian. He fought the “Red Beast” of communism, yet died in poverty in the early 1920’s – a national martyr for Codreanu. A more intellectual pantheon is offered a few pages later, consisting of the following “national geniuses”: Bogdan Hajdeu, Vasile Conta, Mihail Eminescu, Vasile Alecsandri; and later, further intellectuals are added to the list: Vasile Alecsandri, Mihail Kogalniceanu, Ion Radulescu, Costache Negri and A. D. Xenopol. Contemporary figures are also cited at length, especially Alexandru Ioan Cuza, alongside other, “fellow-travelling” professors. This sense of the ideology possessing national pre-cursors was important to Codreanu’s anti-Semitic constructions, as this offered a quotable reservoir of nationalised intellectual resources for historicising the new, paligenetic sense of national consciousness that he wishes to disseminate. As well as figures close to the movement’s historical period, Codreanu also incorporated extracts by St. Paul. By quoting Corinthians I, 13, 1-8, Codreanu derived further credence to his ideology of “love” and “discipline”. He argued: “it is from here that our movement stems... Where there is no love there is no Legionary life”⁵³. (Of course, unlike true Christian conceptions of Love, Codreanu could not extend this to those he considered other, such as the Jews.) Further, the Archangel Michael himself incorporated a sacred, mythic figure into Codreanu’s pantheon of ideological precursors, whose thoughts and actions were felt, collectively, to illuminate and animate the movement. In short, the movement’s past was historicised using both historical and cosmological resources, typical of the sacralisation of politics.

Therefore, it is also worth looking at how Codreanu used various categories of knowledge to build up his arguments. Many of his claims to validity were taken, ultimately, from the Bible, and he genuinely seems to have believed that he was exacting a Christian mission⁵⁴. In contrast, we also find a role for what he

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 233.

⁵⁴ We can find a telling example of how Codreanu privileged an ideology of national preservation over the more established universal Truths of Christianity when he entered Parliament and was confronted by an objection from a professor of Theology on his point of the death penalty for all those convicted of being “fraudulent manipulators of public funds” (the nebulousness of this description is obvious). Professor Ispir calls this extremist attitude „anti-Christian”, yet Codreanu replied that the „death of a thief” was “preferable” in comparison to the potential death of his country. Indeed, for Codreanu this made him a better Christian. See: *Ibidem*, p. 303. This also raises further questions concerning the extent to which Christianity can be seen as appropriated by the ideology on the one hand, or „genuinely” pursued on the other. The text itself appears to privilege the concept of the nation to such an extent that the notion of the universality of the religious dimension is fundamentally corrupted. However, the ideology did hold an appeal among the genuinely faithful, and Priests partook in its activities.

conceives of as “scientific” knowledge (though actually crude scientific theories), when he wishes to appropriate a more modern rhetoric – for example, when he cites at length a paper by A. Cuza on the nature of “the science of anti-Semitism”⁵⁵. Such appeals to a “scientific” knowledge demonstrates the ambivalence in Codreanu’s ideology regarding such rational thought, especially when it could be marshalled in favour of what was, to his mind, a positive end – namely a convincing way to demonise his enemies. Later, we are told how the ideology was founded not upon a rational sense of “thinking alike”, but rather an emotional sense of “feeling alike” amongst those who held the “same moral-emotional-spiritual construction”, as he phrased it. Following this point, Codreanu gave a clear explanation of how he conceived a hierarchy of reason and faith:

This was the signal that the statue of another Goddess – Reason – was to be smashed; that which mankind raised against God, we – not intending to throw away or despise – should put her in her proper place, in the service of God and of life’s meaning⁵⁶.

Later, we can see how the ideology developed its own sense of inner logic. We are told how the Legionary movement had “laws of ethics”, which stressed a sense of moral duty, action and regeneration for the nation⁵⁷; and then of a set of “laws”, which consisted of notes on the topics of: discipline, work, silence, education, reciprocal help, and honour⁵⁸.

