The Precarious Nature of Romanian Identity and Nationality: The Intellectuals’ National Identification Process through Youth, Peasants, and Jews in the Interwar Period. (Part I)

Milad Doroudian*

Abstract: The first part of a two part series, this article explores the confluence of Romanian intellectual culture in the interwar period, with a distinct concentration on the particularity of Romanian identity and its transformation amid the changing rhetoric of plurinationality. Ultimately the process by which a concrete Romanian identity was formed within the rhetoric of intellectuals was the result of elements of differing views of nationality, the Romanian peasantry, and Christian Orthodoxy all of which were salient elements of Romanian society during the rise of extremists groups such as the Iron Guard. This article explores the way numerous Romanian intellectuals understood and defined their own and the nation’s identity by projecting certain elements upon the Jewry through their own work, thus adding a new layer of complexity to the way that we understand the rise of right-wing extremism in Romania in the 1920s and 1930s.

Keywords: Romania, Nationality, Intellectuals, Identity, Jewry.

Introduction

In Emil Cioran’s long, but curious memoirs, he modestly reiterated “I shared evidently his hatred of women. But what seduced me more, was that he, a Jew, detested his race, just as I, a Romanian had a horror of belonging to that nation” alluding to the importance of Otto Weininger’s

* Milad Doroudian, a historian of the holocaust, is a graduate student at Simon Fraser University in B.C, Canada. He works as a journalist, has authored a book, and is currently the Senior Editor of The Art of Polemics Magazine. E-mail: mdoroudi@sfu.ca.
work to his own intellectual endeavours.¹ Emil Cioran, perhaps one of the most prominent intellectuals of the time, was heavily influenced by totalitarianism. Although, most of his work dealt with philosophical stances on existentialism, it did present new conceptions of political understanding. Interestingly, Cioran was very much influenced by Weininger, not necessarily just by his anti-semitism but also his “self-hate.” Cioran’s famous, but surely tendentious view of Romanian and German culture, as well as his impervious interest in totalitarianism was without a doubt very much connected to his beliefs of the ‘degeneracy’ of the Romanian people’s nation and culture.²

A belief in utter fragility, coupled paradoxically with the reaction for the need to subvert that brittleness, was a trend that was common among all Romanian intellectuals from the most liberal-conservatives, to the extreme nationalists in the country’s interwar period.

Leon Volovici posits that “in Romania, extremist nationalism meant first and foremost anti-semitism,” I on the other hand argue that nationalism first meant the intellectual ‘repair’ of a fragile identity, and anti-semitism was the medium, in other words the means which necessitated the ‘totality’ of Romanian thought.³ By “totality” I am referring to the philosophical stance that propagates an all encompassing extremism. In some intellectual circles the totality of Christian Orthodoxy as the absolute became

---

exceptionally salient. Jews, Hungarians, Romani, and Greeks became targets in the incessant campaign of Romanization, which was advocated in differing ways and degrees by all of the nation’s most prominent intellectuals. Nationalism was meant to consolidate a fabricated past and present, that promoted superficial homogeneity, which of course necessitated anti-semitism, the absolute othering, the black and white form of thought where Romanians represented one side, and the Jews the other. This was confluenced with the conceptual projections of peasantry, youth, and nation in all literary forms, and cultural markers. The extreme obsession of the new intellectuals with the ‘Jewish Question’ was not the direct result of nationalism, but rather a complex facet of it - the best way to interpret it perhaps is that it is was not that Jews were Jews, rather it is that they were not Romanian in the eyes of the intelligentsia. The only way for the’ Romanian,’ in the view of most intellectuals, to consolidate his or her identity, was to put himself and herself in opposition to the Jews - which of course was not always the case.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the way that intellectuals in the post-Trianon era, namely in the 1920’s and 1930’s regardless of the nature and propensities of their nationalism, formed their differing degrees of anti-semitism in relation to the way that they perceived the frailty of Romanian identity in the highly precarious era of ‘Greater’ Romania.\textsuperscript{10} Although Radu Ioanid alludes to this relationship, he still argues that the nature of nationalist elements sought to preserve Romanian identity, while I argue that it sought to consolidate, form, and concretize that identity. The works, as well as life and times of intellectuals such as A.C. Cuza, Nicolae Iorga, and others which represented the ‘old guard’ presented these paradoxical notions of Romanians tinged with the view of a lack of an established identity - which was the reason why they became so obsessed with defining historic identities for the ‘new nation-state.’ They in turn played a role in fostering the right contexts and perhaps better said the essential roots for extremist forms of nationalism as exhibited by those such as Emil Cioran, Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade and Nichifor Crainic, known as the ”Young Generation\textsuperscript{11} The prevalence of nationalism not just amid the rhetoric of these men of letters, but also on the political stage in Romania gave way to a unique form of nationalism imbued with the mysticism of Christian Orthodoxy, unlike any other polities in the European context at the time.\textsuperscript{12} The incessant perplexing identification process, regardless of the sheer complexities amid different thinkers, lay in the stark belief in the accommodation of newly defined principles which made up the culture, the


