JOURNAL

OF

ROMANIAN STUDIES

Vol. 3, No. 1 (2021)

Contents

REVIEWS

Articles

The Shape of Interwar Romanian History

Roland Clark

Abstract: *This article reviews some of the major frameworks that histori-ans use to tell the stories of interwar Romania, asking why they became pop-ular and how useful they are in the twenty-first century. It examines the problems of periodization and the placement of the nation-state at the cen-ter of Romanian history, then traces the evolution of four major framing narratives: (1) the problems of a small state; (2) the collapse of democracy; (3) the march of progress; and (4) the consequences of state-building and centralization. Such approaches give the impression that interwar Romania was an intolerant, chauvinistic society that marginalized anyone who was not male, Orthodox, and ethnically Romanian. The best new histories, how-ever, not only uncover alternative, suppressed narratives but also reveal how people were able to live and sometimes thrive in a society as diverse as interwar Romania undeniably was.*

How does one tell the story of what happened in Greater Romania be-tween the two world wars? Was it "a time like no other" (*odată ca nicio-dată*), as in the fables, or did it share continuities, institutions, identities, and discourses with other stories from different eras? When does the story begin and end? Who are its main characters and who was simply there as background? What are the important themes that attentive read-ers of history books should take away with them? In Penelope Corfield's terms, how does "continuity (or persistence)", fit with "micro-change (or momentum) and macro-change (or turbulence)"?[1] No single framework can encapsulate the rich messiness of reality, but historians choose whichever frames help them make sense of the past most clearly. As the German historian Ulrich Herbert has pointed out, various historians have framed the story of twentieth century Europe as one of the conflict be-tween the bourgeoisie and the working classes, of the creation of the West and the German *Sonderweg*, of a battle between liberalism, fascism, and

---

1   Penelope J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 212.

communism, or of the climax and passing of high modernity.[2] This article reviews some of the major frameworks that historians use to tell the stories of interwar Romania, asking why they became popular and how useful they are in the twenty-first century. Jean-François Lyotard has famously argued that in the postmodern world we no longer rely on a handful of "grand narratives," but on multiple small narratives.[3] Yet as I argue below, most historians of Romania continue to use many of the same broad, overarching frameworks that historical actors themselves used to make sense of their world.

All frameworks privilege some traces of the past over others, marginalizing certain stories through omission. They also reflect the interests and mental maps of those social groups they were created for.[4] Before we reproduce these we need to ask whose purposes they serve, whom they empower, and whom they exclude. Moreover, in the same way that the scientific paradigms discussed by Thomas Kuhn shift when new evidence suggests that older paradigms do not describe reality well enough, frameworks are only useful insofar as they explain the evidence that we have available.[5] Has the unprecedented access to national archives and the archives of the Securitate that we have had over the past twenty years produced new narratives and/or invalidated old ones? To what extent is the way we talk about interwar Romania shaped by the questions of the twenty-first century? These questions do not attempt to discredit particular frameworks, merely to emphasize their contingency, assess their usefulness and limitations, and provoke new ways of looking at evidence.

After discussing the problems of periodization and of placing the nation-state at the center of Romanian history, I trace the evolution of four major frames that continue to shape how historians think about interwar Romania: (1) the problems of a small state; (2) the collapse of democracy; (3) the march of progress; and (4) the consequences of state-building and

---

2   Ulrich Herbert, "Europe in High Modernity: Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century," *Journal of Modern European History*, 5, no. 1 (2007): 5–21.

3   Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

4   Balázs Trencsényi, Marja Jalava, and Diana Mishkova (eds), "Regimes of Historicity" *in Southeastern and Northern Europe, 1890–1945: Discourses of Identity and Temporality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Christopher Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

5   Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

centralization. Such approaches give the impression that interwar Romania was an intolerant, chauvinistic society that marginalized anyone who was not male, Orthodox, and ethnically Romanian. As I argue in the final section, however, the best new histories are those which not only uncover alternative, suppressed narratives but also reveal how people were able to live and sometimes thrive in a society as diverse as interwar Romania undeniably was.

Periodization

It is difficult to challenge the idea that there *was* an interwar period. Many Romanians experienced the end of the First World War and the defeat of Béla Kun's Hungary as a watershed moment that set the stage for greatly expanded borders, a decisively pro-French, pro-League of Nations foreign policy, universal male suffrage, the reconfiguration of the major political alliances, new labor laws, land redistribution, and rapid urbanization and industrialization. In the words of Nicolae Iorga, in 1918 contemporaries hoped that "a new Romania, a courageous and pure country must emerge from our sufferings."[6] Twenty years later, the establishment of Carol II's royal dictatorship in February 1938 meant the end of parliamentary government and a geopolitical shift towards foreign and economic policies oriented towards Germany, as well as a major shift in how individuals related to one another and to the state. Media censorship intensified significantly, the brutal repression of the Legion of the Archangel Michael emphasized how serious the king was about banning political parties, and the National Renaissance Front's influence in schools and the civil service established a single party as the locus of social and political power. Carol II's regime curtailed the civil rights of most Romanian citizens, but none more so than Romanian Jews, who were barred from working in public institutions and in certain industries, had their newspapers banned, and lost jobs, businesses, and eventually their citizenship.[7] Finally, the territorial gains which defined Greater Romania were spectacularly reversed with the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union in June 1940, Northern Transylvania to Hungary in August, and Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria in September. By the time the National Legionary

---

6   Comitetul de conducere, "Chemare," *Neamul românesc*, 13, no. 353 (23 December 1918): 1.

7   Philippe Henri Blasen, *La "primauté de la nation roumaine" et les "étrangers": Les minorités et leur liberté du travail sous le cabinet Goga et la dictature royale (décembre 1937–septembre 1940)* (PhD dissertation, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, 2020).

State was established in September 1940, the constellation of economic, social, cultural, and political conditions that most historians associate with the interwar period were well and truly history.

Treating the interwar period as a coherent whole has certain advantages. It emphasizes ruptures with the past and the future and stresses the synchronic over the diachronic. Periodization reveals flows and influences that we might otherwise not have noticed. Subsequently, it encourages historians to look for the underlying myths or narratives—what Fredric Jameson calls the "political unconscious"—that contemporaries believed gave meaning to their world.[8] Only by telling stories that have a beginning, a middle, and an end can we begin to get at the evolution of historical phenomena.

Talking about an "interwar period" is nonetheless problematic because it obscures the continuities between pre-war, wartime, and post-war societies. Significant continuities do exist, particularly in terms of the centrality of what Katherine Verdery calls "national ideology" to Romanian discourses.[9] Institutional continuities also existed. One cannot understand the Securitate, for example, without understanding what it inherited from its interwar predecessor, the Siguranţă.[10] Historians often mention continuities between institutions and laws in the Old Kingdom and those of Greater Romania, but remarkably little attention has been paid to continuities between Hungarian, Austrian, and Russian legacies and interwar Romania. Paul Brunsanowski's research on the unification of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the 1920s and Francesco Magno's work on regionalism in the legal system shows that imperial legacies had a significant impact on the shape of the interwar nation-state.[11] It is likely that similar continuities could be found in most regional institutions.

---

8   Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2010), 12–3, 102.

9   Katherine Verdery*, National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

10   Alin Spânu, *Istoria serviciilor de informaţii/contrainformaţii româneşti în perioada 1919–1945* (Iaşi: Demiurg), 201.

11   Paul Brunsanowski, *Reforma constituţională din Biserica Ortodoxă a Transilvaniei între 1850–1925* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007); Paul Brunsanowski, *Autonomia şi constituţionalismul în dezbaterile privind unificarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (1919–1925)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007). Cf. Francesco Magno, *Law and Justice in Interwar Romania. National, Regional and Professional Identities* (PhD dissertation, University of Trento, 2020).

Tracing individual biographies is one effective way to transcend the interwar/postwar binary by revealing continuities within and across historical ruptures. Robert Levy's biography of Ana Pauker, for example, demonstrates that beyond the before-and-after-1944 story of the Romanian Communist Party lie other stories about the status of Jews and women. As Levy argues, Pauker's dual "otherness" as both a Jew and a woman shaped her political decisions *throughout* her life, not just once she came to power.[12] By and large, however, Pauker's story was the exception rather than the rule. In Luciana Jinga's words, by the end of the interwar period the influence of female communist activists had been roundly defeated: "If they stayed alive they found themselves marginalized and only a few were able to return to prominence within the party."[13]

Prosopographical studies of intellectuals in particular have helped explain how individuals and institutions navigated ruptures such as the two world wars and the rise of state socialism.[14] The research collected in Cristian Vasile's *"We Need People"* (2017) focuses on "mechanisms of change" during transitional periods, showing how elites who had pursued successful careers as fascists during the 1930s managed to salvage their professional status after the war by "retreating into a strictly specialized area."[15] Individuals who had struggled professionally during the interwar period because of their left-wing sympathies flourished after the war.[16] Far from being a decisive break after 23 August 1944, personal alliances and modus operandi established during the 1930s continued to shape careers and institutional practices well into the 1970s.[17] Acknowledging continuities is not to deny the significance of periodization. Rather, the challenge is to show how old institutions, ideas, and individuals adapted to new contexts.

