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Some Considerations on the Evolution of Defining "Fascism"*

ROXANA MARIN

"The term 'fascism' can be applied to the entire broad genus only at the cost of depriving it of any specific content."¹

"It will be seen that, as used, the word 'Fascism' is almost entirely meaningless. In conversation, of course, it is used even more wildly than in print. I have heard it applied to farmers, shopkeepers, Social Credit, corporal punishment, fox-hunting, bull-fighting, the 1922 Committee, the 1941 Committee, Kipling, Gandhi, Chiang Kai-Shek, homosexuality, Priestley's broadcasts, Youth Hostels, astrology, women, dogs and I do not know what else."²

Simultaneously defined as a "palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism" imbued with *desiderata* of rebirth and regeneration³, a fatal symbiosis among transcendence, militarism, statism, nationalism and cleansing⁴, pure and simple "anti-modernism"⁵, the paradigm of the three negations⁶, vigorously denounced as "the product of capitalism"⁷, of "a cultural or moral breakdown in inter-war Europe"⁸ or classified as the resultant of "a certain stage of economic growth, or special historical sequence of national economic development"⁹, fascism still remains a matter under harsh and heated debate. One conspicuous indication for the on-going debate is exactly

* I would like to thank to Mr. Mihai Chioveanu, PhD, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, for his lectures, his suggestions and guidance in a bibliographical shaw and his support all throughout the writing of this text.

¹ Stanley G. PAYNE, "Spanish Fascism in Comparative Perspective", *Iberian Studies*, vol. II, no. 1, Spring 1973, pp. 3-12.

² George ORWELL, "What is Fascism?", *Tribune*, 1944 *apud* Sonia BROWNELL-ORWELL, Ian ANGUS (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. III: *As I Please, 1943-1945*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1968.

³ Roger GRIFFIN, *The Nature of Fascism*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, p. 44.

⁴ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) and New York, 2004.

⁵ Henry Ashby TURNER, Jr., "Fascism and Modernization", in IDEM (ed.), *Reappraisals of Fascism*, Franklin Watts, New York, 1975, pp. 117-140.

⁶ Ernst NOLTE, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, Holt Rhinehart & Winston, New York, 1965. Fascism is both resistance to modernity and to "transcendence".

⁷ Nicos POULANTZAS, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, NLB, London, 1974. Fascism is, more precisely, "an exceptional form of capitalist state".

⁸ George Lachmann MOSSE, "Towards a General Theory of Fascism", in IDEM (ed.), *International Fascism: New Thoughts and New Approaches*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills & London, 1979, pp. 1-41.

⁹ A.F.K. ORGANSKI, "Fascism and Modernization", in Stuart Joseph WOOLF (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1968, pp. 19-41.

the lack of any consensus on the definition of the generic fascism, while the constant distortion beyond recognition of the meaning and the connotations of the concept during half a century of usage in the common language makes the task of defining still more problematic for the scholarly. Moreover, it is particularly in times of social and economic crises, doubled by political instability and societal insecurity, that nationalist radicalism irrupts most vividly and violently. Hence, fascism, unpredictable and spontaneous, might easily find fertile soil in these unclear contexts, it becomes veritable fire in the minds of men once the match of socio-economic frustrations is stricken.

Since, nowadays, what seems to be the crisis of postmodernism had already swept away popular expectations and had seriously shaken national economies, it would not probably be a disparity to predict that fascism could at any moment reemerge as actual and potent. The conjecture of fascism as "the product of post-capitalism" could be, sooner or later, verified to some extent. It is in this conjuncture that the study of fascism becomes most actual and stringent, its findings and conclusions more enriching for society's knowledge and subsequent development, its outcomes more valuable for society not to repeat its extremely painful mistakes, its catastrophic historical wrongdoings. True, formulating a definition for "generic fascism" is instrumental, for it provides a normative and paradigmatic scheme for further inquiry into the topic. However, much more problematic and pertinent seems to be the identification and evaluation of those – sometimes pompously coined as – "exceptional" cases, *i.e.* the national, locally-based, perspectives of analysis when dealing with fascism.

Normatively, inventing a vocabulary that would constitute in an explanatory framework for the anatomy of fascism and its ambiguous and tortuous relations with communism, capitalism, radical rightism, modernization, etc., seems a Sisyphus's task. Descriptively, a scientific endeavor into the national histories of the countries facing fascism can offer a starting point in defining the phenomenon. In addition and by opposition, it could shed some light on newly emerged collocations that have the great merit of further confusing the fascist problematic: "neo-fascism", "post-fascism", even "stalino-fascism". Twenty-first century's movements that may resemble fascism are increasingly hard to analyze and explain in the absence of a viable, working definition of "generic fascism".

Two issues are particularly instrumental in addressing the topic of fascism during the first stages of inquiry and research. First, carefully – not skillfully – looking into and interpreting national histories of different countries experiencing fascism provides a crucial part of the explanation, most importantly and basically because national history tends to shape cultural traits and future developments. Of course, cultural relativism thesis is by no means a way to take in this sense, though the ingrate and pending position of what Malia calls "the Second Europe"¹ – in which Germany is central – can offer a hint regarding cultural, historical, developmental differences Europe was struggling with in the interwar period. Moreover, though one may convincingly argue that fascism was a sudden, unexpected event, a terrible shock wave that was meant to retreat somehow exactly because of its intensity or an accident, accounts on national histories and their lessons can definitely point out marks of cultural and political recurrence that can furthermore isolate preconditions necessary and sufficient for such episodes as fascism, making them predictable and avoidable, given some right political

¹ Martin E. MALIA, *History's Locomotives: Revolutions and the Making of the Modern World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2006, pp. 18-20.

decisions taken at the right time. *Sonderweg* is a quite clear example in this sense, being linked to both national history and political culture that puts a marked imprint on the allegedly eight cultural traits of German "spirit": authoritarianism, militarism, ethnocentrism, extreme nationalism, antisemitism, xenophobia, anti-liberalism and racism¹. But these cultural features are of no relevance on the rise of fascism, if the fashion in which the leaders perceive political power is neglected. The entire sequence of asematic comparisons, directly, immediately connected to aspects of national history (e.g. the absence of a revolution in 1848, but an aborted attempt of negotiated unification; the issue of late unification, that indicates moreover a problem of agreement and consensus at the level of elites; the very fact that the German unification was possible only through "blood and iron", i.e. the violent nature of the late unification; the continuous economic and political pressure that France primarily exerted on postwar defeated Germany, doubled by a stringently felt revanchist sentiment of the masses and a profound intrinsic popular frustration, etc.) conspicuously shows the asynchronism in terms of political (i.e. democratic) development that Germany had acutely struggled with, as compared to the highly developed Western democracies. Aspects linking national political culture with the national historical background are indeed problematic and pose serious difficulties in assessing their importance for the rise of fascism. The eight cultural characteristics, historically proven, coupled with the popular perception, dominant in Germany during the interwar period, that the country was backstabbed by both its external enemies on the international arena and, most importantly, its internal enemies (primarily the Jews), plus the "völkisch" ideology of the Wilhelminian era, installed the general mood that prepared the emergence of the fascist movement in Germany.

This is not to say, by all means, that a definition and an explanation of generic fascism are caducous and void of significance. Reading fascism from the prism of specific, nationally located, cases does not annul the relevance of the generic inquiry into those features the phenomenon displays in all – or the large majority of – particular cases. Devising such an explanatory-descriptive apparatus is nonetheless extremely challenging and, more often than not, it tends to reduce the case studies to cliché-istic instances. However, the importance of analyzing generic fascism lies in its merit of attempting at establishing a comprehensive definition that is usually the enumeration of those characteristics constituting the *minimum minimorum* of what historians, sociologists, political scientists, etc, coin as "fascism" or what Payne labels "the fascist minimum"².

¹ Gabriel Abraham ALMOND, Sidney VERBA, *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton University Press, 1963. The two scholars quote in their treatment of German case: Richard M. BRICKNER, *Is Germany Incurable ?*, J.B. Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1943; David RODNICK, *Postwar Germans: An Anthropologist's Account*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1948; Bertram H. SCHAFFNER, *Fatherland. A Study of Authoritarianism in the German Family*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1948. See also, Gabriele Lee McGOWAN, *The Radical Right in Germany: 1870 to the Present*, Pearson Education & Longman, Harlow (UK), 2002.