Further, we must fully appreciate the way the ideology played with this distinction between senses of the sacred and the profane, which are of great importance if we are to more fully comprehend it. We have seen how Codreanu collapsed the secularisation of the West, and his perceived idea of Jewish colonialism, into the same phenomenon. Therefore, anything connected with modern Judaism was seen as a profaning influence. For example, towards the beginning of the text we are told how the University of Iași attempted to suspend religious service at its annual opening ceremony. This provoked Codreanu into action: “we provoked disorder... but those disorders would stop the great disorder, the irreparable disorder”, which, at this point, was primarily seen as communism –

⁵⁵ This was a discipline that synthesised History, Anthropology, Theology, Politics, Political Economy and Philosophy which, in a highly *a priori* rather than inductive scientific methodology, concluded the necessity for: „*The elimination of the Jews from the midst of other people putting an end to their unnatural, parasitic existence that is due to an anachronistic concept opposed to the civilisation and peace of all nations who can no longer tolerate it... The science of anti-Semitism finally comes to explain this phenomenon... Thus it gives us the formula of the scientific solution for the problem of Judaism, which in order to realise we have only to apply. Modern anti-Semitism then, pools all energies... forming a formidable force, certainly capable of solving the greatest problem of civilization of our times, which is the Jewish problem.*” A. C. Cuza, as quoted in *Ibidem*, p. 42-43.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 214.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

seen by Codreanu as a profane, “international” attack by “international Jewry” on the sacred sense of nationhood. Later, the importance of the sacred becomes more explicit when we are told of how the Archangel Michael became the movement’s icon. At a meal on the 8 November 1923, Codreanu suggested the name Michael the Archangel for the youth organisation of the L.A.N.C. Mota, Codreanu and others then went to view the icon, and Codreanu recalled that:

I felt bound to this one with all my soul and I had the feeling the Archangel was alive. Since then, I have come to love that icon. Any time we found the church open, we entered and prayed before that icon. Our hearts were filled with peace and joy⁵⁹.

As well as absorbing Christian symbolism into the ideological matrix, the movement also developed its own sacred liturgies and rituals. For example, the Legionaries developed ritual that began on 8 November 1927, when the first Legionaries took their vows to join the organisation. Codreanu described how small quantities of soil were gathered from “glorious spots of Romanian history”. These were mixed together and then placed in small leather sacks as ritual symbols of the nation. Prayer and an overarching sense of sacredness and solemnity accompanied these initiation rituals. Later, we are told how the movement honoured Professor Ion Gavanescul with “the most precious gift we could give him”, a ritual sack of soil. Subsequently, General Ion Tarnoschi also received a sack, this time containing the blood of his soldiers. Tarnoschi is described as having tears running down his cheeks as he received it. Further, the sacralisation of the geographical space of the Romanian land through ancient legends can be seen throughout the text, but is epitomised by the rationale behind the title for the publication of the league: *The Ancestral Land*. Codreanu described the significance of the title thus:

This title keeps us tied to the country’s earth in which our ancestors rest; the land which must be defended. It plunges us deep into undefined realms; it will be more than a name, it will be a constant call *to battle, the appeal to bravery, the stirring up of the warlike qualities of our race...* Here we have the axis of our movement already fixed; one end rooted in the earth of our Fatherland, the other in the heavens: “The Ancestral Land” and Michael the Archangel⁶⁰.

Note especially in this remarkable passage, synthesising the idea of a sacred territory and a holy war, how the metaphysical realm and the geographical space of Romania are fused.

In order to enact this new holy war, the league developed a need to generate a vanguard of “new men”. We are clearly told that in such “critical times” Romania

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 226.

needs a new and heroic breed of men to enact their “historic” mission. Describing himself, Codreanu claimed Romania would be led by a figure possessing charismatic qualities. For example, he prophesied:

...a great educator and leader... From this legionary school *a new man* will have to emerge, a man with heroic qualities; a giant of our history to do battle and win over all the enemies of our Fatherland... Everything that our mind can imagine more beautiful spiritually; everything the proudest that our race can produce, greater, more just, more powerful, wiser, purer, more diligent and more heroic...⁶¹

Codreanu continued that this charismatic leader would be heroic, and would offer political and national redemption:

This hero... *will also know* how to elaborate programs; *will also know* how to solve the Jewish problem; *will also know* how to organise the state well; *will also know* how to convince other Romanians; and if not, he *will know how to win*, for that is why he is a hero⁶².