---

12 Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

13 Luciana M. Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare în România comunistă 1944–1989* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 59.

14 Lucian Nastasă, *Intelectualii și promovarea socială (Pentru o morfologie a câmpului universitar)* (Cluj: Editura Nereamia Napocae, 2003); Lucian Boia, *Capcanele istoriei: Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950* (București: Humanitas, 2011).

15 Valentin Săndulescu, "Convertiri și reconvertiri: elite academice și culturale și schmibare politcă în România anilor 1930–1960," in *"Ne trebuie oameni!": Elite intelectuale și transformări istorice în România modernă și contemporană*, ed. Cristian Vasile (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2017), 141–80.

16 Camelia Zavarache, "Geometria unei relații complexe: elite, modele ale modernizării statale și regimuri politice în România secolului XX," in *"Ne trebuie oameni!"*, 181–283.

17 Anca Șincan, "Portretul lui N. Despărțirea de ortodoxia comunistă: despre politica religioasă după 1948," in *"Ne trebuie oameni!",* 317–36.

The Nation-State

In the vast majority of histories the Romanian nation-state functions as the central protagonist. As did most historians of the nineteenth century, Alexandru D. Xenopol and Nicolae Iorga placed the nation at the center of their major synthetic histories. They defined it in cultural and linguistic terms and treated it as an historical actor that emerged in Roman Dacia during the second century.[18] Constantin C. Giurescu and R. W. Seton-Watson echoed their approach and after a lull of several decades, frames emphasizing Romanian national specificity continued under state socialism during the 1970s and 1980s.[19] A great deal of nuance and clarification is needed if the nationalist narrative is to have any value. Balázs Trencsényi and others have shown that national identities were created for specific political goals and instrumentalized in an unprecedented way during the interwar period, but most historians continue to adopt "Romanian" as an unproblematic category and reify it through constant use.[20]

The fragility of Romanian-ness becomes apparent when one looks at people who had to struggle to be recognized as Romanians. Although a host of early twentieth century writers had emphasized the Romanian national identity of Aromanians living in northern Macedonia, when these people migrated to Romania during the 1920s they were not accorded the same "ethnic privileges" as their co-nationals.[21] In Moldavia, the Romanian state maintained an ambiguous attitude towards the Hungarian-speaking Csángós the threat of deportation during the Second World War prompted them into attempting to prove their Romanianness.[22] Nor were

---

18   Alexandru D. Xenopol, *Histoire des Roumains de la Dacie Trajane: depuis les origines jusqu'a l'union des principautés en 1859* (Paris: Leroux, 1896), 110; Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor*, vol. 1.2 (Bucureşti: s.n., 1936).

19   Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor*, 2nd edition (Bucureşti: Fundaţia Regală pentru Literatură şi Artă, 1935); Robert William Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians: From the Roman Times to the Completion of Unity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934); Dennis Deletant, "Re-Writing the Past: Trends in Contemporary Romanian Historiography," in Dennis Deletant and Maurice Pearton, *Romania Observed: Studies in Contemporary Romanian History* (Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1998), 276–303; Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, transl. James Christian Brown (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 70–82.

20   Balázs Trencsényi, *The Politics of National Character: A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London: Routledge, 2013).

21   Roland Clark, "Claiming Ethnic Privilege: Aromanian Immigrants and Romanian Fascist Politics," *Contemporary European History,* 24, no. 1 (2015): 37–49.

22   R. Chris Davis, *Hungarian Religion, Romanian Blood: A Minority's Struggle for National Belonging, 1920–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

all territories included in Greater Romania obviously "Romanian." Romanian elites considered northern Dobruja to be an Ottoman borderland when they annexed it in 1878. Far from identifying its inhabitants as Romanians, opponents of annexation claimed that these people were "an assemblage of the most turbulent elements, gathered there from all over the world."[23] Romania's leaders did consider Transylvania to be Romanian, but that region's national identity was far from being a foregone conclusion in the interwar period.[24] As Lucian Boia points out, in 1910 only 53.8 percent of Transylvanians were Romanian speakers, 31.6 percent spoke Hungarian, and 10.7 percent German, and the status of the territory continued to be contested until the end of the Second World War.[25]

National labels become particularly problematic when applied to minorities. When historians refer to "Romanians", for example, are they also talking about Jews, Muslims, or Roma? These people were citizens of the nation-state but outsiders in other ways.[26] Their articulation as outsiders was crucial for defining Romanians as a dominant group and historians reinforce the insider-outside binary whenever they fail to challenge it.[27] Historians need to be deliberate about which aspects of historical identity are being highlighted by their labels. The term "Romanian Jews" is no more ideologically neutral than "Jewish Romanians," but historians have consistently chosen the former term, which satisfies both Jewish nationalism's desire to identify people as ethnically Jewish regardless of their country of origin and Romanian nationalism's desire to exclude them from the nation. Talking about "Romanian Jews" also masks cleavages within the Jewish community, which recognized differences between "Hungarian Jews" and "Saxon Jews" based on whether their families came from Transylvania or Bukovina and whether they were more comfortable speaking Hungarian or German. Structuring Romanian history around national identities also ignores the multiple instances of national indifference and solidarities across religious and ethnic boundaries that have

---

23   Quoted in Constantin Iordachi, *Citizenship, Nation- and State-Building: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania, 1878–1913* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 12.

24   Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 97–101; Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

25   Lucian Boia, *Cum s-a românizat România* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2015), 45.

26   Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România, 1919–1938. De la emancipare la marginalizare* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2000).

27   Shannon Woodcock, *The Ţigan Is Not a Man: The Ţigan Other as Catalyst for Romanian Ethnonational Identity* (PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, 2005), 6.

been highlighted by historians of places elsewhere in Eastern Europe but are largely ignored by historians of Romania.[28] The volume *Identities In-Between in East-Central Europe* (2019) helpfully moves beyond nationality to look at "subcultures", emphasizing temporary identities and intersectionality in a rethinking of categories of analysis that bodes well for the future of the field.[29]

People who did not interact with the state and/or who did not identify as Romanian are almost invisible in interwar archives except when they had to apply for special permits to hold cultural or religious celebrations. As Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt point out, we know remarkably little about interactions between elites and peasants apart from in the context of the Gusti School's monographic projects.[30] The silence of non-elite actors fuels the perception that there were in fact two Romanias—one of the educated urban elites and one of the rural poor.[31] Such interpretations are, of course, undermined by the wealth of documentation detailing sustained interactions between cities and the countryside throughout the period.

Women are also marginalized, both in the archival records and by historians, many of whom write as if no women lived in interwar Romania. Historians of feminism have noted the limited civil rights enjoyed by women in early twentieth century Romania, the determined opposition feminists faced at all levels of society, and the limitations of their success in legal and economic terms.[32] By focusing exclusively on feminist politics, however, most ignore the key role that industrialization, urbanization,

---

28   István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

29   Jan Fellerer, Robert Pyrah, and Marius Turda (eds), *Identities In-Between in East-Central Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019).

30   Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, 'Introduction', in *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda*, eds. Oliver Jens Schmitt and Sorin Radu (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 1–24.

31   Ionuț Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu: O microistorie a interbelicului românesc* (București: Eikon, 2015), 15–45.

32   Paraschiva Câncea, *Mișcarea pentru emanciparea femeii în România: 1848–1948* (București: Editura Politică, 1976); Ghizela Cosma, *Femeile și politica în România: Evoluția dreptului de vot în perioada interbelică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002); Ghizela Cosma and Virgiliu Țârău (eds), *Condiția femeii în România în secolul XX: Studii de caz* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002); Mihaela Miroiu and Maria Bucur (eds), *Patriarhat și emancipare în istoria gândirii politice românești* (Bucharest: Editura Polirom, 2002); Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, *Birth of Democratic Citizenship: Women in Modern Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

and the introduction of universal male suffrage had on women's roles. Moreover, those histories that focus exclusively on the early twentieth century implicitly frame the struggle as a teleological story connecting feminist activism in the past with rights enjoyed by women in the present, marginalizing the extraordinary impact of state socialism on Romanian women.[33] Paraschiva Câncea, Ghizela Cosma, Mihaela Miroiu, Maria Bucur and others have had little choice about focusing disproportionately on feminist activists to the exclusion of other women because until recently the story of Romanian feminism was almost unknown, and their work has been a necessary first step towards the full integration of women into the history of the interwar period.