\textsuperscript{11} L. Volovici, \textit{Nationalist ideology and antisemitism: the case of Romanian intellectuals in the 1930’s}, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{12} Z. Ornea, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 114.
nation, and finally the Romanian himself/herself. The extreme forms of these beliefs of course were exhibited by the most severe elements such as the Iron Guard.\textsuperscript{13}

The preponderance of self-doubt amid the elite as exhibited in their works in the interwar period, as well as that of the old guard which played a substantial role in their roots, exhibited at least in part a proponency to underline the need for Romanian sovereignty.\textsuperscript{14} These feelings of doubt amid the intelligentsia, most likely led to their sense of fabricated nationalism, concentration on the memory of the past nation, and in a few cases most likely led to the fascist tendencies of the Iron Guard. The mysticism of nationalist rhetoric which placed Romanians, and their identity as seen through the discourse of intellectuals, and resulted in preponderant anti-semitism was the product of such views in the wider contexts of the new Greater Romania.\textsuperscript{15} In other words the fragility of Romanian identity necessitated its concretization, and extreme ‘purification’ in the case of many thinkers. This uncertainty of long standing ideas in the works of these intellectuals led to the uncontested and unfavourable need for the consolidation of a nation-state. This one element, along with the preponderance of long standing memory, the confluence of hatred, fear and inferiority in the contrast to Western Europe sparked a dissociation effect which manifested itself in its most extreme in the Iron Guard.

\textsuperscript{13} R. Clark, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{15} I. Livezeanu, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 12-13.
Guard, through anti-liberalism anti-capitalism, anti-socialism, anti-modernism, and a mentality of opposition to anything that did not exhibit the young, the peasant, and the solipsism of Orthodoxy. The mysticism of purified notions of society as shown by The Iron Guard and contrasted by the traditional fabrics of nationalism and anti-semitism in the rhetoric of individuals led to the movement of the nation towards its fascination of ‘totality.’

This paper will analyze how the ‘old guard,’ the ‘new’ intellectuals, and the extremists of the period did not merely take on the facets of old classical anti-semitism, but in fact the hatred of Jewry intensified through the rationalization of a contested identity - that was much more precarious as the result of new added territories in the 1920’s as well as a highly volatile political atmosphere. However, the question that must be asked is how is it that these intellectuals had such an effect on a population whose illiteracy rate was nearing 40% in 1930, and was at an outstanding 89% in the Old Kingdom? The immediate answer, albeit not a full one, is that extremist forces such as the Iron Guard, as well as the media simplified the rhetoric - mostly journalists who were very much influenced by intellectual discourse - for the Romanian populace. This, coupled with the populism of organizations such as the National-Christian Defence League, concretized the ideals of youth, peasantry, and Christian Orthodoxy from

---

17 R. Ioanid, op. cit., p. 18.
the abstractions of intellectual discourse, to the realities on the ground. In other words, intellectuals used the realities that affected peasants -which made up most of the population - such as their rural character in order to promote the view of philosophical and epistemological ‘totality.’ In other words, an all encompassing extremism which demanded isolationism, and in the context of some thinkers and the movement of “Iron Guardism,” - as established by some historians - the creation of a new type of ‘man’ motivated and driven by the ipseity of Christian Orthodoxy.

Scholars have argued that the “Jewish Question” was very much connected to the “peasant question” in Romania. Although there is, to an extent, some validity to this notion it was more likely that the “peasant question” was rather connected to the “Romanian question” in the sense that the precarious nature of the newly formed nation-state demanded a re-categorization and redefinition of the Romanian identity which included the peasant, yet again anti-semitism was both a by-product but also, paradoxically, the driving force in some instances. The complex views of the varied individuals and groups did not always cross paths, nor am I suggesting that there was mass consensus amid the different exhibitions of nationalism, and anti-semitism, however there is one generality that must be highlighted - namely the uncertainty of Romanian identity at the time. This same pattern was interestingly exhibited by those on the left, the

20 L. Volovici, op. cit., p. 22.
22 Z. Ornea, op. cit., p. 345.
media, and even some salient Jewish intellectuals such as Mihail Sebastian.\textsuperscript{24} The preponderance of this fact, perhaps can play a role in understanding the odd mysticism, and I dare say, anti-rational facets of extremist and nationalist philosophy that began to take over for the first time not only in the rhetoric of high-standing intellectuals but also in the motivations and actions of the youth.\textsuperscript{25} To understand, however, the proclivities of the framework I am trying to establish, which stands in some ways in contrast to current scholarship, it is necessary to look at Romania in the period in which nationalism and extremism became far more intertwined in general culture.