² Stanley G. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism, 1914-45*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 5. Payne's comprehensive definition of fascism is to be found in *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1980, pp. 3-21 and 191-212. In addition, Payne reproduces the quite compelling, multifaceted definition provided by Emilio Gentile, whose definitions alone deserve a separate lengthier account.

Some scholars (like Payne¹ or Mayer²) define "fascism" by distinguishing it from – or opposing it to – the "conservative-authoritarian" right and the "radical" right, or the "reactionary" and the "conservative" right, respectively. For others³, fascism appears as the *extremis* on an ideological *continuum*, as the extreme of the center. Still others adopt a Marxist stance in evaluating fascism as "a phenomenon of developed industrial states [of advanced "capitalist" societies], triggered by a severe socio-economic crisis"⁴, while Eugen Weber defines two subtypes of fascism in an attempt to reach the subtleties of the concept: "the fascist proper" (*i.e.* the Italian case, pragmatic, moderate, conservative) and "the national socialist" type (*i.e.* the German case, theoretically based, radical, much more destructive)⁵. Finally, Gilbert Allardyce defines the phenomenon through what is not: a generic concept, an ideology, a personality type⁶; and the author of *The Anatomy of Fascism* refers to it as a set of "mobilizing passions",

"a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethnical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion"⁷.

Others, be they democrats or Marxists, engage in sophisticated metaphors, further codifying and encrypting rather than actually conceptualizing the notion which is transformed into "something" dystopian virtually indefinable and inexplicable: Gramsci uses "morbid phenomen[on generated by] an *interregnum* [...] in which the

¹ Stanley G. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism, 1914-45*, cit., pp. 15-19

² Arno Joseph MAYER, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytic Framework*, Harper & Row, New York, 1971, pp. 54-69 and 119.

³ Seymour Martin LIPSET, "Fascism – Left, Right and Centre", in IDEM, *The Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (Maryland), 1981, pp. 131-137.

⁴ Martin KITCHEN, *Fascism*, Macmillan & St. Martin's Press, London & Basingstoke, 1976, pp. 83-91. Furthermore, Kitchen continues in the same Marxist vein, by considering fascism "a response to a large and organized working class, [...] an offensive [against it]", recruiting its followers from a "politicized, threatened, and frightened petite bourgeoisie [and, sometimes, from an "aristocracy of labour"]" and bearing as the main social function the "stabiliza[tion], strengthening, and [the] transform[ation of] capitalist property relations". Finally, fascism is "a terror regime which dispenses with all the trappings of parliamentary democracy". Throughout his characterization, the scholar maintains the same Marxist, economically-deterministic rhetoric.

⁵ Eugen WEBER, *Varieties of Fascism. Doctrines of Revolution in 20th Century*, Van Nostrand, New York, 1964. Payne discusses the Weberian dichotomy in *A History of Fascism, 1914-45*, cit., pp. 465-466.

⁶ Gilbert ALLARDYCE, "What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept", in *American Historical Review*, vol. 84, no. 2, April 1979, pp. 367-388. Allardyce is famous for having rejected the idea of "generic fascism".

⁷ Robert PAXTON, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Penguin Books, London, 2005, p. 218. Nine are the "mobilizing passions". Except its excessive preoccupation with ideological prerequisites, Paxton's definition is one of the most comprehensive.

old id dying and the new cannot be born"¹, Peter Drucker employs "black magic"², Daniel Guérin prefers the collocation "the brown plague"³.

Following Eatwell⁴, whose attempt in identifying the "intellectual foundations" of fascism marks the first part of his account on the history of the movement, pointing out the ideas of anachronically placed and diversely constructed thinkers, drawn from various national and intellectual traditions, the inquiry in the philosophical fundamentals of fascism seems at first glance futile. It might be, indeed, misplaced and overemphasized. Subjectively picking up and carefully collecting traces and nuances of the fascist ideology in the works of so different, though path-breaking, intellectuals (e.g. from Rousseau and Hegel to Nietzsche and Gobineau, from Goethe and Schelling to Barrès and Chamberlain, from Le Bon to Sorel, from Darwinism to the first instances of elite theory) seems far-fetched and incongruous an endeavor. Although a laudable attempt, it involves too directly and too markedly the researcher's subjectivity and the fragmentary nature of such an attempt: the researcher tends to stress on those specific points in the *oeuvres* of some arbitrarily chosen thinkers in order to suits best his final interest, to sustain his initial hypothesis, by neglecting at the same time those ideas that would otherwise contradict or be irrelevant to the philosophical and ideological construct of fascism.

Hence, while endeavoring in the "intellectual foundations" of the fascist ideology might prove to be futile, due to the *quantum* of subjectivity and superfluous reading involved, national histories of those countries in which fascism manifested itself more profoundly and organizational features of those movements perceived as "fascist" are cornerstones in the explanatory model of generic fascism. Skimming through quite diverse right-wing or radical conservative organizations and movements during the first half of the 20th century, one may finally gather those defining characteristics of the fascist groups. Their successfulness in seizing and subsequently exercising power can be explained as a complex, a compound of structure, culture and contingency, from membership unity and dominant political culture to the nature of the regime under which they prepared their conquest of political power and the socio-economic situation of the country prior to the installation of the fascist government. In this sense, both successful and unsuccessful cases of fascist episodes are historically relevant, for they constitute essentially an incentive in identifying the causes and circumstances

¹ Antonio GRAMSCI, *Passato e presente*, Einaudi, Turin, 1951, p. 38, cited and translated in Thomas R. BATES (ed.), "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 36, no. 2, April-June 1975, p. 358.

² Peter DRUCKER, "Black Magic", in Roger GRIFFIN (ed.), *Fascism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1995, pp. 27-271.

³ Daniel GUÉRIN, *The Brown Plague: Travels in late Weimar and Early Nazi Germany*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1994 [originally published in French as *Sur La Fascisme I – La Peste Brune*, Maspero, Paris, 1965, followed by the famous *Sur La Fascisme II – Fascisme et Grand Capital*, in the same year]. In the old Marxist tradition, fascism is "not only an instrument at the service of big business [of heavy industry], but, at the same time a mystical upheaval of the pauperized and discontented petty-bourgeoisie". Alongside Rajani Palme Dutt (*Fascism and Social Revolution*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1934), Guerin is considered among the first scholars to develop a revisionist (i.e. leftist) stance of the so-called "Marxist theory of fascism". For Dutt, fascism is "the most complete expression of the whole tendency of modern capitalism in decay".

⁴ Roger EATWELL, *Fascism. A History*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, New York, 1996, pp. 3-16.

that made a very contingent number of fascist groups turn into movements and, concurrently, a still more limited number of fascist movements turn into well-entrenched, established fascist regimes.

The Manichean vision of the world, of the irreducible struggle between good and bad with no shades of gray, – a characteristic of fascism mentioned by Roger Eatwell¹ – hints to the unwillingness to compromise of the fascist groups and to what Nietzsche, a Nazi favorite reading, had previously labeled as “the will to power”². Nevertheless, in practice, this Manichean perspective proved to be at least approximate and putative: the reduced number of successful cases of fully-fledged fascist regimes demonstrates that only pragmatic fascist movements, capable of indulging themselves in small, but important compromises, give-and-take activities or half-measures, were actually able to implement durable institutions and procedures that would eventually reflect this Manicheanism. But unleashing this black-and-white stance too soon in the evolution of the movement or hanging on to idealist, purely ideological, Manichean messages like grim death proved pedestrian to the attempt to acquire and exercise power and noxious to the fate of the movement itself. Those groups seeking idealistically the total control of the society, unwilling to nuance their radical, extreme ideas in their initial moments of expression on the political scene, were meant to fail simply because of their idealism and radicalism. To this point, a “biological” dimension of the nature and the means of organization of the fascist groups must be added: the successful cases of fascist regimes pertain to those groups formed of middle-aged experienced, versatile individuals capable to adjust their methods for advancing their ultimate goal. Conversely, the unsuccessful episodes, those many abortive moments of fascism of the interwar period, are associated with the groups and movements whose leaders, members and followers were young people, holding extremely radical conceptions, idealizing these conceptions; these young people had fought the First World War and ended up completely disappointed of their governments following their immense effort on the battlefield and the great number of human and material losses. Hans Mommsen discusses “cumulative radicalization”³ in the case of successful fascist regimes (*i.e.* increased radicalization during the last phases of the regime, with bargain and compromise in the initial steps of the movement’s organization and accession to power), that would run counter to a “cumulative moderation” in the internal dynamics of the regime that constantly jeopardized the successfulness of the Italian case.