Cristina Sircuța's *Women's Lives in Interwar Romania* (2017) is the first study that addresses the impact of broad social and political change on women's lives during this period. Women's history rather than gender history, it explores how women experienced the First World War, female education, women in the workforce, family life and changing attitudes towards women, women's contributions to the arts, literature, and theatre, women's involvement in right wing politics, women's leisure activities, fashion, and the feminist and anti-feminist movements. Sircuța thus opens up a wide variety of new research agendas that had hitherto been explored only in isolated journal articles or not at all. She notes that "we cannot talk of a single type of woman in the interwar period," but that the "different opportunities offered by life in the city or the countryside, and distinctions of wealth, income, and education" meant that women's lives differed radically from one another even while they shared common experiences of patriarchy and legal restrictions.[34] More focused research is needed on women from different walks of life, ages, and education. Gender histories of the interwar period are also sadly lacking, with the notable exception of Maria Bucur's seminal research and a handful of articles on women and fascism.[35] Zsuzsa Bokor and Ghizela Comsa have written

---

33 On the impact of state socialism on Romanian women, see Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and Jill Massino, *Ambiguous Transitions: Gender, the State, and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

34 Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică* (Bucureşti: Oscar Print, 2017), 322.

35 Maria Bucur, "In Praise of Wellborn Mothers: On the Development of Eugenicist Gender Roles in Interwar Romania," *East European Politics and Societies,* 9, no. 1 (1995): 123–42; Maria Bucur, "Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War," *Journal of Women's History,* 12, no. 2 (2000): 30–56; Maria Bucur, "Gender and Fascism in

on the history of prostitution, and Cristina Bejan has discussed elite attitudes towards homosexuality, but their work stands almost alone on the shelf.[36] Of all the people ignored by the major frames of Romanian history, women are the most glaring omission, and their stories need to be integrated into future accounts of the period. The social and cultural contributions of ethnic minorities—Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Roma, Ukrainians and Poles—are also sadly missing from most histories, leaving us ignorant of their active involvement in Romanian society.[37]

The Problems of a "Small" State

A fervent supporter of independent nation-states as a means of maintaining the balance of power in Central Europe, the prominent historian R. W. Seton-Watson wrote in 1915 that "a hundred years ago Roumania consisted of two corrupt and backward vassal provinces of Turkey, without influence or consideration in the world. To-day she has been not unjustly described as 'the Belgium of the East,' progressing by leaps and bounds."[38]

Interwar Romania," in *Women, Gender and the Extreme Right in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 58–79; Maria Bucur, "Romania," in *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919–45* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 57–78; Roland Clark, "Die Damen der Legion: Frauen in rumäischen faschistischen Gruppierungen," transl. Andreas Rathberger, in *Inszenierte Gegenmacht von rechts: Die "Legion Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien 1918–1938*, eds. Armin Heinen and Oliver Jens Schmitt (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), 193–216; Mihai Stelian Rusu, "Domesticating Viragos. The Politics of Womanhood in the Romanian Legionary Movement," *Fascism*, 5, no. 2 (2016): 149–76.

36 Zsuzsa Bokor, *Testtörténetek. A nemzet és a nemi betegségek medikalizálása a két világháború közötti Kolozsváron* (Cluj-Napoca: Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2013); Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania: The Criterion Association* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 177–209.

37 For example, Tudor Georgescu, *The Eugenic Fortress: The Transylvanian Saxon Experiment in Interwar Romania* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016); Margaret Beissinger, Speranța Rădulescu, and Anca Giurchescu (eds), *Manele in Romania: Cultural Expression and Social Meaning in Balkan Popular Music* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Ottmar Trașcă and Remus Gabriel Anghel (eds), *Un veac frământat: Germanii din România după 1918* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2018); Anca Filipovici (ed), *Polonezii din România: repere identitare* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2020).

38 R. W. Seton-Watson, *Roumania and the Great War* (London: Constable and Company, 1915), 2. On Seton-Watson's politics at the time, see László Péter, "R. W. Seton-Watson's Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 82, no. 3 (2004): 676–679. On his role in negotiations with Romania during 1915, see Hugh Seton-Watson and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen, 1981), 114–5.

His account of Romanian history concluded that it was a small country which could easily influenced by the Great Powers, in particular, by Great Britain. In 1945, a survey of the interwar period written by his son, Hugh Seton-Watson, again characterized Eastern Europe as "a battle-ground of rival Imperialisms." He argued that the Eastern European countries "have shown themselves weak, divided and inexperienced," unable to solve their own problems. He told of "backward and apathetic" Romanian peasants ruled by vain and ambitious elites, concluding that "the future of Eastern Europe is inseparable from the future of the European Great Powers."[39] Other interwar accounts similarly emphasized the extent to which Great Power politics shaped Romanian political and economic realities, but pointed out that foreign intervention was a mixed blessing in Romania, as likely to harm the Great Powers' reputation as it was to help them.[40]

While acknowledging the undeniable impact of geopolitics, there has been an increasing trend for historians to emphasize Romanian agency and efforts to turn foreign ambitions to Romania's advantage.[41] Norman Stone's 1975 history of the Romania's involvement in the First World War argued that Romanian fortunes in the war were entirely dependent on what their French and Russian allies did or did not do, but more recent histories have revealed the extent to which decisions made by Romanians at all levels of society shaped the country's wartime experiences.[42]

Sherman David Spector's and Keith Hitchins' histories of the Paris Peace Conferences, for example, put Ion I. C. Brătianu in center stage. "In a sense," Hitchins writes, "Paris was the culmination of a grand strategy Brătianu had worked out in the preceding quarter-century to raise the

---

39   Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), xiii, 213, 413.

40   Nicolae Iorga, Francis Bickley and Marion Newbigin, "Romania," in John Buchan (ed), *Bulgaria and Romania* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 282–312; George Clenton Logio, *Rumania: Its History, Politics and Economics* (Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes, 1932).

41   For example, Valentin Naumescu (ed), *România, marile puteri şi ordinea europeană, 1918–2018* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2018); Svetlana Suveica (ed), *Romania and the Paris Peace Conference (1919): Actors, Scenarios, Circulation of Knowledge*, Special issue of the *Journal of Romanian Studies*, 1, no. 2 (2019): 9–152.

42   Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914–1917* (London: Penguin, 1998); Maria Bucur, "Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War," *Journal of Women's History,* 12, no. 2 (2000), 30–56; Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Claudiu-Lucian Topor and Alexander Rubel (eds), *"The Unknown War" from Eastern Europe: Romania between Allies and Enemies (1916–1918)* (Iaşi: Editura Universităţii "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2016).

modest Romanian nation-state to a European level of prosperity and civilization and transform it into Greater Romania encompassing all Romanians."[43] Others have recognized the central role Nicolae Titulescu played in Balkan diplomacy, the League of Nations, and in building the pro-French alliances of the 1920s.[44]

The extent to which Romania had a choice about allying itself with Nazi Germany remains contested. Andreas Hillgruber's 1954 study argued that a German-Romanian alliance was "natural" given the German roots of the Hohenzollern dynasty and had only been derailed by the First World War and Titulescu's subsequent foreign policy. He emphasized trade relations—especially Romanian oil—as the driving force between Romania's alliance with Germany and almost completely ignored the ideological implications of the alliance.[45] In 1989 Dov Lungu's more balanced work stressed Romania's precarity as a small state caught up in the growing tensions in Europe, the unsatisfactory nature of the alliance with the Soviets, and how few choices the Romanians really had by 1940.[46] Eleven years later, Rebecca Haynes argued that pro-German sentiment ran much deeper in Romania than had previously been thought, and that Romanians *chose* Germany over France rather than being forced into the alliance.[47]

Fascists—in particular legionaries—were frequently accused during the interwar period of having been financed by Nazi Germany. The 1971 study by Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu labeled the Legion a "terrorist movement" and argued that fascism had no popular basis in Romania but was an "instrument of German Nazism."[48] Most legionaries denied these accusations, and Armin Heinen found only a single German donation to Ştefan Tătărescu, the leader of Romania's National Socialist Party, in

43   Keith Hitchins, *Ionel Brătianu: Romania* (London: Haus Publishing, 2011), ix; Sherman David Spector, *Romania at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study of the Diplomacy of Ioan I.C. Brătianu* (Iaşi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1995). In a more nationalist vein, see also Vasile Puşcaş and Ionel N. Sava (eds), *Trianon, Trianon!: Un secol de mitologie politică revizionistă* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Şcoala Ardeleană, 2020).

44   Cristian Popişteanu, *România şi Antanta Balcanică* (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1968); Dov B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 15–99; Keith Hitchins, *Rumania* (London: Clarendon Press, 1994), 426–37.

45   Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu: die deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen, 1938–1944* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1954).

46   Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers*, 99–228.

47   Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany, 1936–40* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

48   Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, *Garda de Fier: Organizaţie teroristă de tip fascist* (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1980), 10.