**The Perilous Romanian Nation-State**

After the First World War, during 1918 to 1920 Hungary was forced to concede Transylvania to the Kingdom of Romania. That, along with other major territories taken from Russia, and Bulgaria, the nation-state, along with its nationalists finally achieved their long-standing dream of incorporating the Romanian speaking people under one polity.\textsuperscript{26} Yet, the new territorial acquisitions also took in large populations of minorities, which were uncharacteristic compared to the relatively homogenous principalities of Wallachia and Moldova.\textsuperscript{27} After the Treaty of Trianon concretized the new borders, it became obvious that the newly acquired minorities which included 400,000 Jews and over a million Hungarians

\textsuperscript{25} R. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 42-44.
\textsuperscript{27} *Ibidem*, p. 270.
posed a problem for the nation-state that sought to consolidate its power not only in the region but also in the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{28} Although not directly, Nicolae Iorga’s work as a nationalist pamphleteer in the 1890’s, and his constant reiteration that Romanians had abandoned their sense of culture and history, bore fruit in the 1920’s when the state had instituted an intense Romanization program.\textsuperscript{29} Over the course of a few years, the state sought to abolish the cultural markers of the Hungarian minority by denying them schooling in their official language, as well as the imposition of the Romanian language on all facets of their lives.\textsuperscript{30} This of course causes even more acrimony between the populations, and the large, mostly urban, population of Transylvania.\textsuperscript{31} This led not only to the production of discussions of the identity of the Romanian people in newspapers, but also an increase in anti-semitic rhetoric as well.

In prominent publications such as \textit{Transylvania}, an intellectual literary magazine, read widely by the intelligentsia, defined the new formation of the country as “a new period” for the Romanian people. That particular article was followed by a long piece entitled “The Art The of Peasant” in which identity is discussed in great depth and associated with the cultural importance of the peasant, and his/her position in the ‘rebirth’

\textsuperscript{28} I. Livezeanu, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 136-137.
\textsuperscript{29} W. Bracewell, \textit{Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe}, Central European University Press, 2008, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{31} I. Livezeanu, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 136-137.
of the new nation.\textsuperscript{32} Although this is only one small instance, it is found amid many of the literary magazines and newspapers of the period, and it is indicative of the importance placed on what it meant to be Romanian in the early 1920’s. Amid the creation of a new precarious and highly unstable nation-state, it became obvious that such discourse was usually accompanied with the negative portrayal of Hungarians and Jews as seen in the highly nationalist newspaper \textit{Românul}.\textsuperscript{33} Nationalism, of course, was not only present in the literary elements of society at the time, as it became a salient characteristic of not just national and local parties but also most of the cultural and social organizations.\textsuperscript{34} Despite the fortuitous effort of Romanization in the 1920s, the reality was that in Transylvania, and Bessarabia which was acquired from Russia, the Romanian press, and most other cultural publications were rather insipid. For instance, in Bessarabia the Romanian press only made up four percent of the region, with the majority being Russian and Jewish, due to the large non-Romanian population.\textsuperscript{35} The importance of this lies in the fact that, in this period the press made an effort to promote Romanian culture and language, in order to make up for the lack of Romanian publications.

Radu Cinpoes best describes the period as one where nationalism “did not emerge from a feeling of national defeat, rather it grew as a result of consolidating the new multi-ethnic Romania.”\textsuperscript{36} This of course was very

\textsuperscript{34} I. Livezeanu, \textit{op. cit}., pp. 132-134.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibidem, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{36} R. Cinpoes, \textit{Nationalism and Identity in Romania: A History of Extreme Politics from the Birth of the State to EU Accession}, I.B. Tauris, 2010, p. 44.
much different from the nationalism of the 19th century that was mostly concentrated on the issue of independence. In the case of the 1920’s the lack of a cohesive national and organizational framework for this new heterogeneous polity, bred “anxiety” amid all levels of social and political organization.\textsuperscript{37} With that in mind however, that is not to say that the ‘old’ classical nationalism did not have an effect on the preponderance of extremist nationalism in the interwar period.