Both pieces of collective memory and authorized histories refer to the 20th century as both the culmination of progress and civilization and a fatidic and agonizing period, imbued with horrors, devastating wars, malefic creations of a tired human spirit, the pure expression of threadbare evil, a parenthesis in the glorious history of humanity. After all, the 20th century bred the two infamous totalitarianisms, communism and fascism, exhausting the very meaning of the word “evil”, *maximum maximorum* on the scale of systematic violence, two overall terrifying political experiences, so exactly characterized by genocidal massacres and authoritarian and criminal propensities. Hence, studying fascism is inseparably linked to the study of the 20th century.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. xix.

² Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, transl. by Ian C. Johnston, first published in 1887, in Leipzig, in the 2nd Essay (XII and XVIII) and in the 3rd Essay (XI, XIV, XV, XVIII).

³ Hans MOMMSEN, “National-Socialism: Continuity and Change”, in Walter LAQUEUR (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 151-192/pp. 178-179.

Secondly, fascism, as did communism, imprinted the human mind with a dangerous range of unrelinquished traumas and anxieties. It is this painful series of profoundly disturbing sentiments that would sooner or later, though surely, outburst in other shocking historical episodes. This is another valid reason that would justify the study of fascism, at a basic, rather psychological, level.

Another aspect in the study of fascism – as in the study of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, as well – lies in the popular perceptions associated with movements and governments of fascist nature. One cannot neglect or refute the terrible social and economic difficulties the countries in which fascism expressed itself to the fullest experienced *a priori* to the installation of dictatorship: one of the factors conducive to the rise of fascism had been identified as being the grave socio-economic situation these countries found themselves in the postwar period, following the devastating World War I, the status of defeated in the war and the world economic crisis of 1929-1933. On the background of the "red threat", the fascist movements throughout Europe appeared as a viable solution for the extended crisis, a controllable solution for the conservative governments of Central and Eastern Europe. In the short run, the fascist rule provided welfare for the people and ameliorated the economic crisis, whileedulcorating the interwar social grievances. As it remained in history, the "slogan" of Nazism during the war was "keeping the people at home happy". The social security offered by the regime ensured the minimum support of the people and the overall acceptance for its infamous policies: it assured the regime's stability. The conjecture of fascism creating a "one-dimensional society" and favoring welfare was advanced in the 60s by Herbert Marcuse, who argued that fascism installed only in advanced industrial societies where increasing affluence facilitated the dilution of the social conflict, the annulment of public debate, the exhaustion and the absorption and annihilation of any form of opposition or resistance. The argument that welfare subdues opposition to the regime is still under scrutiny and remains to be convincingly tested¹.

It has become conspicuous that classical "totalitarian paradigm", put forward by Hannah Arendt in her magistral 1951' *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, seems insufficient in explaining the subtleties and complexities of a regime whose rise and consolidation remain problematic for sophisticated explanatory models. The same holds true for 1966' Karl Friedrich' and Brzezinski's "philosopher's stone" for the study of the species of totalitarianisms, panacea for all dead-ends in the inquiries into fascist polities, the "six-point syndrome of inter-related traits" combining the characteristics of: an official ideology; a single mass party, usually led by an all-powerful leader; a system of terroristic police control; monopoly control of the means of mass communication; a monopoly of arms, and the central control of the economy². Though both theoretical frameworks construct paradigms of irrefutable significance in the definition of both "fascism" and "communism", they display a series of conceptual limitations, due primarily to their rigid scheme. Karl D. Bracher's interpretation of totalitarianism as a revolutionary form of authoritarianism works as a buffer zone between Arendt's and Friedrich's studies³. Wolfgang Sauer's discussion of "National Socialism" as a facet

¹ Herbert MARCUSE, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Routledge, London, 1964, p. 5.

² Carl Joachim FRIEDRICH, Zbigniew BRZEZINSKI (eds.), *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1966, p. 9.

³ Karl Dietrich BRACHER, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Consequences of National Socialism*, Penguin University Books, Harmondsworth (UK), 1973.

of "totalitarianism", on the other hand, seems an application of both studies, hence straightening their descriptive precision¹. After all, the Italian fascism proclaimed the aim of the "*Stato Totalitario*", the strong state, as the fundament for a renewed, more powerful and more extended *Impero Romano*. Among the classical accounts on fascism, Ernst Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* represents a monumental scientific explanatory endeavor; Nolte's definition of fascism is commonsensical, unavoidable in every discussion on the topic; however, fascism as "antimarxism, antiliberalism, anticonservatism", centered on the leadership principle, on a party army and bearing the aim of totalitarianism² does not explain too much on the fascist construct. It is true, general dissatisfaction with the entire political *spectrum*, after a world war and a world economic crisis, depressively evolved into the refutation of all established, consecrated ideological formulas, and the dangerous search for "revolutionary" alternatives: as Mann perceptively observes, popularly, "modernity was desirable but dangerous, liberalism was corrupt or disorderly, socialism meant chaos, secularism threatened moral absolutes"³, etc. Hence, the overall feeling that all existing political conceptions dramatically failed and disappointed was acutely widespread. But, the evolution from disenchantment to complete negation is problematic in explanation following Nolte's definition.

Nevertheless, the contingent character of the pioneering models of defining and understanding "totalitarianism", generally, and "fascism", specifically, is explainable through the novelty of the regime in the 20th century; these limitations have been somehow overcome during the last decades of research. Even so, the consecrated theoretical models are not to be neglected, since they provide the basics for distinguishing species of totalitarianism from autocracy and authoritarianism or from traditional forms of dictatorship (e.g. seeking "total" control, the imperative for popular mobilization and energizing the atomized and inert masses for the purpose of abolishing "the private" and creating "the new man", the prerequisite of a modern industrialized state, etc.). The prominence of the dictatorship, spelled out in the slogan "everything for the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state", the domination of the charismatic leader under the shield of the "*Führerprinzip*" (as Klaus Hildebrand concludes in the German case, "one should not talk about National Socialism but about Hitlerism"⁴, pointing to the centrality of the leader in decision-making mechanisms), the alleged anti-capitalist character in economy – were all features of fascism that were one by one refuted or reconfigured in new understandings after the first wave of writings on fascism and totalitarianism in the 50s and 60s has eventually passed. The recent literature on fascism takes into account the instable character of Italian fascist regime and even some degree of power division

¹ Wolfgang SAUER, "National Socialism: Totalitarianism or Fascism?", *American Historical Review*, vol. LXXIII, no. 2, December 1967, pp. 404-422.

² Ernst NOLTE, *The Crisis of Liberal System and the Fascist Movements*, Mentor Books, Dublin, 1995, p. 385. (originally published as *Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen*, R. Piper, Munich, 1968).

³ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit., p. 355.

⁴ Klaus HILDEBRAND, quoted without exact reference in Timothy W. MASON, "Intention and Explanation. A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism", in Jane CAPLAN (ed.), *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class. Essays by Tim Mason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 212-230/p. 218. In respect of National-Socialism, it is Tim Mason to introduce the notion of "primacy of politics".

at the higher levels of leadership in the case of Nazism (as "a more or less anarchic polycracy"¹). Moreover, the volume and the magnitude of fascist historiography have reached considerable proportions. The large majority of pieces of academic inquiry tackles primarily aspects of organization of fascist movements and the consolidation of fascist regimes. The evolution of the study is conspicuous. Somewhat in answering Isaac Deutscher's worries that "posterity will understand all that even less than we [*i.e.* the contemporaneous scholarly to fascism] do"², the scientific endeavors approaching fascism managed admirably to surpass the allegedly insurmountable obstacle posed by the "absolutely unique character" of these regimes.