1934.[49] Captured German archives held in Britain show that the Nazis in fact subsidized a range of far-right newspapers throughout the 1930s, from *Calendarul* to *Porunca vremii*, but still do not mention financing fascist parties directly.[50] Holly Case's *Between States* (2009) pushes the debate forward by emphasizing "the European idea as emerging from relations between neighboring states" rather than as a product of Great Power politics.[51] Posing the question in terms of Romanian agency masks the very real cleavages across Europe as a whole. Liberals in Romania developed policy in tandem with their counterparts in France and Germany, while the far right pursued a common agenda in all three countries. Recent studies on Romanians studying abroad have highlighted how the ideological polarization of Europe shaped Romanian realities through individual biographies.[52] Saxons also travelled to Nazi Germany during this period, and more research is needed into the international journeys and transnational ties of other minority groups.[53]

Influenced by world systems theory and dependency theory, Katherine Verdery's 1983 history of a Transylvanian village argued that the region became "underdeveloped" because of patterns of industrialization across the Habsburg Empire after 1800, the evolution of Transylvania as a supplier of raw material for industrializing Hungary after 1867, and the failure to attract foreign investment during the 1920s.[54] In contrast, Kenneth Jowitt and Daniel Chirot took the idea that Romania really was backward at face value and tried to show how such a situation had emerged.[55] Similarly, both Lucian Boia and Oliver Jens Schmitt have grounded their

---

49 Armin Heinen, *Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail": Mişcare socială şi organizaţie politică* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2006), 225.

50 The National Archives (UK), German Foreign Ministry Archives, Press Department, German Press in Romania, GFM 33/3464/9602, Serial 9601, E676783–E676835.

51 Case, *Between States*, 7.

52 Diana Georgescu, "Excursions into National Specificity and European Identity: Mihail Sebastian's Interwar Travel Reportage," in *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*, eds. Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 293–324; Irina Nastasă-Matei, *Educaţie, politică şi propaganda: Studenţi români în Germania nazistă* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Şcoala Ardeleană, 2016).

53 Georgescu, *The Eugenic Fortress*.

54 Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers: Three Centuries of Political, Economic, and Ethnic Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 130–40, 195–210, 276–86.

55 Kenneth Jowitt, *Social Change in Romania, 1860–1940: A Debate on Development in a European Nation* (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1978); Daniel Chirot (ed), *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

observations that "something isn't right in Romania" by unpacking histori-cal trends that did not go quite as they should have.[56] Whereas both Boia and Schmitt focus on cultural history, Bogdan Murgescu's detailed analysis of economic statistics builds on Chirot's narrative in a different way. He ar-gues that Romania lagged behind the rest of Europe economically not only because it suffered from the same macro-economic influences that plagued all European economies during these decades but also because of inopportune policies regarding protectionism and exports.[57] Murgescu's data reso-nates with discussions of Romanian political economy written under state socialism and more recently by historians in Germany.[58] The story remains that of a small state navigating international currents beyond its control but the questions have shifted from "what can Romania do for us?" and "was Romania a victim of Great Power politics?" to "how did Romanian realities fit into transnational puzzles?" One question that has rarely been asked is how Romanians came to think of themselves as backward. *Pace* Chirot and Boia, the notion of backwardness is itself neo-colonial and problematic, and we need more histories that explore backwardness as a construct, as sev-eral recent historians have done.[59]

The Collapse of Democracy

Turning from a transnational story to a national one, the most enduring narrative is that of the collapse of democracy.[60] Writing during 1941, the communist activist Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu argued that the parliamentary

---

56   Lucian Boia, *De ce este România altfel?* (București: Humanitas, 2012); Oliver Jens Schmitt, *România în 100 de ani: Bilanțul unui veac de istorie* (București: Humanitas, 2018).

57   Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010)* (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 205–314.

58   Ioan Saizu, *Politica economică a României între 1922 și 1928* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1981); Dietmar Müller, *Agrarpopulismus in Rumänien: Programmatik und Regierungspraxis der Bauernpartei und der Nationalbäuerlichen Partei Rumäniens in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Sankt Augustin: Gardez! Verlag, 2001); Angela Harre, *Wege in die Moderne: Entwicklungsstrategien rumänischer Ökonomen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009).

59   Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania; Alex Drace-Francis, The Tra-ditions of Invention: Romanian Ethnic and Social Stereotypes in Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Diana Mishkova and Roumen Daskalov, "'Forms without Sub-stance': Debates on the Transfer of Western Models to the Balkans", in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans,* Vol. 2: Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions, eds. Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–98; Vintilă Mihăilescu*, De ce este România astfel: Avatarurile excepționalismului românesc* (Iași: Polirom, 2017).

60   Roland Clark, "Interwar Romania: Enshrining Ethnic Privilege", in *Interwar East Cen-tral Europe, 1918–1941*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (London: Routledge, 2020), 144–77.

system disappeared as soon as it had outlived its usefulness to wealthy capitalists. Pătrăşcanu maintained that the bankers controlled Romanian industry until the Great Depression crippled the banking industry in 1931. Whereas capitalists had been well represented by Brătianu's National Liberal Party (PNL) during the 1920s, increasing state regulation and the state's role as the largest consumer of industrial goods meant that the great industrialists gradually turned to Carol II's camarilla as the best way to guarantee their economic success. By 1938 "the royal dictatorship," Pătrăşcanu wrote, "was the political expression of the interests of the great landholders and the leaders of industry. It thus had a decidedly economic basis."[61] Carol's unpopular rule relied too heavily on bureaucrats and army officers, however, and with no popular support was easily pushed aside by the fascists who, Pătrăşcanu claimed, had German support. Despite its economic determinism and occasional flights of fancy, Pătrăşcanu's narrative contains a number of elements that have endured in subsequent histories— a corrupt PNL, the importance of finance capital and industrialization, a superstitious and disaffected peasantry alienated from the political process, fascism as the pawn of cynical elites, and the personal ambitions of King Carol II undermining the legitimacy of parliament.

The most popular explanation for the collapse of parliamentary democracy emphasizes the failure of successive governments to win the support of rural voters through land reform and effective agrarian policies. This frame was first expressed during the interwar period by David Mitrany and Virgil Madgearu, then developed further by Hugh Seton-Watson in *Eastern Europe Between the Wars* (1945).[62] It was one of Seton-Watson's students, Henry Roberts, who crafted the authoritative version of this framework, which shaped Romanian studies in the West for several decades. Roberts conducted his research in Romania during 1944 and 1945, submitting his conclusions as a PhD dissertation in 1948. "The weak popular support of most of the parties, together with the extravagance of interparty squabbles," Roberts said, "had the inevitable consequence of increasing political indifference among the mass of the people and of lending a certain plausibility to the claims of those who stood 'above politics'."[63] The result, he argued, was the rise of fascism and the royal dictatorship. Roberts proved

---

61 Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu, *Sous trois dictatures* (Paris: Ed. Jean Vitiano, 1946).

62 David Mitrany, *The Land and the Peasant in Rumania: The War and Agrarian Reform (1917–21)* (London: H. Milford, 1930); Virgil N. Madgearu, *Evoluţia economiei româneşti: după războiul mondial* (Bucureşti: Independenţa Economică, 1940); Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars*.

63 Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 92.

his case through a detailed analysis of economic data and written documents from the period, bringing a new level of professionalism to English-language writing about Romania. Roberts was so successful that almost all of the synthetic histories of Eastern Europe written between 1956 and 1998 drew heavily on his and Hugh Seton-Watson's accounts, including Joseph Rothschild's influential *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (1974).[64]

In the context of the Cold War, Romanian émigré historians of fascism described a backward, peasant country riddled with antisemitism that turned to fascism because of ignorance and superstition. Eugen Weber wrote in 1965 that "whereas Western fascist movements were generally a-religious or antireligious, [Codreanu's] was a religious revival, or, perhaps more correctly, a revivalist movement with strong religious overtones." He compared the Legion to "novel revivalist churches" in Africa, which used religious innovations to establish a new social and political order.[65] One early historian even justified separating the Legion from the study of other fascist movements on the dubious grounds that in Romania the Legion developed "within the framework of a completely Orientalized way of life," and "as a result of Oriental despotism."[66] Nicholas Nagy-Talavera's account was likewise centered in isolated villages and recounted the author's childhood awe in the face of towering legionaries dressed as *haiduci* (bandits) with turkey feathers in their hats, riding white horses and prophesying a new spiritual age.[67] Béla Vago further reinforced the themes of backwardness and violence in his edited collection

---

64   Robert Lee Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956); Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974); Peter F. Sugar, Donald Warren Treadgold, Charles Jelavich, and Barbara Jelavich, *A History of East Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977); Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe 1740–1985: Feudalism to Communism*, Second Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

65   Eugen Weber, "Romania," in *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, eds. Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 523, 534. Zeev Barbu and Stephen Fischer-Galati both also followed this line of interpretation. Zeev Barbu, "Rumania," in *European Fascism*, ed. S. J. Woolf (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 146–166; Stephen Fischer-Galati, "Fascism in Romania," in *Native Fascism in the Successor States 1918–1945*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1971), 113.