The importance of understanding the roots of nationalism, found in the vestiges of old 19th century conflicts, lies in the fact that it sheds light on the unique characteristics of the so called ‘new nationalism’ after the First World War, but also contextualizes the memories that intellectuals used in their own works to rationalize extremism.\textsuperscript{38} In fact, a great many of them based their conceptions of Romanianism connected to the ‘peasant’ on the old ideals of independence from the Ottoman empire in the 19th century, by placing them as the heroic elements against the historic enemy, namely the “Turk” in the eyes of Romanian society and culture.\textsuperscript{39} Usually considered as the period of ‘national reawakening’ by scholars in the 19th century, starting with the precipitous period of 1848, all the way up to the consolidation of independence in 1877, this has very much been considered to have been the result of Westernization not only in the politics of the

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibidem.}

\textsuperscript{38} L. Volovici, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{39} F. Kellogg, \textit{The Road To Romanian Independence}, Purdue University Press, 1995, p. 45.
leaders of the two principalities but also the ideals of the intellectuals, and men of letters at the time, from Mihai Eminescu to Alexandru Ioan Cuza.\textsuperscript{40}

The cultural signifiers that came about at the time, such as the nationalistic paintings of those such Constantin Daniel Rosenthal, or the poetry of Ion Luca Caragiale, set in motion the epithets which reverberated through the decades all the way up to the National-Legionary state set up in 1940. The notion of nationalism at the time, which of course became that much more established by the international recognition of the Kingdom of Romania in 1881, was usually one that was categorized as classical nationalism, based in the long drawn concepts of the folk, and mostly based on the importance of the Daco-Roman people that had lived in the area for millennia, as usually promoted by historians.\textsuperscript{41} These memories, coupled with anti-Ottoman sentiments, and the pervasive myth of the peasant undoubtedly established the roots, and the context which fostered the ideas and conceptions of important intellectuals in the period of 1881 to the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{42} Although, as aforementioned, nationalism in Romania at this time was similar to that of many other European nations, it was already beginning, in the rhetoric of many, to experience self-doubt and uncertainty in regards to identity, especially when many individuals sought to compare themselves to Western nations and cultures - particularly France.\textsuperscript{43} In a sense this trend of being influenced by Western culture, has been argued to have set the origins of doubt in the rhetoric of many thinkers, especially

\textsuperscript{40} R. Cinpoes, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 14-15
\textsuperscript{42} R. Ioanid, \textit{The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania}, pp. 117-118.
\textsuperscript{43} G. Bobango, \textit{The Emergence of the Romanian National State}, East European Quarterly, 1979, pp. viii, 42.
when considering the long historic political and regional differences that categorized the Romanian people especially since the first Ottoman invasions.

Even in this period of the early consolidation of identity, the issue of Jews and their position and presence was used, as in many other countries, as a way to identify what it meant to be Romanian. The incessant denial of emancipation, or rights for that matter to Jews in Romania in the late 19th century was very much predicated on the idea that they were consistently identified as foreigners, especially in law and by judicial bodies.\textsuperscript{44} It was, however Nicolae Iorga that made the case that Romania was such a multi-ethnic entity, that to maintain the sovereignty and validity of the nation-state necessitated the allowance of all minorities, including Jews, to be considered Romanian at least in terms of citizenship.\textsuperscript{45} Still, amid the paradoxical and at times contradicting views that Iorga produced, it was obvious that even he struggled with the definition of ‘Romaniaism,’ and what constituted the national character amid his increasingly impassioned nationalism.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} W. Oldson, The Historical and Nationalist Thought of Nicolae Iorga, Indiana University Press, 1969, pp. 84-85.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibidem, pp. 89-91.
The ‘Venerable’ Guard

It would be a mistake not to begin looking at the manifestation of Romanian nationalism with all of its characteristics through the late decades of the 19th century, and early ones of the 20th century through the works and intellectual frameworks of Nicolae Iorga, the most prolific and influential intellectual of the time. Although Iorga has been known in scholarship to have established the roots of the intertwining of nationalism, and the study of history, his work on the Romanian identity not in regards to past memory, but present cultural, social, and economic markers had always been salient to most of his contemporaries. The particular character of his nationalism which both opposed the then current trends at the turn of the century, which were mostly based off the romanticism of Mihai Eminescu, he rationalized the propensity of nationality, but also debated its unsteady nature. Amid his vast literary output, but also the promotion of what has been attributed as his ideological pursuit of Semănătorism, Iorga always put an emphasis on the importance of the peasant, but more importantly his/her association to the philosophical and literary forms in the preservation of the Romanian language.

At the turn of the 20th century, Iorga’s nationalism was mainly based on the secular notion of Romanianism and Latinism based on old memories of historic Romanian heroes, cultural norms, and literary figures.