Later, Codreanu describes the nation not only as an entity that can live or die, but also one that can only be led by a heroic vanguard. He concluded, “...a people are not capable of governing itself. *It ought to be governed by its elite.*” He then recapitulates his view that, as a consequence of the post war settlement, the nation had fallen into a state of decadence due to the democratic political process and increased racial heterogeneity, and that the old national elite had also degenerated. He continued this point by arguing that the Legionaries must wage a generational war against the old elites because he believed that though national elites were continued along hereditary blood principles a new elite could remove these if they no longer function as the “real” elite, meaning they had become decadent. In this case, he argued that: “...*the real elite is born out of a war with the degenerate elite, the false one.*” As such, the purpose of an elite was:

- a) To lead the nation according to the life laws of a people.
- b) To leave behind an inheriting elite based not only on the principle of heredity but also on that of selection... It is like a gardener who works his garden and sees to it that before he dies he has an inheritor... for he alone can say who among those working with him is best placed to take his place...⁶³

He concluded by claiming the national elite is founded on the principles of: a purity of soul, the capacity of work and creativity, bravery, war against threats to

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 221.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 311.

the nation, a lack of desire for personal wealth, faith in God, and love. From this characterisation of the role of elites, the notion of liminality is one again clear in the ideology, here finding expression in the archetype of generation conflict. We can also find the rhetoric of the heroic outsider fighting for the cause of the peasants in the rhetorical use of the Captain, his moniker within the movement, as it is suggestive of the myth of “Robin Hood” style irregular troops, or sometimes bandits, the *haiduci* – a popular myth common to much of the Balkans region.

Overall, one cannot help but conclude that the text is shot through with the archetype of rebirth. We have seen this repeatedly in the categories previously analysed, but to give one final example of how Codreanu’s ideology clearly was constructed upon a base of mythic palingenesis we can read:

The hour of Romanian resurrection and deliverance is approaching. He who believes, he who will fight and suffer, will be rewarded and blessed by this people. New times knock at our gates! A world, with an infertile and dry soul is dying and another one is being born, belonging to those who are full of faith.⁶⁴

Again, we have many key elements comprising Codreanu’s ideology: the present understood as decadent; a sensitivity to liminality; sacralising rhetoric; the idealisation of suffering and sacrifice; and a glimpse of the emergence of a new age. This was the palingenetic, mythic core of fascist ideology that can be seen as the subjective quality that followers of The Guard of the National Conscience, League of National Christian Defence, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and the Iron Guard, all attempted to live out.

Conclusions

To conclude, it is worth tying together the ideological tropes that were offered in the cluster concept outlined at the start of the paper by summarising they ways in which we can see examples of these manifesting themselves in the text. By doing so, it is possible to construct the following summary of the ideology:

Codreanu’s variant of ultra-nationalism was clearly a politics that was not compatible with liberal democratic institutions. He detested these and, despite partaking in elections and parliamentary procedure, he sought to disregard their worth at every opportunity in the text. He made reference to a series of ultra-nationalisms, such as Fascism and Nazism, achieving their national revolutions, and clearly saw himself as part of a community of ultra-nationalist ideologies that, though marked by much national detail, bore the family relationship of viewing their actions as a necessary defence of the ideologically conceived national

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 267.

community by developing new, totalitarian forms for the state that would further ultra-nationalist ends. Like so many people during this period, and not only fascists, he was highly influenced by military style and the creative force of the soldier, as evidenced by his fascination with the myths of heroism produced by the First World War. He was also motivated by the sense of failure of the war because it had not produced his utopian vision of a unified and ethnically homogeneous Romanian nation. This failure to produce a harmonized national population contributed to his paranoia of Romania being overtaken by “rootless” outsiders. By giving them nomadic, international characteristics, the Jews for Codreanu became the most demonised of these groups, and this led to his assertions that, through their supposed conquest of Romania through economic means, alongside the destruction of the metaphysical idea of Romania, they were the nation’s primary enemy.