66   Emanuel Turczynski, "The Background of Romanian Fascism," in *Native Fascism*, ed. Peter Sugar, 102, 104.

67   Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970).

of British Foreign Office documents on interwar Romania, a book which once again focused on the rise of fascism.[68]

Stephen Fischer-Galați's *Twentieth-Century Rumania* (1970) added much needed nuance to the story by reminding us that Jews were not the only minorities in the country and legionaries not the only people involved in right-wing politics. Fischer-Galați raised the question of "whether a democratic regime representative of the interests of all inhabitants of Rumania could ever have been established in that country."[69] Drawing explicitly on Roberts, he concluded that the nationalist and corrupt political culture had made no attempt at reconciling elites and peasants, Romanians and minorities, center and peripheries into a functioning political organism. He insisted that nationalism and antisemitism were core ideologies of interwar Romania but noted that the king chose to support the extremist National Christian Party (PNC) when he was faced with a choice between Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu after the 1937 elections, destabilizing democracy and making a royal dictatorship possible. His decision, Fischer-Galați wrote, was driven by the knowledge that both Maniu and Codreanu wanted him to abdicate or at least to limit his power significantly. In the end ideology was less important than Carol's personal ambitions and his bank accounts.[70]

Rejecting the assertion that there was anything unusual or peripheral about Romanian fascism, in 1986 Armin Heinen argued persuasively that the Legion was a fascist social movement comparable to German Nazism or Italian Fascism, with a mass following and clear political goals.[71] Heinen's approach to the Legion as a movement waned over the next two decades, as historians focused increasingly on the person of Codreanu himself. Encouraged by the blossoming literature on European antisemitism and the Holocaust, Radu Ioanid argued that antisemitism lay at the core of Romanian fascism. Antisemitism, he showed, was deeply rooted within Romanian culture but suddenly became a substantial political movement in the 1920s.[72] In 1993 Francisco Veiga used oral history interviews to portray

---

68   Béla Vago, *The Shadow of the Swastika: The Rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin, 1936–1939* (Farnborough: Saxon House for the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1975).

69   Stephen Fischer-Galați, *Twentieth Century Rumania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 41–2.

70   Ibid., 58–9. On the influence of Carol's finances, see Robert Arnold, *King Carol's Personal Fortune and its Influence on Romania's Economic Negotiations with Germany 1937–1940* (PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 2008).

71   Heinen*, Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail."*

72   Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, transl. Peter Heinegg (Irvington, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990).

Codreanu as a political actor with little formal power and showed how his message and tactics mutated to take full advantage of the weaknesses of his opponents and the changing grievances of his followers.[73] Constantin Iordachi then revived the emphasis on peasant superstition that dominated the 1960s but did so in a more sophisticated manner that has been echoed by both Sandu Tudor and Oliver Jens-Schmitt.[74] Iordachi argued that messianic ideas about national regeneration found in nineteenth-century Romanian nationalism gathered legionaries around Codreanu as a leader endowed with unique charismatic qualities.[75] The stories told by Ioanid and Iordachi ground fascism so deeply in Romanian culture that the collapse of democracy appears almost a foregone conclusion.

Heinen was the only historian of fascism who paid much attention to the mainstream political parties, but all of these accounts assumed that ultimately the success or failure of fascism lay in the ability of the Liberals and the Peasantists to resist authoritarianism. Keith Hitchins summarized this position beautifully in 1994, arguing that by the 1930s "the leading democratic parties seemed to have lost much of their *élan* of the preceding decade. They proved incapable of withstanding the assault from both within and outside the country and acquiesced in the establishment of Carol's dictatorship in 1938, an event which marked the end of the democratic experiment in Rumania."[76] Hitchins provided clear and useful narratives of intellectual debates, economics, politics, and foreign policy during the interwar period. As he argued, the challenges facing Romanian elites after 1918 were substantial, and he helpfully showed how themes that continue to characterize the historiography—Romania as a small state, industrialization, the agrarian problem, democracy vs. authoritarianism, and pro-French vs. pro-German foreign policy—were all debated passionately during the 1920s and 1930s.

Subsequent historians have been less enthusiastic about the democratic credentials of the major parties. Hans Christian Maner's 1997 study of the parliamentary system emphasized that the country's "democracy" had not been healthy from the start. He noted how the 1923 constitution

---

73   Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919–1941: mistica ultranaţionalismului*, transl. Marian Ştefănescu (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1993).

74   Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain: Histoire de la Garde de fer* (Paris: Perrin, 2014); Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: ascensiunea şi căderea "Căpitanului"* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2017).

75   Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the "Archangel Michael" in Inter-war Romania* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004); *Martyrdom to Purification: The Fascist Faith of the Legion 'Archangel Michael' in Romania, 1927–1941* (London: Routledge, 2020).

76   Hitchins, *Rumania*, 378.

and the electoral laws of 1926 concentrated power firmly in the hands of the government and argued that Gheorghe Tătărescu's cabinets between 1934 and 1937 so discredited parliamentary democracy that "an openly authoritarian regime was the only way out."[77] Governments of the 1930s were already ruling in such an authoritarian manner that Carol was simply continuing a process begun long before the royal dictatorship. Whereas Maner's argument focused heavily on the Tătărescu regime, in 2001 Dietmar Müller turned his attention to the National Peasantist governments between 1928 and 1933. Not only did they fail to deliver on their promises to rural voters, Müller argued, but like the Liberals their policies were impractical and poorly thought through.[78] The following year Antoine Roger explained that the National Peasantist reluctance to push through a major new program of reform stemmed from the abject failure of the Liberal attempt "to mold society as they wished" between 1922 and 1928.[79] The programs of both the Liberals and the Peasantists had failed by 1934, and Roger portrayed Tătărescu's regime as a time of exploring alternative, nationalist options, which by now both the Carlists and the legionaries were also promoting. All three scholars laid the blame for the collapse of democracy firmly with the dysfunctional nature of the parliamentary system.

Dylan Riley shifted the narrative away from Bucharest politicians in 2010, arguing that the rural associations, cultural circles, and credit institutions established in the nineteenth century created an "agrarian civil society" that mobilized behind fascism when the failure of the ruling parties to win popular support became manifest at the beginning of the 1930s. Riley maintains that the rise of fascism exposed the weakness of parliamentary politics, providing an opening for the king to introduce a more authoritarian style of government.[80] Riley's position has been supported by Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, who argue that after the Great Depression "an often overlooked parallel society emerged in the rural area, under the guidance of social and ideological forces which openly rejected the existing political order."[81] The volume of case studies edited by Radu and Schmitt confirms that peasants were indeed involved in

77   Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismus in Rumänien (1930–1940): Demokratie im autoritären Umfeld* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997), 510.
78   Müller, *Agrarpopulismus in Rumänien*.
79   Antoine Roger, *Fascistes, communistes et paysans: Sociologie des mobilisations identitaires roumaines, 1921–1989* (Bruxelles: Université de Bruxelles, 2002), 141.
80   Dylan J. Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 113–48.
81   Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Introduction," in *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania*, eds. Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, 21.

party politics, and mobilizing rural voters could mean the difference be-
tween winning and losing an election. At the same time, peasants had
their own, often local agendas and voted accordingly.[82]

Throughout the 1930s right-wing authoritarianism enjoyed the
support of a number of prominent intellectuals, such as Mircea Eliade,
Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, and others. Norman Manea raised the
question of Eliade's fascist past in 1990, and Zigu Ornea laid out the full
extent of the problem in 1995.[83] Since then historians interested in the
collapse of democracy narrative have repeatedly asked themselves how
so many great minds could have supported such an evil ideology. Regard-
less of whether it celebrates them or condemns them as fascists, one in-
herent problem in this genre is that it presupposes that these men—and
they were overwhelmingly men—were genuinely geniuses. A much more
interesting question would be why they came to be seen and celebrated
as geniuses to the exclusion of others, as Katherine Verdery did in *Na-
tional Ideology Under Socialism* (1991).[84] The answer to their political
choices, it seems, lay in the structure of intellectual life in interwar Roma-
nia. One study after another reflects the same central themes: a rapidly
expanding system of higher education that nonetheless failed to provide
jobs for talented intellectuals, the influence of a handful of charismatic
right-wing mentors, the ascendency of fascism in Europe, nationalist pre-
suppositions that became more and more important to articulate, the ap-
peal of modernism, and a fashion for "spirituality" all attracted young Ro-
manian intellectuals to the far right. At the same time, each study reveals
a host of individual factors that are far from generalizable. Each person
arrived at fascism along a different path and with varying degrees of com-
mitment.[85] Moreover, as Ionuţ Butoi shows in his recent microhistory of

---

82   Radu, Schmitt (eds), *Politics and Peasants.* See also Cornel Micu*, From Peasants to
      Farmers? Agrarian Reforms and Modernisation in Twentieth-Century Romania: A
      Case Study: Bordei Verde Commune in Brăila County* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter
      Lang, 2012).
83   Norman Manea, *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* (London: Faber and Faber,
      1994), 91–124; Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească* (Bucureşti:
      Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 1995).
84   Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, 256–318.
85   Alexandre Laignel-Lavastine, Cioran, Eliade, *Ionesco: l'oubli du fascisme : trois in-
      tellectuels roumains dans la tourmente du siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2002); Florin Ţurcanu,
      Mircea Eliade: le prisonnier de l'histoire (Paris: Découverte, 2003); Alexandru D.
      Popescu, *Petre Ţuţea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004);
      Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past: E. M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania*,
      transl. Bogdan Aldea (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005); Philip Vanhaelemeersch, *A Ge-
      neration "without Beliefs" and the Idea of Experience in Romania (1927–1934)*
      (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2006); Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, (ed) *Sear-*

Mircea Vulcănescu, fascism was not the only option, and Orthodox Christian youth groups or Dimitrie Gusti's sociological teams were equally likely destinations for young nationalist intellectuals.[86] The study of right-wing intellectuals mirrors the evolution of the collapse of democracy narrative more generally. Few of the main contours of the story have changed significantly since 1948, but the importance of detail and nuance is becoming ever clearer as what used to be a straight-forward story reveals itself to have been remarkably complex.