---

48 W. Oldson, The Historical and Nationalist Thought of Nicolae Iorga, pp. 2-3.
50 Ibidem, p. 33.
all of which, in his view, played a role in bringing the Romanian closer to ‘his’ lands.\textsuperscript{51} At the same time Iorga also believed that Romania always sought to place itself “at the centre of European civilization,” similar to France and other European nations.\textsuperscript{52} With that in mind, at no point did Iorga propagate a sense of real xenophobia, except towards the Jews which he justified due to their “control” of the Romanian press and publishing houses, yet his nationalism and patriotism were very much extend to all the minorities living in Romania during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{53} In his view however, as seen through most of his works on the histories of the Romanian people, and the Ottoman Empire he emphasizes the importance of the people as the historic defenders of European Christianity, and as the centre of Eastern Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{54} Despite all of these basic frameworks of his intellectualism, which were both very much influential to, but still influenced by other intellectuals, what remains significant is the means by which he viewed the specificity of Romanian identity.

In Iorga’s view the essence of nationalism is the means by which the spirit or soul manifests itself in space, and the ‘vital energy’ of the Romanian people can only be found in its pure form in the Romanian peasant, which was the closest to his land, unlike most of the educated

\textsuperscript{51} W. Oldson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{53} W. Oldson, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 45-47.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibidem}.
urban dwellers.\textsuperscript{55} In the myriad of his publications, many of which took titles such as “What is nationalism?,” and “What is peoplehood?” he makes it obvious that fears for the Romanian’s inability to take hold of who he or she is because of his lack of not just historical understanding but also cultural understanding as seen in the ‘peasant’.\textsuperscript{56} Throughout his works on this topic, Iorga concentrates on defining not only the conceptual ideas of Romanian nationality but also the concepts of peoplehood and nation. He considered that the only way that a Romanian could manifest his full national spirit, was by controlling all the economic elements in his/her country.\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, the historic separation of the Romanian people, could only be achieved through the intensification of Romanian civilization, in what he called an “irredentist nationalism” that was particular to the Romanian people.\textsuperscript{58}

The extent of Iorga’s intellectualization of nationalism, and its historicity is exceptionally vast and complex; however throughout most of his publications he remained concerned with the concretization of Romanian identity, and its definition.\textsuperscript{59} Interestingly, he defined it through the peasantry, its absolute connections with ecclesiastical philosophy, but also international importance in the defence of the Christian religion, and as well as what he believed was the ‘rational’ exclusion of Jews from Romanian culture, and economic life.\textsuperscript{60} Iorga was one of the most read

\textsuperscript{57} W. Oldson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibidem}, pp. 51, 83.
\textsuperscript{59} N. Nagy-Talavera, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{60} W. Oldson, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 84-85.
historians, especially in the intellectual and academic circles surrounding the University of Iasi. His views of the Romanian nation most likely reverberated through the ideas of Romanian thinkers’ decades after his life. Yet he was not a singular entity, as he was surrounded by dozens of similar scholars, the most important and influential being Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol.

Xenopol, perhaps more so than Iorga, was fascinated with the Daco-Roman origins of the Romanian people, and in fact over the course of a six volume work, he argued that the Romanian people are the direct descendants of the Roman Empire, and thus the central figures in Eastern Christian Orthodoxy. His works, which were far more concentrated on the long history of the Romanian peasants, propagated a form of nationalism very similar to that of Iorga, still infused with anti-semitism, yet he did reject the use of violence against Romanian Jews. His “Mijloacele de îndreptare ale stării țărănimii române” - “The Means By Which To Right the State of Romanian Peasantry” discussed the connection between Romanian identity and the peasants, and concluded that to right the Romanian peasant would mean again the repair of Romanian culture and civilization. Xenopol, more so than Iorga, has been long considered to have had an important effect on the rise of nationalism in the early 20th

---

century, and even the formation of the Iron Guard.\textsuperscript{65} This connection similar to that of Iorga is based on the importance of scholarly output not only on the academic world of Romanian universities, but also the popular culture of the nation as well.\textsuperscript{66} Throughout both Xenopol, and Iorga’s long literary works, the consistent definition, re-definition of Romanian identity and on their ideas of how to fix it, along with the nation’s problems was preponderant.\textsuperscript{67}

The most interesting character, A.C. Cuza was both the connection between the old classical intellectual milieus, seen through his connections with Xenopol and Iorga, and that of the new intellectual movements especially considering that he was one of the founders of the National-Christian Defence League, along with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.\textsuperscript{68} Cuza, although was very much associated with the intellectual groups of the University of Iasi, still rejected the ‘rational’ nationalism of old guard, and placed the “Jewish Question” at the centre of his nationalism.\textsuperscript{69} Although, nowhere as prolific as his contemporaries, his influence was mainly found in the classroom, where he gave long anti-semitic lectures for hours. His theories on Judaism, were not in any way unique, and in fact followed the traditional rhetoric that Jews sought the destruction of Christian countries, and especially Romania because of its importance in Eastern Christianity.\textsuperscript{70} It is obvious that Cuza, was undoubtedly the link between the ‘old’

\textsuperscript{65} “Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania” (November, 2004), USHMM, pp. 13, 17; Leon Volovici, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{66} W. Oldson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{67} L. Boia, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 93-94.