From the "totalitarian paradigm" of the 50s and 60s, the interpretation of "fascism as crisis of modernity" dominant in the 70s evolved in the 90s in an increasing focus on racism, as a defining trait of fascism, with its extreme deviation in Nazism, the Holocaust. In this series of reinterpretations and theoretical reconfigurations, a central role is played by the studies aiming a reevaluation of the role of ideology in the consolidation of the fascist movements and, furthermore, in the perpetuation of a fascist regime. The topic bears a special significance for contemporaneity, simply because it puts a particular emphasis on the impact of ideas on current realities and on leadership, and the capacity of destructive conceptions to influence and reshape even well-entrenched theoretical constructs and philosophical traditions. Generally, intense, strong political messages are disseminated towards the masses, welcoming a tremendous appeal, especially when they are accompanied by a series of powerful, emotionally charged symbols to resonate with the overwhelming sentiments of the public. Young people, particularly, found the fascist ideology "revolutionary" indeed, and were the first to proclaim their support for it³. Militancy in propagating the ideology proved vital in the fascist case. Eventually an advanced, 20th century' composite of Enlightenment's "party of humanity" and Romanticism's exacerbation of feelings and emotions⁴ constituted the quintessence of fascist philosophical construct, by its dissolution of century-long ideological conflicts. It is important to remember the classical theory of "totalitarianism", put forward by Hannah Arendt's inaugural works, and its conspicuous shortcomings in discussing the place of ideology in the construction of both fascist movement and regime: classical inquiries argued for an "ideological emptiness" at the core of the fascist system, since the "totalitarian leader" himself does not sincerely believe in his own ideology; ideology is merely a

¹Saul FRIEDLÄNDER, "From Anti-Semitism to Extermination: A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies Toward the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation", *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 16, 1984, pp. 1-50/p. 18, discussing the functionalist perspective regarding the implementation of anti-Jewish policies in the Third Reich.

²Isaac DEUTSCHER, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & London, 1968, p. 163.

³Zibordi, cited by F. Carsten, argues the youngsters' support ("those declassified by the war, the youngsters who went to the front before they were twenty years old and came back at the age of 23 or 24, being neither able nor willing to return to their studies or their places of work in a regular fashion") was marginal as compared to the lower middle classes in the towns and in the countryside, the "petty bourgeoisie". Fascism becomes thusly "the class struggle of the lower middle class which exists between capitalism and proletariat as the third [group] between two combatants" (Luigi Salvatorelli). Both Giovanni Zibordi and Luigi Salvatorelli are quoted in Francis L. CARSTEN, "Interpretations of Fascism", in Walter LAQUEUR (ed.), *Fascism...cit.*, p. 416.

⁴Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit., p. 365.

rhetorical instrument useful in controlling, energizing and mobilizing the masses¹. But, its falsified and counterfeited character can explain little of the spread it enjoyed in Europe at the end of the interwar period and elsewhere in the second half of the 20th century. The recent literature tends to valorize the centrality of ideology in the fascist contexts, by opposing the series of actions motivated by pure ideological belief to the importance of those actions having as an end the capture of all means of control, manipulation and domination (the totalitarian paradigm). Here, the divide between "intentionalism" and "functionalism" for the special case of Nazism is telling of the shift the position of ideology suffered in the scientific literature on fascism and can be extended to the Italian example, as well.

Eventually, it is of paramount importance to consider as well the functional concept of "enemy" in the fascist *imaginarium*. The actuality of such a discussion is marked by the increasingly concerning political, social, national and ethnical conflicts in the developing regions of the world, which are masked under the disguise of "fascist" movements. If one considers as a working definition for "fascism" Nolte's triple negation, completed by Payne with a new series of negations, it might be argued that the "enemies" of fascism were an infinite succession of political, social or national groups that ultimately comprised virtually the entire society. At a second glance, though initially confusing – rather intentionally, as to draw more popular support –, the fascist ideological construct had, from its infancy, isolated and conceptualized the notion of "enemy", most notably (at least for the German case) in the ethnic sphere, but also in the political (the communists, the democrats) and the social fields. The identification of the "enemy" suffered some mutations in the evolution from the movement to the regime, but generally, it translated the same agenda, expressed the same antagonisms, focused on the same target. The concept had to be humanized in order to stir hatred, mobilization, action, in order to initiate and to motivate the "revolutionary fight". The extermination, the violent annihilation and elimination of the enemy was perceived as a means for cleansing the "vital space", but the actual undertaking against the "enemies" radicalized gradually, being more or less systematized and carefully prepared and conducted and reaching the climax during the years of war.

In the same line of argumentation, the concept of "revolution" in the definition and interpretation of fascist movements is increasingly problematic, since "revolution" in itself poses incommensurable difficulties in definition². In the pages of the impressive volume of scholarly research dedicated to revolutions, one can easily find references to the Italian fascism and Nazism as being instances of revolutionary forms³. At

¹Hannah ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1951.

²Karl Kautsky would conclude about the concept: "There are few concept over which there has been so much contention as that of 'revolution' [...] Few things are so ambiguous" (Karl KAUTSKY, *The Social Revolution*, C.H. Kerr, Chicago, 1902, p. 5). Isaac Kramick, among others, reiterates the same idea: "Revolutionaries [...] have usually devoted as much time and energy debating the nature of revolution as they have in efforts to bring one about. No surprise, then, that students of revolution have an equally difficult time in describing and defining the phenomenon of revolution" (Isaac KRAMNICK, "Reflections on Revolution: Definition and Explanation in Recent Scholarship", *History and Theory*, vol. 11, no. 1, January 1972, p. 26). The same can be applied, contingently, to fascism.

³See, for instance, Eugen WEBER, "Revolution ? Counterrevolution ? What Revolution ?", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 9, no. 2, April 1974, pp. 3-47, or, most prominently, George L. MOSSE, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism*, Howard Fertig, New York,

the opposite pole, Marxist scholars define "fascism" clearly and irrefutably at the antipodes of the Marxist *dictatum*, by labeling the former "counter-revolutionary", a monstrous product, a crisis of capitalism, reactionary device of capitalist deceitful maneuvers, etc.¹ Recently, opposing Griffin's insistence on "palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism", young leftist scholar Dave Renton conceives fascism outside the logic of a "revolution", not primarily as "an ideology, but as a specific form of reactionary mass movement", bearing an intrinsic contradiction, because it is shaped "at one

1999. The label of "revolution" attributed to fascism generically seems to express something quite different from what the usage of the word "revolution" meant in 1789 or 1917. According to Close, the usage of the term "revolution" is generally adopted in connection to fascisms "partly to justify their departure from legality, partly to claim originality and importance for their achievements" (David H. CLOSE, "The Meaning of Revolution", in David CLOSE, Carl BRIDGE (eds.), *Revolution: A History of the Idea*, Croom Helm, London & Sydney, 1985, p. 13).

¹ Mussolini himself, in his definition of "fascism" refers generously to a "revolution": "Fascism [...] believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism – born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples [...] Fascism is the complete opposite of [...] Marxian Socialism [...] Fascism, now and always, believes in holiness and in heroism; that is to say, in actions influenced by no economic motive, direct or indirect. And if the economic conception of history be denied [...], it follows that the existence of an unchangeable and unchanging class-war is also denied. And above all Fascism denies that class-war can be the preponderant force in the transformation of society. [...] Fascism combats the whole complex system of democratic ideology, and repudiates it [...] Fascism denies that the majority, by the simple fact that it is a majority, can direct human society [...] ad it affirms the immutable, beneficial and fruitful inequality of mankind, which can never be permanently leveled [...] Fascism denies, in democracy, the absurd conventional untruth of political equality dressed out in the garb of collective irresponsibility, and the myth of 'happiness' and indefinite progress [...] The foundation of Fascism is the conception of the State, its character, its duty, and its aim. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative [...] [T]he Fascist State is itself conscious and has itself a will and a personality – thus it may be called the 'ethnic' State [...] The Fascist State organizes the nation, but leaves a sufficient margin of liberty to the individual; the latter is deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom, but retains what is essential [...] For Fascism, the growth of empire, that is to say the expansion of the nation, is an essential manifestation of vitality [...] Fascism is the doctrine best adapted to represent the tendencies and the aspirations of a people [...] But empire demands discipline, the coordination of all forces and a deeply felt sense of duty and sacrifice; this fact explains many aspects of the practical working of the regime [...], the necessarily severe measures which must be taken against those who would oppose this spontaneous and inevitable movement [...] If every age has its own characteristic doctrine, there are a thousand signs which point to Fascism as the characteristic doctrine of our time. For if a doctrine must be a living thing, this is proved by the fact that Fascism has created a living faith; and this faith is very powerful in the minds of men" (Benito MUSSOLINI, "Fascism", in *Italian Encyclopedia*, first published in 1932, quoted in Carl COHEN (ed.), *Communism, Fascism and Democracy: The Theoretical Foundations*, 2nd ed., Random House, New York, 1972, pp. 328-339). Mussolini points out quite clearly the ideological features of the movement: anti-pacifist, anti-Marxist, anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian; the exacerbation of "sacrifice", vitalism, of natural inequality between men, of spontaneity and dynamism, of war; statism, the expansionist-imperialist pretence, the holistic-organicist view of the society, "ethnic" nationalism, the apology (or necessity?) of violence and discipline, authoritarianism, the centrality of ideological "faith", etc.