The March of Progress

Relatively few historians writing under state socialism specialized in the interwar period, most focusing primarily on medieval and early modern history.[87] Gheorghe Platon's textbook *The History of Modern Romania* (1985) ends with the First World War, reflecting the reluctance of the regime to discuss the recent past.[88] It was the vice-president of the Romanian Academy, Mihail Roller, who first introduced a communist framework for the interwar period through strategic appointments to key academic posts, by publishing large collections of primary sources, and through his 1947 *History of Romania*. Roller and his collaborators emphasized class struggle as the engine of history, the positive benefits Russia and the Soviet Union had brought to Romania, and the harmful impact of the West and of bourgeois liberalism in general. They also highlighted the

ching for Cioran* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Marta Petreu, *Diavolul şi ucenicul său : Nae Ionescu—Mihail Sebastian* (Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2009); Idem, *De la Junimea la Noica: studii de cultură românească* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2011); Boia, *Capcanele istoriei;* Antonio Momoc*, Capcanele politice ale sociologiei interbelice: Şcoala gustiană între carlism şi legionarism* (Bucureşti: Curtea Veche, 2012); Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism*.

86   Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu.*
87   Lajos Jordáky and Keith Hitchins, "The History of the Habsburg Monarchy (1789–1918) in Romanian Historiography since 1945," *Austrian History Yearbook*, 4 (1968): 303–34; Paul Michelson, "Themes in Modern and Contemporary Romanian Historiography," in S. J. Kirschbaum (ed), *East European History* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1988), 27–40; Frederick Kellogg, *A History of Romanian Historical Writing* (Bakersfield: Charles Schlacks Jr, 1990), 52–70; Pompiliu Teodor, *Introducere în istoria istoriografiei din România* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Accent, 2002), 112–127. For a comprehensive bibliography of Romanian histories of the interwar period written between 1944 and 1969 see Robert Deutsch, *Istoricii şi ştiinţa istorică din România, 1944–1969* (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1970), 267–344.
88   Gheorghe Platon, *Istoria modernă a României* (Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, 1985).

struggles of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) while minimizing the role of the Church and demonizing the monarchy.[89]

In 1951, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej argued that interwar Romania had been "a colony of Anglo-Franco-American imperialism," with the bourgeoisie and the great landholders working together to keep the working classes under control. Gheorghiu-Dej identified the Bolshevik revolution in Russia as the motivation for the wave of strikes in the early 1920 but saw the rest of the decade as a time when the bourgeoisie and the landholders went on the "counter-offensive" alongside "reformist traitors" to take the wind out of the revolutionary movement, eventually financing fascism as a way to crush the workers.[90] By 1959, following Roller's fall from grace, de-Stalinization and a purge of the PCR, Gheor-ghiu-Dej's narrative had shifted to one of progress.[91] He now character-ized the interwar as a period of "opportunism and reformism," but also one of a growing awareness among workers that communism was the country's only solution. Gheorghiu-Dej emphasized the Bolshevik revolu-tion in Russia, the Fifth Party Congress in Moscow at which the PCR aligned itself with Stalin's geopolitical aims, and the strikes of 1920 and 1933 as moments of "awakening" for Romanian workers and of progress towards the victory of the PCR.[92] Earlier labor organizing among Romanians had been ineffective because it lacked the "revolutionary" focus of the PCR.[93]

Historians worked hard to confirm his story over the next few years, with an emphasis on the role of the PCR over and above that of peasant

---

89   Mihail Roller (ed), *Istoria României* (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat, 1947); Boia, *History and Myth*, 70–3; Liviu Pleşa, "Mihail Roller şi 'Stalinizarea' istoriografiei româneşti," *Annales Univeristatis Apulensis, Series Historica*, 10, no. 1 (2006): 165–77; Francesco Zavatti, *Writing History in a Propaganda Institute: Political Power and Network Dynamics in Communist Romania* (Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2016), 115–56.

90   Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, *30 de ani de luptă a partidului sub steagul lui Lenin şi Stalin* (Bucureşti: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951).

91   Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 148–86; Zavatti, *Writing History*, 163–90.

92   Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, quoted in E. Drob, G. Florea, and I. Tudosescu, "Formarea şi dezvoltarea conştiinţei politice socialiste a clasei muncitoare din ţara noastră," in Institutul de Filozofie al Academiei RPR (ed), *Dezvoltarea conştiinţei socialiste în Republica Populară Română* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1961), 96–9.

93   L. Fodor and L. Vaida, *Contribuţii la istoria mişcării sindicale din Transilvania (1848–1917)* (Cluj: Editura Consiliului Central al Sindicatelor, 1957), 115–6.

movements or foreign assistance.[94] In contrast with the workers, they insisted, interwar peasants were unenlightened. They were "always tricked by 'politics,' deceived by newspapers, swindled at the markets by capitalist merchants, exploited and oppressed."[95] Despite horrific suffering, it was apparently only communist activists who convinced peasants to "ally themselves with the workers" and to engage in occasional revolts against capitalist oppression.[96] Writing in 1955, Dionisie Ionescu described an independent peasant revolt in Bacău county during 1936/37, but his colleagues emphasized that peasants were repeatedly defrauded of their land in progressive stages during the 1920s and 1930s.[97] The importance of the Romanian Communist Party to framing the interwar story became evident in 1963 when the History Institute of the Soviet Union Academy of Sciences attempted to write a history of modern Romania, only for it to be bitterly rejected by the Romanian Academy for emphasizing the importance of Russian influence at the expense of organic, local communist organizing.[98]

The assertion of Romanian independence from the Soviet Union from 1964 onwards consolidated the centrality of national ideology for historical narratives, a move seen most clearly in the new emphasis on

---

94 Klaus P. Beer, "Die Interdependenz von Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik in Rumänien von 1945 bis 1980. Die Historiographie über den Zeitraum von 1918 bis 1945," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 32, no. 2 (1984): 243–48. Examples include Institutul de Istorie a Partidului de pe lânga CC al PMR, *Greva generală din România, 1920* (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1960); *Din lupta PCR pentru închegarea alianţei clasei muncitoare cu ţărănimea muncitoare în bătălia pentru reforma agrară din 1944–1945*, vol. 1 (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Politică, 1961); Titu Georgescu, *De la greva generală la crearea PCR: Lupta pentru clarificarea politică, ideologică şi organizatorică din mişcarea muncitorească în preajma creării PCR: octombrie 1920–mai 1921* (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifica, 1962); Titu Georgescu and Mircea Ioanid (eds), *Presa PCR şi organizaţiilor sale de masa, 1921–1944: Prezentare bibliografică* (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1963); Ion Popescu-Puţuri and Nicolae Goldberger (eds), *1933: Luptele revoluţionare ale muncitorilor ceferişti şi petrolişti* (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1971).

95 Mihail Cernea, "Cu privire la procesul formării şi dezvoltării conştiinţei politice socialiste a ţărănimii," in Institutul de Filozofie al Academiei RPR ed., *Dezvoltarea conştiinţei socialiste în Republica Populară Română* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1961), 313.

96 Titu Georgescu and Ladislau Fodor, *Răscoala ţăranilor din Valea Ghimeşului (1934)* (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1960).

97 Dionisie Ionescu, "Ocuparea pămînturilor moşiereşti în regiunea Bacău (fostele judeţe Bacău şi Neamţ)," in Institutul de Istorie a Partidului de pe Lânga CC al PMR ed., *Din lupta PCR pentru închegarea alianţei clasei muncitoare cu ţărănimea muncitoare în bătălia pentru reforma agrară din 1944–1945*, vol. 1 (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Politică, 1961), 59–60. Compare Ionescu's account with the other essays in this volume, which never mention peasant resistance prior to 1944.