\textsuperscript{68} R. Clark, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 151.


\textsuperscript{70} L. Volovici, \textit{op. cit.}, p.24.
nationalism espoused by cultural figures such as Mihai Eminescu, and the fiery views of extremists of those nicknamed the “generation of 1922.”

The salience of Iorga, Xenopol, and Cuza lies in their prominence as literary figures, historians, and theorists. It would be ludicrous to say that the direct links between each, and that of later generations were total, yet it would not be wrong to infer that they built the contexts of the uncertainty of Romanian identity, yet also they sought to find ways to fix and consolidate it in their own fashions. Iorga believed in the Romanian ‘spirit,’ and its connection to the peasant, while Xenopol sought to understand Romania through its origins to the Roman Empire. Cuza, who was also part of this group however, believed that the answer to the “Romanian question” lay directly in attacking Jews, and all problems presented by intellectual historians, such as the “peasant question” would be answered solely through the repudiation of all Jewish elements from Romanian society. In the end his rabid anti-semitism, still laid in that preponderant need to fix as what he saw the precarious nature of Romanian identity. Cuza of course moved beyond the conception of the Romanian nation-state’s essential absorption of all minorities as propagated by Iorga, and to an extent by Xenopol. His views lay solely in the belief that a “nation is the totality of

---

72 W. Oldson, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
individuals of the same blood.” Both Iorga and Cuza would become important politicians as the former served as prime minister, and the latter as minister of state under the Octavian Goga government. Both intellectuals also became more anti-semitic in their rhetoric especially after the formation of Greater Romania.

The ‘venerable’ guard, as I have coined them played an important role in influencing the People’s Party, set up in 1918 by the nationalist yet also populist Alexandru Averescu. An exceptionally anti-semitic organization, but more importantly one which began to propagate the idealized notion of the Romanian peasant, and even ‘Latinism’ even before most other nationalist groups and parties in the country. Ultimately the point remains that the problematic historical contexts of independence and nation-formation in which Iorga, Xenopol and Cuza lived through in the late 19th century, the same issues surrounding Romanian identity became intensified after 1918, when it was believed that a full union would solve all the nation’s problems, when in fact it created far more. It was something which very much affected the new generation of intellectuals and their view of Romanian nationality and nationalism.

The ‘New’ Intellectual

Throughout the numerous thinkers that gained prominence during the time before the First World War, but also in the post-war period the

---

75 Irina Livezeanu, op. cit., p. 22.
76 L. Volovici, op. cit., p. 51.
most important figures were without a doubt Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, Mircea Eliade, and Emil Cioran.\textsuperscript{77} The characteristics of each individual were undoubtedly different, as were their propensities for the way that they viewed the issue of nationalism, and national identification. Their views on the Romanian character in those turbulent times were very much intersected with each other, yet also based on the classical notions of Iorga and Xenopol’s view of nationality, and even Cuza’s anti-semitism.\textsuperscript{78} Each intellectual’s prominence, served to an extent as the bridging elements between the old guard, and the ‘new way’ of thinking. Some, such as Nichifor Crainic’s ideological currents such as Gândirism which propagated the ideals of the peasant, youth, and of course anti-semitism, played a substantial role in the circles of students, many of which would later be in some way active in the Iron Guard and other less extreme nationalist parties.\textsuperscript{79} Although scholars who have been fascinated with these figures, have usually concentrated on their nationalism and even admiration of totalitarianism, their views on what constituted a Romanian, in the most abstract sense but also a practical one can perhaps shed some light on their contributions to the “anxiety” of Romanianism at the time, and hence its reaction which although complex, had its roots in the precarious nature of Romanian identity, but also the way that it was conceptualized.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Z. Ornea, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibidem}, pp. 131-132.
\textsuperscript{80} R. Cinpoes, \textit{Nationalism and Identity in Romania: A History of Extreme Politics from the Birth of the State to EU Accession}, p. 44.
Nichifor Crainic’s most famous work *Orthodoxy and Ethnocracy*, published in 1938 was the telling culmination of his ideological frameworks that he advocated throughout his life.\(^8\) In this highly influential and polemical work he intertwines the racial character of the Romanian people with their historic legacy of Christian Orthodoxy.\(^9\) Crainic explains that the two elements which make up Romanian national life are inseparable, and infers that Iorga’s explanation of the Romanian ‘spirit’ as one found in Romanian cultural signifiers is not enough to understand the character of the nation.\(^10\) In fact he calls Iorga’s nationalism too “ecunimical,” and something that does not appreciate its natural affinity with Orthodoxy.\(^11\) It is interesting to note that Crainic attacked materialism and capitalism as the facets of a way of thinking and life that run contrary to the spiritism of Romanian existence.\(^12\) In this work, he reiterates that the only way for a Romanian to be in fact at ease with his or her nationality or identity, he or she must completely reject all foreign elements, especially the ideological precepts of Jewry in Romania - such as “the Talmud which is the Jewish falsification of the Old Testament.”\(^13\) Despite his antisemitism, there is in this work something rather obvious, and it is that of the “Romanian question,” similar to how many other writers at the time sought to provide the answer to Romania’s problem of nationality and international