and the same time by mass support and reactionary goals"¹. Renton's definition is a hermeneutical extension of the earlier definition put forward by (self-entitled) post-Marxist theoretician Mihály Vajda: fascism is "a mass movement" that assumed for itself the task of "solving the nation-specific developmental problems of industrial capitalism" under severe crisis². Somehow accounting for the Marxist evolutions in the study of fascism.

Every large-scale, well-documented, well-entrenched, famous, completely reliable scientific inquiry into fascism concludes with a final section dedicated to the relevance of fascism nowadays, including contemporaneous movements that display resembling features reminding of a fascist revival, groups or actions deemed to be fascist through their outlook, simple persons marked as fascist by their current *M.O.* or by a disturbing conviction. Thus, it might seem that fascism poses a persistent danger, outside its perennial theoretical problematic, in day-to-day life, in the public sphere, in the space of the democratic polity. A sense of intrinsic fear regarding the possibilities of fascist revival, even in the 21st century and in a democratic context *tout court*, is part of the explanation regarding the misleading usage of the term "fascism". The actual chances that fascism would resurface are difficult to measure – they might depend on the occurrence of a major socio-economic crisis, on the general popular disenchantment with mainstream politics, on ethnic-national ambiguities, on the rise of authoritarian alternatives and loyalties, etc. –, but the continuing concern in this sense justifies to the fullest the historical studies constantly undertaken by scholars outside the contingent spaces where fascism represented a historical reality. Mann, for instance, expresses his deep reservations regarding a fascist "resurrection", though admitting that, inescapably, one can find the five distinguishable features of fascism "scattered around the world, probably in varied combinations"³: the "neo-fascist", Holocaust-denial groups of the 70s lacked paramilitarism and popular support, the "neo-fascist" parties (e.g. MSI in Italy, NDP in Germany, BNP in UK, CP'86 in the Netherlands) registered really insignificant electoral scores, and the extreme right populism or "radical populism" (e.g. "Front National" in France, "Republikaners" in Germany, the Austrian Freedom Party, "Volksunie" and "Vlaams Blok" in Belgium, DPP in Denmark, FrP in Norway) gained some attention though its anti-immigration stance. These parties gained the attention and the interest of the scholarly, as well. As expected, the perspectives on the topic of fascist revival within the party systems of some Western nations are varied, even divergent to some extent. The large majority of the *academia*, nonetheless, refutes the fascist character *tout court* of these organizations: they are either having a purely electoral agenda, betting on populism and negationism, or they display a conspicuous ambivalence towards "the state".

In an in-depth account on the evolution of "Marxist theory of fascism", A. James Gregor would observe the impressive progresses in the definition of the concept, but would simultaneously warn on an "obsolete" distinction between leftist and rightist biasness: "Our error has been to attempt to force each revolutionary instance

¹ Dave RENTON, *Fascism: Theory and Practice*, Pluto Press, London & Sterling (Virginia), 1999, pp. 3, 104 and 106. Fascism is "primarily a form of political mobilization, shaped by a distinctive relationship between a particular ideology and a specific form of mass movement".

² Mihály VAJDA, *Fascism as a Mass Movement*, Allison and Busby, London, 1976.

³ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit., p. 365.

into a procrustean bed of preconceptions"¹. Naked to specific symbolism, Marxism, as studied by Gregor, is but a version of generic fascism. This blunt and shocking conclusion reads to the inauguration of a new epoch of definitions, interpretations, reconsiderations in the field of "fascism studies", transforming "fascism" into a never-ending territory of research, capable of no exhaustiveness.

Some Accounts on the Peculiarities of Fascism in Romania

As a particular case among the European fascisms, the Romanian fascism displays its own difficulties of analysis, posing further problems of definition. The main features of the Iron Guard movement², its inception and its rise to power, its very short period in the government – all its evolution became intriguing for the scholars of fascism. Some (Nagy-Talavera³, for instance) figured that a comparative treatment with the neighboring Hungarian Arrow Cross would be telling in accounting for some sort of specificity of Eastern European fascism. Nevertheless, the differences between the two cases, the Hungarian and the Romanian ones, are conspicuous; they are not to be overlooked. One cannot neglect, for instance, the very fact that the two countries were, at the time of the Paris Peace Settlement in 1919, on the opposite camps, Romania among the victors, Hungary as one of the great defeated countries. Moreover, a look into the "elite political cultures" of the two states would be illuminating, as well, in assessing the contingencies in treating Hungarian and Romanian fascisms similarly.

As Karen Barkey has already observed in her inquiry into types of nationalism in East-Central Europe in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the two countries experienced different types of nationhood and fashions of conceiving the national construct. Barkey ventures in differentiating, when discussing the Romanian and Hungarian cases before and after the First World War, between "political/ assimilationist nationalism" and "ethnic, exclusionary nationalism"⁴. The

¹ A. James GREGOR, *The Faces of Janus. Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2000, p. x.

² From the very outset, it is important to mention that the Legion of the Archangel Michael – referred in the Western literature as the Iron Guard – is not the only movement in the late interwar Romania that displayed fascist traits: (1) the League for National Christian Defense – LANC (a prominent radically antisemitic group, led by A.C. Cuza), (2) the National Agrarian Party (presenting conspicuous features of authoritarianism and nationalism, led by O. Goga, what Payne would label as "radical right"), (3) the National Socialist Party of Romania – PSNR (as its very name denotes, a poor attempt to imitate the German model, initiated by Ștefan Tătărescu). An attempt to form a Nazi-styled organization of the Romanian Germans was registered in 1932-33, following the success of Hitler's formation in Germany. After 1935, tiny and largely insignificant groups (a "National Socialist Christian Peasant Party", a "Romanian Sacred Holy League", "a Military Nationalist Front") and "secessionist" groups from the Legion ("Swastika of Fire", "Crusade of Romanianism", etc.) crowded the political scene and the Romanian society in the second part of the 30s. Lastly, as Payne observes in *A History of Fascism* (pp. 278-279), the entire Romanian political scene departed from democratic practice, shifting to moderate or radical forms of authoritarianism and nationalism.

³ Nicolas M. NAGY-TALAVERA, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford (California), 1970.

⁴ Karen BARKEY, "Negotiated Paths to Nationhood: a Comparison of Hungary and Romania in the Early Twentieth Century", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 14, no. 3,

antagonism between some sort of inclusive and exclusive nationalisms is attenuated, blurred, since, through demographic and modernization mutations, one country can experience the two types of conceiving nationhood during different historical episodes. It is the case of Hungary, but not of Romania. Hungary and Romania are epitomes for fascist moments born out of similar conceptions of nationhood. On the one hand, Hungary had developed an assimilationist nationalism up to the Treaty of Trianon of 1919, taking into account that it had incorporated 53.35% of its population as minority groups (Germans, Jews, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Ruthenes, Russians, etc.¹); prior to 1919, Hungary nurtured a quite peculiar form of "civic nationalism in the East", acting as a veritable "melting pot" for its cohabiting nationalities before losing two-thirds of its territory. After 1919, Hungary – now rather homogeneous in ethnic terms –, adopted a type of exclusionary nationalism. On the other hand, Romania, a small, ethnically homogeneous state before 1918, practiced a nationalist rhetoric that proved predominantly ethnic, cultural traits; after the Great Unification, doubling its size and incorporating not only Romanians, but large numbers of minorities (Hungarians, Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, Germans – a total of 30% of the population²), Romania stuck to the same exclusionary, ethnic conception of nationhood. This perpetuation of exclusionary, xenophobic nationalism is, according to Barkey, the expression of a consensus among elites regarding the manner in which nation is to be conceived (singular if one considers the divides on party lines regarding social, political, economic developments) and an unusual attachment between professionalized politicians and public intellectuals³. While divergence flourished in the programme of state- and nation-building among the dominant political parties of the interwar period, "Romanization" was on every party's political agenda.