98 Zavatti, *Writing History*, 179–80.

the historically "Romanian" character of Bessarabia despite the fact that it was now its own Soviet Republic.[99] The idea that class struggle facilitated a steady movement of national progress framed most communist histories written under Ceaușescu. Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu's two-volume history of *Romania after the Great Union* (1968), for example, argued that,

> Romania continued to be a unitary national state and Romanians constituted an overwhelming majority of the country's population after those provinces found under foreign occupation were united with their ancestral home. … The consolidation of the country's human and economic potential created the conditions necessary for the productive exploitation of the riches of the soil and minerals at a national level, accentuating the role of industry within the national economy.[100]

The primary benefactors of Greater Romania were the bourgeoisie, Mușat and Ardeleanu argued, but agrarian reforms, the building of railroads, and the growth and science and education laid the foundations for national prosperity, and industrialization created a new working class which made state socialism possible. Even the rise of fascism seems not to have phased Mușat and Ardeleanu, who suggested that the extreme right had no popular support and was simply a creation of the bourgeoisie. In support of this narrative, state publishing houses reprinted the writings of prominent left-wing figures from the interwar period, even recasting beloved nationalist intellectuals such as Nicolae Iorga as anti-fascists.[101] In 1975 Dumitru Șandru challenged the narrative of ever-greater suffering, replacing it with a whiggish story of gradual progress. Blending a detailed analysis of economic statistics with an account of communist activism, he argued that although they were insufficient, the land reforms of 1921–23 did improve the lives of the majority of peasants over the next twenty years.[102]

Not only is the communist story of progress empirically wrong in terms of economic growth, it raises ethical questions about whether the

---

99   Beer, "Die Interdependenz," 248–61; Zavatti, *Writing History*, 294–6.
100 Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea* Unire vol. 2, Partea 1 (1918–1933) (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), v.
101 Boia, *History and Myth*, 75–6. For example, Titu Georgescu, *Nicolae Iorga împotriva hitlerismului* (București: Editura Științifică, 1966); *Intelectuali antifasciști în publicistica românească* (București: Editura Științifică, 1967); N. D. Cocea, *Jurnal* (București: Editura Politică, 1970); Ion Constantinescu, *Din însemnările unui fost reporter parlamentar: Camera deputaților, 1919–1939* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1973); C. G. Costa-Foru, *Din viața și opera unui mare democrat român* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1986);
102 Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1921 în România* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1975). Șandru's narrative of progress was affirmed in Vasile Pușcaș and Vasile Vesa (eds), *Dezvoltare și modernizare în România interbelică 1919–1939* (București: Editura politică, 1988).

sufferings of one generation can be said to have been "worthwhile," because they paved the way to future prosperity. Historians who came of age under state socialism continued to promote this narrative after the regime collapsed, but it had effectively lost its appeal in its communist form by the beginning of the twenty-first century.[103]

Nation-Building and Centralization

While the narrative of progress was being promoted inside Romania, historians in the United States and Germany were developing a more complicated version of the collapse of democracy narrative around questions of regionalism, centralization, and the treatment of minorities. Irina Livezeanu's *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (1995)—originally written as her PhD dissertation in 1986—argued that bureaucrats, politicians, teachers, and journalists exploited "ethnic nationalist ideology" to facilitate the incorporation of the new territories of Transylvania, Crișana, Maramureș, Bukovina, Bessarabia, the Banat, and Dobruja into Greater Romania after 1918. They promoted Romanian culture in schools and universities to the exclusion of minority languages and literatures and sent teachers and administrators from the Old Kingdom into the provinces to replace existing staff. Coupled with overcrowding and administrative problems in the universities, the state's nation-building project produced a generation of ultranationalist students who used violence and intimidation to establish fascism.[104] Subsequent research has confirmed Livezeanu's conclusions about problems in the universities. Dragoș Sdrobiș in particular argues that the student violence of the early 1920s was symptomatic of wider social problems, including xenophobic nationalism, fears of cultural inferiority, anger at political corruption, an underfunded education system, and a surplus of unemployed intellectuals.[105]

Although she also drew on political speeches and journalistic manifestos which demonstrate beyond doubt how omnipresent the centralization narrative was, Livezeanu's narrative was based heavily on archival documents. Her sources reflected a bureaucrat's way of looking at the

---

103 For example, Nicolae N. Constantinescu, *Romania's Economic History: From the Beginnings to World War II* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1994); Ion Bulei, *Scurtă istorie a Românilor* (București: Meronia, 1996).

104 Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

105 Dragoș Sdrobiș, *Limitele meritocrației într-o societate agrară: Șomaj intelectual și radicalizare politică a tineretului în România interbelică* (Iași: Polirom, 2015). See also Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

world and the state's perspective on social problems. They thus marginalized the myriad of other stories that took place outside of the state's field of interest, and implied that historical actors were motivated primarily by a nation-building ideology when in fact this was just the language that individuals learned to use when interacting with the state in order to promote their own ambitions and personal rivalries. The narrative of nation-building and centralization has nonetheless been incredibly productive and has inspired a solid corpus of new and innovative research.

In 2001, Mariana Hausleitner documented the destruction of multicultural Bukovina during the 1920s, as the Romanian state systematically restricted expressions of Ukrainian, Jewish, German, and Polish culture in a process that culminated in the deportations and massacres of the Holocaust.[106] Alberto Basciani's analysis of the Romanianization of Bessarabia argues that not only was the state inconsistent in how it applied nation-building policies there, but that the process was complicated by geography and fears about communism.[107] Florian Kührer-Wielach's 2014 study of a parallel process in Transylvania reveals a quite different process at work there. With stronger democratic traditions and decades of experience resisting Magyarization by the Austro-Hungarians, ethnic Romanians in Transylvania worked to sabotage Bucharest's attempts at centralization, attempting to impose their own vision of what the relationship between regions and the nation-state should be. Ultimately neither side was completely victorious, the result being a complex compromise.[108]

Both Hausleitner and Kührer-Wielach note that "modernization"—and industrialization in particular—were core elements of national integration, but Kührer-Wielach argues that the Romanian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Roman Catholic Churches also played key roles in creating regional and national identities.[109] His argument builds on Hans-Christian Maner's pioneering study on ecclesiastical politics in 2007. Maner shows how confessional conflicts exacerbated attempts at nation-building, and representatives from different provinces inside each church also resisted Bucharest's centralizing tendencies. The Metropolitan of Transylvania,

---

106 Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukowina: die Durchsetzung des nationalstaatlichen Anspruchs Grossrumäniens 1918–1944* (München: Oldenbourg, 2001).

107 Alberto Basciani, *La difficile unione: la Bessarabia e la Grande Romania, 1918–1940* (Roma: Aracne, 2005).

108 Florian Kührer-Wielach, *Siebenbürgen ohne Siebenbürger?: Zentralstaatliche Integration und politischer Regionalismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munchen: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014).

109 Ibid., 360.

Nicolae Bălan, for example, "maintained that the Orthodox Church is nei-
ther above the state, nor ruled by it. Based on Transylvanian tradition, he
strongly insisted on the maintenance of ecclesiastical autonomy and de-
centralized decision-making."[110] At the same time that he defended the
rights of Orthodoxy against Greek- and Roman Catholics, Bălan also en-
couraged both church and state to persecute minorities, including Jews,
Freemasons, Baptists, Brethren, and Pentecostals. A host of histories doc-
umenting this persecution have appeared in recent years, telling the story
from the victim perspective and portraying interwar Romania as a hostile,
persecuting society.[111] The state deported some Protestants to Transnis-
tria during the Holocaust, and as Ion Popa argues in *The Romanian Ortho-
dox Church and the Holocaust* (2017), leading figures within the Orthodox
Church promoted violent antisemitism and actively encouraged the
state's genocidal project against the Jews.[112]

    The Holocaust looms large in many of the narratives about central-
ization and nation-building. Vladimir Solonari in particular argues that
the Holocaust in Transnistria was part of a larger project to transform
Bessarabia into a "model province." Using deportations and mass murder,
Romanian administrators hoped to "purify" the eastern provinces of un-
desired ethnic groups, just as they did through the population exchanges
with Bulgaria.[113] Not only state officials were involved in the Holocaust.
Comparing Romanian Bessarabia with Soviet Transnistria on the left
bank of the Dniester River, Diana Dumitru claims that Bessarabians were
so convinced by the state's antisemitic propaganda that the twenty years

---

110 Hans-Christian Maner, *Multikonfessionalität und neue Staatlichkeit: Orthodoxe,
griechisch-katholische und römisch-katholische Kirche in Siebenbürgen und Alt-
rumänien zwischen den Weltkriegen* (1918–1940) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag,
2007), 346.