---


\(^9\) *Ibidem*.

\(^10\) *Ibidem*, p. 214.

\(^11\) *Ibidem* p. 128.

\(^12\) *Ibidem*, p. 124.

\(^13\) *Ibidem*, p. 135.
position - in this case Nichifor Crainic brought the vestiges of nationalism closer to a more obvious ‘totality.’

It was however his literary magazine Gândirea which played a salient role in the proliferation of his nationalist ideals, but also a stage where intellectuals such as Pamfil Şeicaru discussed the anti-rational, and even mystic aspects of Romania’s ethnographic make-up. The immediate concentration on Romanian folklore and culture was always discussed through a lens of Orthodoxism, with both right and left leaning intellectuals contributing to the publication throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s.

Nichifor Crainic set up Gândirea not only to appeal to the new generation of intellectuals with his mystic, and at times esoteric and abstract ideological underpinnings but also to counter Nicolae Iorga’s famous Sămănătorismul, which it would later surpass in readership in the interwar period. Its success lay in its rejection of the importance of Westernism in Romanian culture, and its emphasis on the spirituality and nationhood of the new nation, which was very much correlated with the youth movements that were preponderant at the time - the most salient of course being the Iron Guard. Crainic regularly infused the ideals of old conservatism as propagated by Juninism, and even those such as Averescu,

---

87 M. Jay, Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas, p. 16.
89 Z. Ornea, op. cit., p. 94.
91 R. Clark, op. cit., p. 139.
but even there Crainic argues for the lack of originality in Romanian intellectuals circles as most did not draw from Romanian culture, but rather from foreign elements such as the West.\textsuperscript{92}

Crainic was not the only mystic, or pseudo-existentialist at the time, as Nae Ionescu who was very much found within the same inner circles, had also established similar spiritual and ideological guidelines, whose polemics were more conservative.\textsuperscript{93} Ionescu, who was a contributor to \textit{Gândirea}, propagated his ideology of \textit{Trăirism} which advocated the same spiritual underpinnings and connections to the Romanian peasant as most of his contemporaries, but rather based on the factual presentations of life.\textsuperscript{94} What is particularly interesting however is the fact that Nae Ionescu, as well as Nichifor Crainic, were virulent anti-semites, yet their anti-semitism did not stem from the classical nations of hatred of Judaism - it was not necessarily religious or racial in character.\textsuperscript{95} It was rather a necessity based of their ideologies, which later took on the form of racialized xenophobia. For instance in both \textit{Gândirism} and \textit{Trăirism} the main aim was the resuscitation of Romanian culture through the confluence of Orthodoxy and race, which argued that any elements outside those paradigms were invariably harmful to the Romanian character, and way of life.\textsuperscript{96} Their philosophies, which were seen by many as a new way to think, and live, were in fact as what they saw as their answers and responses to the incessant “Romanian Question.” In a 1931 issue, in a few articles by Lucian

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{92} N. Crainic, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{94} I. Livezeanu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 273; L. Volovici, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 72-73.
\end{flushleft}
Blaga and others, the metaphysical qualities of music and culture are discussed in relation to “identity.”

Although, the magazine at times dealt with philosophical issues, even drawing on Hegel’s dialectics and the problems with identity, it seems that the existentialism propagated was not simply one that sought to find answers to the ‘meaning of life,’ rather one that sought to find an identity.