Sideration, perplexity and confusion had characterized the first attempts to analyze, explain and, finally, define the Romanian fascism. Questions were raised regarding: the strange setting of a successful anti-bourgeois, anti-Marxist, anti-democratic movement in an underdeveloped, preponderantly agrarian country, with neither democratic experience nor socialist turmoil (due to the absence of a numerous, well-entrenched, well organized working class); the peculiarity of a reactionary, revanchist movement in a country which gained considerably from the First World War; the social composition of the support fascism enjoyed in Romania (*i.e.* largely students, not middle class bourgeois layers and workers); the insistence on other ideological aspects as the ones inaugurated and imposed by the Italian and German successful fascisms (*e.g.* a certain "cult of death"), etc. In a remarkable – through its

Fall 2000, pp. 497-531/p. 499. Hence, what Barkey suggests is that one particular philosophical translation of nation-building cannot comprehensibly and exhaustively characterize the nationalism nurtured by a certain country. Visions on nationality and nationhood are ever-changeable, even volatile.

¹ For Hungary, the demographical statistics are to be found in Aurel C. POPOVICI, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Grossösterreich*, Verlag von B. Elischer Nachfolger, Leipzig, 1906, *apud* Carlile Aylmer MACARTNEY, *National States and National Minorities*, Russell and Russell, New York, 1968, p. 121.

² For Romania, the demographical statistics are to be found in Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1950*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (New York), 1995, and Karen BARKEY, "Negotiated Paths to Nationhood...cit.", p. 524.

³ N. Iorga's and A.C. Cuza's cases are paradigmatic for Barkey.

courage – attempt, Zevedei Barbu¹ essays at explaining the emergence of fascism even in the post-WWI victorious Romania: it was not the extremely humiliating and demoralizing defeat and the subsequent terrible revanchist sentiments both at the elite level and grass-roots level, but the apparent general popular confusion and bewilderment with the legacy of the war, with the unbelievable gains of the Peace Settlements at the end of the war, with the management of a larger territory and a numerous – quite diverse ethnically – population composing the perpetual dream of a "Greater Romania". This considerable effort to cope with the new realities, for both the elite and the bulk of the population, is similar, for Barbu, to the psychological impact experienced by a "*nouveau riche*". Difficult to assess this psychological turmoil of a "*nouveau riche*"²: this is the reason why Barbu introduces a series of new considerations and observations regarding the peculiarity of the Romanian case of fascism, such as: the provinciality of the movement (a sense of this provinciality is to be identified partly in the German case, as well, if one cares to remember that Dexler's initially insignificant political formation – "club" might be suitable – appeared in the highly industrialized Munich, a bastion of the "working class"), the lack of any coherent, serious democratic attempts to reform in the interwar period (an interesting perspective, peculiar in an intellectual landscape in which the majority of scholars praises the Romanian "democratic tradition" of the period 1918-1939), the inability to internalize democratic values in the compound of both "elite political culture" and "community political culture"³, the extension of the franchise (hence, the entry into the political life of new social classes, more prone to radicalism, and the revision towards populism and propaganda, of the political mechanisms of persuasion), the intrinsic multi-ethnic character of the nation (and the great number of ethnic Jews, particularly

¹Zevedei BARBU, "Rumania", in Stuart Joseph WOOLF (ed.), *European Fascism*, University of Reading, Vintage Books, London & New York, 1968, pp. 146-166.

²Though Payne attempts an explanation: "[T]his enormous expansion [inaugurated by the Trianon Peace Settlement], together with Romania's severe social, economic, and cultural backwardness, posed problems of the utmost severity. The country was faced at one and the same time with the challenge of building a greatly expanded and multiethnic nation, creating a democratic political system, and modernizing one of the weakest economies in eastern Europe. Partial democratization of some institutions only accelerated a kind of national identity crisis and a prolonged search for alternatives" (Stanley G. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (Wisconsin), 1996, p. 277 [italics added]). The keyword here is "backwardness" and the role played by this peril in the emergence of fascism in Romania, if one considers the consecrated cases of Italy and Germany, two highly industrialized countries (despite the economical injuries following the defeat in the "Great War"). It is unclear in Payne and Barbu if backwardness is favorizing or inhibiting factor for the appearance of fascism, since the cases examined are ambivalent. The economic determinism is but a problem in approaching the Romanian case.

³The phrase "*elite political culture*", as distinguishable from a "*community political culture*" ["a set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the historical relationships between regime and community"] and a "*regime political culture*" ["a set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the institutional definition of social, economic, and political life"], is to be found in Kenneth JOWITT, *The New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, pp. 51-52 and 54-56. "Elite political culture" is "a set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge as response to and consequence of a given elite's identity-forming experiences."

in Moldavia), the pressure exerted by the "red threat" coming from the East (some sort of fear of a new Russian domination, after centuries of suzerainty, limited autonomy, partial independence, etc.), the ambiguous, charismatic-authoritarian figure of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the intellectual-demagogic antisemitism of Cuza, etc. All these features, Barbu observes, made fascism conspicuously imminent for the Romanian society at the end of the interwar period. Barbu further insists, in an interesting study about the "psycho-historical and sociological perspectives on the Iron Guard"¹, on the peculiarities and specificities of the Romanian fascist movement – with an application on the movement led by Codreanu, other fascist groups in the interwar Romania being largely neglected –: the fascist *desideratum* of the "New Man" as differently conceived in the case of legionarism (*i.e.* the legionnaire "New Man" should have been primarily an Orthodox Romanian, completely loyal, devoted to the Fatherland, therefore inclined to martyrdom), the call for social cohesion and unity around the supervising figure of God, of the "Conducător" and of a divine "mission" of spiritual, moral regeneration and national reinvigoration, terrorism and assassinate as favorite political instruments, etc.

The focus of the scholarly in respect to the Romanian case remained its proto- and pre-fascist features, fully expressed in the emergence and evolution of the Iron Guard. For a prolonged period, especially in the Western *imaginarium*, legionarism appeared as veiled in an aura of exotism, mysticism, extreme Orthodoxism, transcendent national and spiritual revival, cult of personality doubled by charismatic leadership. Payne's emphasis on palingenetic, populist, ultranationalist manifestations oriented towards rebirth and regeneration would seem to characterize Romanian fascism quite properly. However, beyond the Balkan, exotic, dark, spiritual allure the Western writers tend to stress, legionarism is, as Ernst Nolte famously noted, "the most interesting and the most complex fascist movement, because like geological formations of superimposed layers it presents at once both prefascist and radically fascist characteristics"². Actually, it is Eugen Weber to become one of the most given to historian for the study of legionarism, his fortunate interest for the Legion of Archangel Michael and its impact on the Romanian politics during WWII being translated into impressive studies of historical-sociological-culturalist flavors concerning the emergence and the rise to power of what other scholars saw an "abortive fascism"³. In a quite different fashion, Renzo De Felice thoroughly repudiates the fascist nature of the legionary phenomenon; for the Italian historian of fascism, the movement led by Codreanu is instead a fully-fledged manifestation of nationalist populism⁴, since it renounced

¹ Zevedei BARBU, "Psycho-Historical and Sociological Perspectives on the Iron Guard, the Fascist Movement of Romania", in Stein U. LARSE, Bernt HAGTVET, Jan P. MYKLEBUST (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, Universitetsforlaget & Columbia University Press, Bergen & New York, 1980, pp. 379-394.

² Ernst NOLTE, *Die Faschistischen Bewegungen*, DTV, Munich, 1966, p. 227 *apud* Stanley G. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, cit., p. 280.