111 The most authoritative is Dorin Dobrincu and Danuț Mănăstireanu eds., *Omul
evanghelic: O explorare a comunităților protestante românești* (Iași: Polirom,
2018). For an overview of the literature in English, see Paul Michelson, "The His-
tory of Romanian Evangelicals, 1918–1989: A Bibliographical Excursus," *Archiva
Moldaviae*, 9 (2017): 191–234. For an attempt at a more balanced approach to Ro-
manian church history, see Roland Clark, *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Ro-
mania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

112 Viorel Achim (ed), *Politica regimului Antonescu față de cultele neoprotestante: Doc-
umente* (Iași: Polirom, 2013); Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the
Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

113 Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing
in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009).

of Romanian rule transformed them into willing perpetrators of the Holocaust. Transnistrians, on the other hand, were more likely to help Jews during the Holocaust.[114]

Nationalism, antisemitism, and eugenics were core ideologies of the centralizing nation-state. Constantin Iordachi's recent book shows that nationalism and liberalism were intimately connected in Romanian politics from 1750 onwards, and that during the nineteenth century exclusion shadowed almost all discussions of extending civil rights.[115] Antisemitism bedeviled important intellectual debates in the interwar period and was the motivating force behind both political policies and parties.[116] Not just an influential set of ideas, antisemitism structured everyday practices that marginalized and discriminated against Jews.[117]

Historians of the Holocaust from Radu Ioanid to Jean Ancel have repeatedly emphasized the connection between organized antisemitism and the mass murders that began in 1940. At the same time, however, they also acknowledge that the Holocaust was only made possible by the unique combination of events between 1940 and 1943 that gave Romanian perpetrators the opportunities and means to carry out the killings.[118]

---

114 Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

115 Constantin Iordachi, *Liberalism, Constitutional Nationalism, and Minorities: The Making of Romanian Citizenship, c. 1750–1918* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

116 Léon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991); Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România : 1919–1938: De la emancipare la marginalizare* (București: Hasefer, 2000); Gabriel Asandului, *Istoria Evreilor din România (1866–1938)* (Iași: Institutul European, 2003); Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew: Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romanian and Other Central East-European Cultures,* transl. Mirela Adăscăliței (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Peter Manu and Horia Bozdoghină, *Polemica Paulescu: Știință, politică, memorie* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2010); Horia Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A. C. Cuza în politica românească* (București: Curtea Veche, 2012); Irina Marin, *Peasant Violence and Antisemitism in Early Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

117 Anca Filipovici and Attila Gidó (eds), *Trecutul prezent: Evreii din România: istorie, memorie, reprezentare* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2018).

118 Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 5–61; Elie Wiesel et al., *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (București: International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, 2004), 19–56; Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940–44* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Armin Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 49–53; Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 25–70.

Alongside antisemitism were scientists and policy makers committed to creating an ethnically and socially "healthy" nation-state even if this involved sterilization and other restrictive measures aimed at eradicating "undesirable" traits in the population.[119] As Tudor Georgescu demonstrates, Romanian officials and doctors were not the only ones interested in eugenics, and the ideology shaped the development of Transylvanian Saxon communities throughout the 1930s.[120] Historians have been more hesitant to draw a straight line from eugenics to the Holocaust, but alongside historians of centralization and nation-building, they nonetheless emphasize that the same motivations and ideologies inspired both movements.

Beyond the Grand Narrative

A large number of new and hitherto inaccessible sources became available after the fall of the Ceaușescu dictatorship in December 1989. Western scholars now travel easily within Romania. Books, memoirs, diaries, and essay collections written by interwar intellectuals and politicians are republished and became easily accessible in most major research libraries in the country as well as in Western Europe and the United States. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists began carrying out large-scale oral history projects on interwar Romanian history during the late 1990s and early 2000s. First the National Archives, then the archives of the Securitate, became accessible to historians. Yet despite the sudden increase in source material, the dominant frameworks of interwar history hardly changed. Their enduring success testifies to the quality of the works by pioneering historians such as Seton-Watson, Roller, Roberts, Hillgruber, Heinen, Hitchins, and Livezeanu. With the exception of Roller's nationalist account of the march of progress, the details established by these historians have survived just as well as the core elements of their general frameworks. At the same time, however, one wonders whether the failure of subsequent generations of historians to establish new frameworks points to a lack of imagination across the field as a whole. The cultural turn, the literary turn, the rise of gender history, the history of sexualities, histories of the body, ethnomusicology, the spatial turn, global history, environmental history, the history of animals, and other innovative new approaches that have transformed the writing of history over the past thirty

---

119 Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Marius Turda (ed), *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900–1945: Sources and Commentaries* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

120 Georgescu, *The Eugenic Fortress*.

years have made remarkably little impact on the historiography of interwar Romania. The need for historians to read outside of their own fields and to adopt interdisciplinary methodologies is as urgent now as ever. Adapting ideas from studies of other times and places will allow us to see interwar Romania with new eyes and to discern new narratives running through the past.

Reading the past with an eye to the concerns of the twenty-first century also has the potential to generate new narratives. All of the earlier frameworks that continue to shape Romanian studies emerged out of the concerns of their eras. Seton-Watson and Roberts wrote with British interests in mind, Roller and Gheorghiu-Dej with a concern for spreading communist ideology, and Livezeanu with an awareness of the new approaches to nationalism and antisemitism that became popular during the 1980s. Verdery was influenced by world systems theory, a left-wing response to the inequalities created by global capitalism, and Heinen by social movement studies that emerged out of the new social movements of the 1960s. What might historians uncover today by interrogating gender binaries, asking about populism and radical right extremism, ethnic privilege, European integration, the interaction between humans and their environment, or the impact on new technologies of communication on the public sphere? All of these remain under-researched fields with great potential for future discoveries. Done well, asking today's questions of the past does not mean imposing our concerns onto the past but allowing the past to speak into the present in new ways.

Historians of interwar Romania have consistently struggled to portray plurality and to include ethnic and religious minorities within their narratives, Maria Bucur's *Heroes and Victims* (2010) being one of the few exceptions. Not only does Bucur manage to tell the story of Romanian, Hungarian, German, and Jewish memorialization, she also alerts us to a striking disconnect between state-sponsored narratives about the war and individual, family, or ethnic memories. Communities mourned their loved ones who perished in the First World War in different ways, and men and women played different roles in commemorations. Bucur's achievement is to unite the plurality of different voices into a single polyphonic narrative, as well as situating the interwar period within a longer temporal trajectory, from the 1880s to the 1990s.[121]

Other historians have shown parallel processes at work within Hungarian and Romanian communities, telling transnational stories that took

---

121 Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 49–143.

place simultaneously in both nation-states.[122] In *Hungarian Religion, Romanian Blood* (2019), R. Chris Davis shows how sociological, religious, and nationalist discourses from three different communities—Romanian, Hungarian, and Csango—converged during the 1930s to threaten the very existence of the Csango people. Similarly, James Kapaló's history of Inochentism analyses how stories about a religious minority spread from newspapers into police reports and popular culture, resulting in the harsh repression of believers by the state. By refusing to rely on only one type of source Kapaló manages to analyze interactions between social groups and to expose how one body of sources influenced another. In doing so he lets us see interwar Romania through the eyes of a persecuted minority rather than only through the eyes of the state.[123]

Disempowered minorities are not the only people ignored by the dominant frameworks of interwar Romanian history. Whereas most historians have focused on the perspective of the Romanian state and the debates of economists, Máté Rigó has been able to shed new light on interwar history by following the fortunes of "Europe's top one percent." Contrary to what the dominant frameworks suggest, Rigó shows that Jewish industrialists actually did better in antisemitic Transylvania than in supposedly tolerant France, and that French hegemony in Eastern Europe was as much about economics as about geopolitics.[124]

Bucur, Davis, Kapaló, Rigó and others like them show that alternative frameworks are possible. Integrating the stories of women and of ethnic and religious minorities into those about Romanian men produces much richer, more sophisticated, and more accurate history, as does viewing the past from hitherto unexplored perspectives, such as those of Inochentists or industrialists. What could we learn about interwar Romania if we approached it from the perspective of non-human actors, such as wolves or forests, or if we took Jewish hymnals, carts or railway stations as our primary texts? How did the lives of people with physical or mental disabilities change during this period, and how was life as a pensioner different in 1940 compared to 1920? Did men who had sex with

122 Anders E. B. Blomqvist, Constantin Iordachi and Balázs Trencsényi (eds), *Hungary and Romania Beyond National Narratives: Comparisons and Entanglements* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).

123 James A. Kapaló, *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (New York: Routledge, 2019). See also James Kapaló and Tatiana Vagramenko (eds), *Hidden Galleries: Material Religion in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2020).

124 Máté Rigó, *Imperial Elites after the Fall of Empires: Business Elites and States in Europe's East and West, 1867–1928* (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2016).

other men find their lifestyles constrained by the rise of right-wing nationalism in the late 1930s, or did the relative invisibility of homosexuality mean that things got neither better nor worse for them? To what extent did shifting geopolitical alliances, ethnic tensions, or changing technology impact the history of dance, and how did the rise of the oil industry change the lives of working-class youths? Which innovative new frameworks will find traction in the coming years is anyone's guess, but the vibrancy of alternative frameworks in the histories of other national contexts suggests that there is much still to be uncovered about interwar Romania that has hitherto been ignored or marginalized by the dominant frameworks in the field.