Although Mircea Eliade hid his connections to the far-right during the advent of Communist Romania, his relations both personal and ideological especially to Trăirism and some of the other intellectuals were obvious. The importance of Eliade lies not only in his influence, but his more conservative emphasis on spirituality - at the time in the 1930’s he laid the roots which would make him the most prominent theologian in Romanian intellectual history. Eliade’s philosophies on folklore, religion, and most importantly myths were substantiated in the long historic memories of Romania’s Daco-Roman traits, which he struggled with in his early years. Despite this common thread however, even in Eliade’s philosophy on religion he sought to impose on the Romanian identity a sort of meaning which he found in Christian Orthodoxy. It should not be a surprise that after the Second World War, Eliade set up the first Romanian

---

98 Ibidem.
99 L. Volovici, op. cit., pp. 88, 125.
101 Ibidem, p. 82.
literary magazine that sought to defend Romanian identity - as in its spiritual character - from the universalism of Sovietism.

The spiritual and mystic character of these intellectuals however, was not only found in their intellectualization of the then current Romanian political issues, but I believe their rift away from the classical nationalism lay in their quest to define Romanian identity. Their lack of originality in their roots, as most of them taken from Iorga, Xenopol and many others - as not only made obvious by the content of their works but also their associations throughout their life and times - is of course not a surprise, yet their mix of raciality, spirituality, and Orthodoxy gave heed to a new wave of thought. In essence, these abstractions surrounding their ideas most likely necessitated a new type of ‘totality’ in their thinking, one which very much reverberated with their populist followers found in the youth, and extremists that did not spread their nationalism through their pen, but through their violent actions. The last individual who although aligned himself to the fascist tendencies of the new intellectual school, completely opposed the positivist views it propagated, which made him in the eyes of many a bit of an anomaly.

Emil Cioran, a nihilist who belonged to the school of intellectual pessimism had made his sympathies for totalitarianism in his polemical essay The Transfigurations of Romania, yet he attacked Romanian nationalism as futile and self-destructive. Cioran, although influenced by the trains of the ideological thought of Gândirism in its early days, moved

---

103 R. Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.
away from the spiritualism of Orthodoxy, and became more interested in the existentialist issues found more commonly in Western ideals.\textsuperscript{105} Both throughout his works, but also personal life, it is obvious that he rejected his Romanian identity, and some scholars have suggested that he was suffering from a prolonged “identity crisis,” which might be a reason why the facets of his nihilism were very much concerned with not just meaning in life, but the meaning of existence as seen through socio-cultural and political lenses.\textsuperscript{106} In a sense this explains his fascination with Otto Weininger, not just as an intellectual but also as a human being.\textsuperscript{107} He saw in him the materialization of intellectual self-rejection, and ultimately suicide which was a common theme in Cioran’s work.\textsuperscript{108}

Conclusion

The extent of Weininger’s actual influence on Romanian intellectuals, including Cioran, is very little known during this period, most likely due to their rejection of philosophy of a foreign character outside of Romania. However, it is known that the first translation of \textit{Sex and Character} appeared in Iasi in 1912 - in fact the whole book was not translated and printed, but only the chapter “Motherhood and Prostitution” which later gained some circulation around the halls of the University of

\textsuperscript{105} E. Cioran, \textit{The Transfiguration of Romania}, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 86.
Iasi. Still, the importance lies in the fact that the identity ‘crisis’ exhibited by Cioran as an individual, was also present in the works of all the right-wing intellectuals in the period. Although in a myriad of different ways, their reactions were always intellectually totalitarian in nature. Yet these patterns, to differing degrees, were also present amid those found on the left and even prominent Romanian Jewish thinkers.

Bibliography

Ancel, Jean, *The History of The Holocaust in Romania*, University of Nebraska Press, 2011.
Balan, Dinu, „Integration or Assimilation: Ethno-Cultural Frontiers and the De(Construction) of Jewish Identity during the 19th century in the Romanian Lands” in *Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, Edizioni Plus, 2007.


Bucur, Maria, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*, University of Pittsburgh, 2010.


Idem, „Constitința politică a studențimii”, in *Vremea*, No. 463, 15 Nov. 1936.


Idem, „Naționalism și antisemitism,” in *Noua Revistă Română*.


*Gândirea*, 1931, No. 1, Sibiu. Biblioteca Centrală Universitară,


Iorga, Nicolae, „Ce este o natiune” No IV (135), 1909.

Idem, „Ce este ‘poporul”, No. XVIII (269), 1923.

Idem, „Ce este ‘patria”, No. V. (26), 1910.


---*Transylvania: Revista Asociaţionii pentru literatura română si cultura poporului roman*, 1st December, 1920 No. 12, Biblioteca Centrală Universitară.