³ Peter WILES, for instance, fails to see the fascist element(s) in the legionary movement; his emphasis is rather on populism. See Peter WILES, "A Syndrome, Not A Doctrine. Some Elementary Theses on Populism", in Ghiță IONESCU, Ernest GELLNER (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weinfeld & Nicholson, London, 1969, pp. 166-179/176-177.

⁴ Renzo de FELICE, "Der Faschismus, Ein Interview von Michael A Leeden", Nachwort von Jens Petersen, Stuttgart, 1977 *apud* Armin HEINEM, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail. O*

the entire ideological *compendium* (from the insistence on intense industrialization to secularism) characterizing fascism in the West.

One can refer, in the case of Romanian fascism, of the immanent nature of an "integral nationalism"¹, a peculiar form of nationalist sentiment; it becomes conspicuous that "integral" nationalism employs in its construction (*i.e.* strategies, rhetoric, ideas) predominantly the blood and race bounds between individuals in a historically-defined community, common traditions and a shared ancestry. By spotting the propensities towards aspects of common ethnic and historical bondage, this type of nationalism is designed to augment the differences between "nations" and, in addition, to exacerbate the superiority of one "chosen nation" that has the obligation – due specifically to its cultural-ethnic prevalence – to govern over the other nations². Emerged as an alternative between westernizers and nativists, the Romanian fascism, rather closer to the latter, appeared as a viable ideological response to socio-economic and identity dilemmas. Deeply concerned with what Eatwell would see as the "intellectual foundations" of Romanian fascism (*i.e.* a particular emphasis on Eminescu's mystical nationalism of the 19th century, the conservative nationalism of the Germanophile "Junimea", C. Stere's peasant populism of the beginning of the 20th century, Mihail Manoilescu's "neoliberal" version of corporatism, etc.), Nagy-Talavera is right in stressing both the similarities between the Iron Guard and the consecrated models (especially the Italian one, with which the Romanian movement shares the mechanisms of implementing terror and the organizational scheme) and the uniqueness of the movement (the "ideological deviations" to traditional, Orthodox values, its popular appeal, etc.) Yet another specificity, especially in the debuting instances of the movement, is its student membership and its general appeal to university circles; Weber would explain that university *milieux*, as autonomous *loci* for public debate, for deliberative endeavors concerning the national problems and the course of politics, work as incubators for frequently radical, extreme political alternatives. Moreover, the students' involvement in the radicalization of politics is symptomatic for backward societies, in which students formed the only organized group, possessing a sort of group consciousness or solidarity, in the absence of a numerous, unionized working class and a coherently organized peasantry. The impact of students in legionarism is immanent, since the movement stressed on youth, vitality, vigour, powerful will, dynamism, spontaneity, radicalism. But the hypothesis that the fascist movement – as

contribuție la problema fascismului internațional, transl. from German by Cornelia and Delia Eșianu, Humanitas, București, 1999, p. 21.

¹ The collocation "integral nationalism" is to be found for the first time in Charles Maurras, "Le Nationalisme intégral", *Le Soleil*, on the 2nd of March 1900, and it was soon taken over in various classification of nationalism(s) (for instance, in Andrew VINCENT, "Liberal Nationalism: an Irresponsible Compound ?", *Political Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, June 1997, pp. 275-295 (by differentiating between (1) "liberal *Risorgimento*" nationalism, (2) "traditionalist conservative" nationalism, and (3) "integral" nationalism), in Peter ALTER, *Nationalism*, Edward Arnold, London, 1989, pp. 99-117 ("*Risorgimento*", "reform", and "integral" nationalism) and Carlton J. HAYES, *Essays in Nationalism*, Macmillan, New York, 1926, ch. 4 (a sequence of "humanitarian", "Jacobin", "liberal", "traditionalist", "economic", "protectionist" and "integral totalitarian" nationalisms).

² On the role of "integral nationalism" in shaping the Romanian fascism, see Robert BIDELEUX, Ian JEFFRIES, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 387-389.

expressed by the Iron Guard –, being initially a student movement, was to be marginal in Romanian politics, aggregating the interests of a specific social group, can easily be refuted: it is interesting how the students' demands superposed and coincided with the amorphous mass of peasants, transforming the Iron Guard into a mass movement, with a significant support¹. The radical conceptions of some "public intellectuals", popular figures of the time, can add to this. From a small, very radical student group to the "legionary national state" of September 14, 1940-February, 14, 1941 (with the vice-presidency of the Council of Ministers, four ministries and five state under-secretaries and, above all, with the Legion being the "only movement recognized by the new state"²), there was an important and long way to go, in which radicalized politics, violence and antisemitism came to draw larger and larger popular support.

One may hypothesize that legionarism is another "form without substance" in the Romanian institutional and societal landscape during the interwar period: though sharing many features with the Western and Central European "prototypes", fascism in Romania was extremely nationalist indeed, but it encompassed, as well, traditionalist and Orthodoxist ideological aspects and it appealed to different classes, other than the middle-class bourgeoisie or some segments of the working class, since these social groups were numerically reduced in an underdeveloped Romania. Therefore, fascism in Romania could not have been a crisis of the declining bourgeoisie – as the Marxist postulate insistently proclaims –, simply because the Romanian bourgeoisie was still in its infancy, on a background powerfully dominated by a rural *milieu* and an agrarian economy. As opposed to the successful instances of fascism in Italy and Germany, the Iron Guard professed a return to traditional, ancestral values, on which a process of divinely-supervised regeneration of the nation would commence. Conversely, it was even vocal in opposing the bourgeoisie, by vividly attacking the decadent, cosmopolitan bourgeois values and lifestyle, its corrupt and vicious means of accumulating wealth and power. In doing so, the guardists could not have distinguished themselves from the socialists and communists, even if the two "revolutionary" movements did so on different grounds, their political-ideological motivations being different. But the far/ extreme left in Romania was virtually non-existent, in the absence of a numerous, organized working class. One should add to this the elite consensus on the organic

¹ A short description of students' social *status* and the inception of radicalism among them is to be found in Zvi YAVETZ, "An Eyewitness Note: Reflections on the Rumanian Iron Guard", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 26, nos. 3-4, September 1991: "The Impact of Western Nationalisms: Essays Dedicated to Walter Z. Laqueur on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday", pp. 597-610 (especially pp. 599-602).

² Dinu C. GIURESCU, Stephen FISCHER-GALAȚI (eds.), *Romania: A Historical Perspective*, East European Monographs & Columbia University Press, Boulder & New York, 1998, pp. 330-331. The intransigency of the Legion, its unwillingness to compromise, its insistence on the imperative of (a too idealistic) "revolution", once it seized power in 1940 (in a limited, "dualist" share of power with General Antonescu), remembers Mussolini's tone when explaining the initial intentions, the "missions" of fascism, in 1932: "A legionary regime cannot survive with a liberal economic structure [...] The legionary regime needs a government legionary in spirit, a *totalitarian* government. Totalitarian government means *the political monopoly of a movement*, the movement that has won, *exclusiveness* [...] In legionary Romania there is no place for any other party [...] The legionary regime implies control over the press [...], complete control over the economy, in opposition to the old liberal economy [...] Any blocking of *the legionary revolution* is fatal for the country" (Horia Sima, quoted in Dinu C. GIURESCU, Stephen FISCHER-GALAȚI (eds.), *Romania...cit.*, p. 331 [italics added]).