Their presence in the country was seen to have helped induce in the nation a state of decadence, and he believed that the only way to protect and forward the future health and vitality of Romania was by the introduction of his variant on the idea of a modern totalitarian state. This would inaugurate a new age for the nation, offering a renewal of a sacred communion with the organic nation that he felt was being lost in the modern, rootless age. Therefore, his ideology was heavily marked with mythic qualities, especially of hero myths narrating individuals going beyond everyday boundaries, including self-sacrifice, in order to serve the needs of their nation. (In reality, these missions by Iron Guard nests were marked by extreme political violence, some of the worst of which occurred when the movement was finally put down after its attempted coup in January of 1941.) We also saw many tropes of liminality in the ideology. “Romanianism” emerged poetically from the mists of time, yet in recent years was presented as having fallen into a profound state of decadence. In response, the ideology sought a new form of political agency to bring about its regeneration. It was this re-vitalising role of the ideology that manifested its dimension as a political religion. By drawing the Orthodox Church, Codreanu and other ideologues appropriated a set of sacralising resources that imbued the ideology with a spiritual dimension that possessed a genuine sense of verisimilitude for its followers. Codreanu also sought a form of national revolution, or rather anthropological revolution, which would be enacted by the new men of the Iron Guard, who would be able to convert the nation into “purified”, “healthy” and homogeneous community.

This reading of the ideology has sought to highlight the appeal among fascist ideologues of the need to find in the nation a transcendental idea that promises a vision of hope for the future, and in so doing produces the belief that their ideology was the only true elixir for the nation. The universal need for people to find forms of transcendence may seem a million miles away from the vicious characteristics of

violence and hatred that Codreanu summoned up in his writing, and that was enacted by Romanian fascists during the interwar years, but by acknowledging this spiritual dimension to his thinking we can get closer to mapping his political thought and the way it drew on aspects of Orthodox Christianity to construct its ideological dynamic. Further, in this worldview faith and violence were inextricably linked, a fact that Codreanu repeatedly asserts in the book. Through the anthropological aspect of the methodology of this paper, we can tackle the complex issue of the religiosity of the movement by characterising it as a *communitas*, or revitalisation, movement. Therefore, though it contained many tropes of Orthodox thinking, and consequently appears very similar to it in some ways, the primary purpose of the ideology was the rejuvenation of the nation and the completion of the idea of “Greater Romania”. Orthodoxy was subverted to a political idea. The political project of the movement intuitively drew upon the resources of the church, both because they were an integral aspect of the nation’s identity and also because they lent themselves so readily to generate a symbolic world that sacralised, and therefore legitimised, extreme behaviour and violence. However, the limits of this paper lay in the fact that we have a restricted perspective, i.e. that of Codreanu. This is a field of research that is already well worn, though what remains under-researched is the perspective of the Orthodox Church to the Iron Guard. It is likely that detailed study from this perspective will shed far more light upon the complex relationship between the traditional and well-established religion of Romanian Orthodoxy and the modern political religion of the Iron Guard.

A final point worth highlighting is the issue of resonance with contemporary political practices. Clearly, despite major divergences, some aspects of this cluster of ideological tropes can be seen in postwar variants of fascism. These ideologies continue to demonstrate a variety of different surface characteristics to forward organic concepts of ultra-nationalist identity and programmatic fantasies for its regeneration. They offer their followers, who can often be found surfing in rhizomic web communities discussing their sensitivities to new manifestations of modernity’s rootless characteristics, novel frameworks through which to organise their political praxis. These disparate groups, refracting modern society through new senses of liminality, remain deeply influenced by past “heroes” of the ideology, such as Codreanu, whose work they continue to disseminate and read with interest. For example, this can be found not only in works such as Julius Evola’s application of Codreanu’s thought to contemporary political issues, but also through web outlets, such as ebay or far right specialist, that stocks his work in a number of foreign translations. The impact and power of conversion of the ideology contained within *For My Legionaries (The Iron Guard)*, both within Romania and internationally, is far from merely being a historical concern. In respect to this ongoing interest, it is worth bearing in mind the words of Eugene Ionesco, who, when asked to comment on his satire *The Rhinoceros* and on the

conversion among his fellow Romanians to fascism, offered the following on how the ideology influenced his thinking:

... in the course of my life I have been very struck by what one might call the current of opinion, by its rapid evolution, its power of contagion, which is that of a real epidemic. People allow themselves suddenly to be invaded by a new religion, a doctrine, a fanaticism ... At such moments we witness a veritable mental mutation. I don't know if you have noticed it, but when people no longer share your opinions, when you can no longer make yourself understood by them, one has the impression of being confronted by monsters – rhinos, for example. They have that mixture of candour and ferocity. They would kill you with the best of consciences⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd. Revised and Enlarged Edition*, Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd, 1968, p. 178-179.