nature of the "nation", on the conception of "nationhood" and "national identity"; the general propensity towards collectivism, communitarianism. A political force virtually impossible to negotiate with, the Iron Guard, through its intransigent – if not single-minded – leaders and through an extremely radical ideology, was totally unwilling to compromise; this specious unwillingness to compromise and negotiation will delay its rise to power and would rapidly trigger its end. Its revolutionary mission will never be abandoned by both followers and leadership, particularly when its presence in the government assured its control of power¹. Each local formation or breach (called "*cuib*" – nest) shared a quite sophisticated initiation ceremony for the new members and the obedience to the "six fundamental laws": discipline, work, silence, education, mutual aid and honor². The peculiarity of the Romanian fascist movement – a peculiarity that generated its quite short live in power, as well – lies also in its insistence, at the level of ideological construct, to spiritual transcendence through perpetual warfare within the telluric, ordinary, human, "sinful" space, a war waged against the ethnically and morally impure, against the enemies of the Fatherland: "All for the Fatherland" ("*Totul pentru Țară*") was the slogan to guide the actions of the guardists, for the sake of the "nation", interestingly conceived as "the Fatherland". Irrespective of the final state of the legionnaire-warrior – since the desirability of the martyrdom was clearly expressed in the ideas of the Iron Guard –, the (physical) destruction of the enemy was imminent, imperatively necessary, for the advance of the community. The metaphor of Nietzschean "will to power" was contingently employed in the Iron Guard's rhetoric, for it implied also a feeble sense of individualism, incompatible with the communitarian, organicist *dogma* of Romanian fascism. This community should have undergone a process of purification, a *catharsis* through extreme violence, that would have led to its redemption and whose main generator would have been Codreanu's movement; individual sacrifice – that should be accepted without any opposition, but with joy – was asked in this militancy for ultimate collective redemption. An unprecedented cult of death, a peculiar morbidity in this respect, were cherished within the movement, a trait of "political theology" quite unique, since generally a sense of vitality, a propensity towards spontaneity and vibrant, active life were central in both Italian and German fascist rhetoric. The accent put on the virtual imperative of martyrdom and on the following significance of it (including the emphasis on the cult of death) was perceived as a specificity of legionarism by the scholarly on fascism, as an opposition towards secularism and as a return to religiosity, to Orthodox identity³. The resort to religion as identity indicator in the autochthonous fascist discourse is indeed unusual, though partly explicable. Romania exacerbated from the time of the national emancipation of Transylvania

¹ A reconsideration of the concept of "revolution" in respect to legionarism is necessary. Its consecrated reactionary forms indicated rather a desire to restoration to a traditional, rural, Orthodox, morally superior, ethnically homogeneous, patriotically devoted Romania. This is the reason, as Weber perceptively noticed, the ideal of "fascist revolution" was abandoned by the Iron Guard in favor of "national unity", of restoration of the "golden age" of divine, ethic and ethnic, purity. See, Eugen WEBER, "The Man of the Archangel", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1966, pp. 101-126/p. 105.

² Stanley G. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, cit., p. 285.

³ Accounts on the specificities of legionnaire "doctrine" are to be found in Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, East European Monographs & Colombia University Press, New York, 1990, pp. 83, 98-174.

and of the unionist movement its "enclave" character in the region, of both language (one of the descendents of the Roman legacy) and religion (similarly, Hungary would stress on its insularity in terms of language, its Finno-Ugric specificity). The Romanic-Orthodox¹ blend provided the fundament underpinning the xenophobic nationalism and a type of fanaticism-cum-self-destructiveness unparalleled by any other fascist manifestation. In pointing out the marked differences between fascism in the West and in the East, Weber convincingly reasons that, being in no need to compromise with the moderate, centrist forces on the political scene against a competing leftist extremism (virtually absent in agrarian Romania), fascism here could radicalize to a fuller extent, could preach revolution more freely and was able to work its imagination upon an ideological sophistication of "totalitarian" reconfiguration unrestrainedly by any other radical-revolutionary alternative². Moreover, in respect to its "enemies" – the "enemies" of the entire nation, after all –, the Legion of the Archangel Michael was "possibly the only other fascist movement as vehemently antisemitic as German Nazis"³, in a favorable internal context, in which the national cultural traits indicated conspicuously a well-entrenched xenophobic popular attitude and a multitude of discriminatory policies.

The movement lacked coherence in its political program, a programmatic ambiguity to be found especially in the German case. Similarly to paradigmatic cases, the Romanian fascists emphasized on the novelty of their agenda, the prospect of an upcoming spiritual purification of the nation, the creation of the "new man", the thorough reconfiguration of institutional framework, on the basis of collectivity, a corporate-like social advance and an economic development founded on communal, organic mechanisms. Somehow contrarily, Dylan Riley refers to legionarism as an instance of "statist fascism", resembling to the Italian and Spanish cases, the "result of associational development in the context of a failed hegemonic politics"⁴; a "state-led associational development" (as opposed to "autonomous" or "elite-led associational development") generating a certain type of fascist movement would characterize the Romanian model. Riley identifies five "stages of Romania's path to fascism": (1) and (2) the inability of forging both "intraclass" and "interclass" hegemony (*i.e.* deep fragmentation) at the level of social elite, following the adoption of the Constitution of 1866, and at the level of the peasantry, following the organization of the popular banks started in 1903; (3) the attempt to form an "interclass hegemony" after WWI, through the pursuit of reconfiguring political, socio-economic, cultural reforms to accommodate the reality of a "Greater", multiethnic, multi-problematic Romania (*e.g.* a radical land reform, the introduction of universal suffrage, the first instances of

¹ Contrarily to the centrality of Christian Orthodox teachings in the construction of the Legion's ideology, Constantin Iordachi argues that the autochthonous fascist ideology was inspired by the "European Romantic historical ideologies of social palingenesis", accessed through three main channels: (1) "the tradition of national messianism"; (2) "the sacralization of politics", and (3) "the conservative tradition of religious-patriotic militarism" (Constantin IORDACHI, "God's Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania", in IDEM (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies. New Perspectives*, Routledge, London & New York, 2010, pp. 316-357.

² Eugen WEBER, "The Man of the Archangel", *cit.*, p. 105.

³ Stanley G. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, *cit.*, p. 281.

⁴ Dylan J. RILEY, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870-1945*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (Maryland), 2010, p. 144.

mass parties, etc.); (4) the inability, clear by the early 30s, of both the Liberals and the Peasants to develop a veritable democratic regime; (5) the overcoming by Codreanu's "party fascism" of two basic problems: (a) lacking a "strong organizational basis" (in the absence of workers' unionism and rural cooperativism) and (b) the fact that "the overweening power of the political elite in Romania undermined the development of a political contest between left and right"¹.

Finally, Emanuel Turczynski perceives and analyzes the fascist phenomenon in Romania as a moral and spiritual reaction to the centuries-dominant Oriental lifestyle². Turczynski's and Riley's perspectives are (re-)considered partially in the impressive study on the "political problems of an agrarian state", authored by Henry L. Roberts³, who attempts a reevaluation of the historical autochthonous circumstances that inaugurated fascism in interwar Romania and the forms of manifestation of legionarism. The attempts described above by Riley, to rapid democratization and industrialization, destabilized the Romanian society, which, in response, reactivated and accessed as a defensive mechanisms its behavioral and attitudinal deviations, from inherent antisemitism, exacerbated nationalism, xenophobic adversity, to anti-Communist augmented fear, disregard for and opposition to parliamentarism, a preference for violent political resolutions, an inclination to ruralism and communal-organicist conception of society, and a powerful desire to transform and reconfigure, on moral/religious grounds, the totality of this society. Roberts defines Romanian fascism as a political current epitomized by negationism towards the existing political alternatives, towards the institutional framework, a plague started in the intellectual spheres contaminating the lower *strata*, through its recourse to irrationality. Despite the harsh observations regarding the composition of the legionary movement – Alexandru Crețianu would identify among the militants "largely pseudo-intellectual riff-raff unable or unwilling to make a decent living, and who sought refuge in a mystic nationalism, the only reality of which was a ferocious antisemitism", "white-collar workers, unsuccessful students, and various dilettanti transformed into political zealots, [...] *déclassés* and [representatives of the] *lumpenproletariat*"⁴ –, one should not forget that these legionnaires preached central moral virtues to which any Romanian – any human being – perennially aspires: honesty, responsibility, correctness, reliability, vitality, the will to transform, hard work for a better world, industriousness⁵.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 144-147. Riley strangely distinguishes between "party fascism" (traditionally represented by the Iron Guard) and "statist fascism" (embodied by the Carolist dictatorship).

² Emanuel TURCZYNSKI, "The Background of Romanian Fascism", in Peter F. SUGAR (ed.), *Native Fascism in the Successor States, 1918-1945*, ABC-Clio, Santa Barbara (California), 1971, pp. 98-112.

³ Henry L. ROBERTS, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1951.

⁴ Alexandru CREȚIANU, *The Lost Opportunity*, J. Cape, London, 1957, p. 20.

⁵ Eugen WEBER, "The Man of the Archangel", *cit.*, p. 106.