

Domesticating Viragos. The Politics of Womanhood in the Romanian Legionary Movement

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Abstract

Building on the basic premise that the attempt to create a New Man was one of fascism's master-ideas, this article focuses on the feminine underside of this program of political anthropogenesis. The article centers on the image of the New Woman and the politics of womanhood within the Romanian Legionary movement. It argues that the Legion's trademark rhetoric of martial heroism and martyrdom led to an essential tension between a virile model of womanhood (patterned upon the masculine ideal type of the martyr-hero) and a more conservative domestic model. A third, reconciliatory hybrid model, which mixed features borrowed from the two antagonistic types of Legionary womanhood was eventually developed to defuse this tension.

Keywords

gender politics – fascist femininity – New Man – New Woman – Romania – Iron Guard – women

The Gender Politics of Fascist Movements

Prompted by an upsurge of scholarly interest in the relationship between women and fascism, in recent decades a valuable corpus of scholarship has emerged from the intersection of gender and fascist studies.¹ The scholarship

¹ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975); Leila J. Rupp, 'Mother of the "Volk": The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology,' *Signs* 3 (1977): 362–379; Alexander de Grand, 'Women under Italian Fascism,' *The Historical Journal* 19 (1976): 947–968.

resulting from this convergence has been instrumental in furthering our understanding of women's connections with Italian Fascism, German National Socialism, the Croatian Ustasha, as well as with fascist movements in France and Britain.² Nonetheless, the feminine underside of Romanian fascism has failed to catch the interest of scholars fascinated by the muscular trappings of the Legionary movement.³ The few inroads made into the feminine side of the Romanian Legionary movement has not changed the fact that it remains a poorly charted scholarly territory.⁴ This study hopes to correct this omission and fill a gap within the literature by providing an analytical overview of women in the Romanian fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael.

Conservatism, male chauvinism, and patriarchalism – with their corresponding cult of domesticity, exaltation of motherhood, and sometimes visceral antifeminism – were very much ingrained in the fascist politics of gender. However, as in so many other aspects, the gender politics employed across the fascist spectrum reveals the plasticity of fascist ideologies.⁵ While Italian Fascism had ended up an antifeminist movement after starting out with a programme calling for women's political enfranchisement, Hitler's views on women expounded in *Mein Kampf* showcase an original radical patriarchalism that gradually softened its stance in relation to women's rights and labour.⁶ Closer scrutiny of both Mussolini and Hitler's socio-economic policies reveals

- 2 Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992); Martina Bitunjac, *Le donne e il movimento ustascia* (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2013); Melanie Hawthorne and Richard J. Golsan, ed., *Gender and Fascism in Modern France* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 1997); Julie V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2003).
- 3 Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1970); Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the 'Archangel Michael' in Inter-war Romania* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures & Societies, 2004).
- 4 Maria Bucur, 'Romania,' in *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe, 1919–45*, ed. Kevin Passmore (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 57–78; Valentin Nicolescu-Quintus and Radu A. Pircă, 'Femeia în gândirea naționalistă românească: patriarhalismul indiferenței,' in *Patriarhat și emancipare în istoria gândirii politice românești*, ed. Mihaela Mirou and Maria Bucur (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 149–215; Alexandra Petrescu, 'Women and Fascism in Romania,' *Postmodern Openings in Political Sciences* 2 (2009): 73–88; Alexandra Petrescu, *Tentația fascismului în România interbelică* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2010): 57–80.
- 5 Michael Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London: Academic Press, 1978). Billig was among the scholars who pointed out the 'internal inconsistencies of fascism' as a political ideology, see page 243.
- 6 Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 8–10.

that, despite an overarching contempt for women, fascist policies did not fit easily with the conventional wisdom on the relationship between fascism and women. That is to say, this relationship was much more intricate than conventional accounts suggest. Fascist regimes cannot be rendered simply as no more than antifeminist patriarchal powers 'devoted to the removal of women from the labour market and their return to a life of domestic servitude and the unceasing production of children.'⁷

Drawing on Martin Durham's 'subversive' thesis which challenges the 'taken for granted' nature of fascism's intrinsic conservatism towards women, this study highlights the inconsistencies at the heart of the Romanian Legionary movement's gender politics. It starts by discussing the Romanian fascism's anthropological project of creating a 'New Man,' understood in an essentially masculine fashion. Creating a female counterpart to fit this new man – a 'New Woman' – constituted a secondary project whose proper understanding can occur only when set aside the fascist attempt to fashion the new man – a rendition of masculine perfection conceived through the lens of an ideology preaching heroic martyrdom. The ideal types of womanhood identified in both the Legion's doctrinal writings as well as in the movement's ranks will be analysed in relationship to this 'New Man'. This paper argues that whereas the manly ideal of human perfection was never a problem, the movement struggled between two very opposite types of ideal womanhood. The thesis developed in this paper is that in addition to the taken for granted, conservative model of domestic womanhood, the Legion's trademark rhetoric of heroic self-sacrifice led to the articulation of an antagonistic type of militant womanhood. This heroic masculinization of the Legion's women created an essential tension within the movement's politics of womanhood that ultimately led to an attempt to domesticate the viragos. As a result of this reconciliatory project, a third, hybrid model of womanhood emerged, subordinating features of virile womanhood drawn from the virago model of the Legionary New Woman to a domestic model of wifehood and motherhood.

Fascism and the Struggle for Political Anthropogenesis

A bastardized notion of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* stood at the centrepiece of fascism's worldview.⁸ The attempt to transform human nature through a radical

⁷ Durham, *Women and Fascism*, 3.

⁸ The idea of a 'new consensus' in fascist studies, based on conceptualizing fascism as 'a revolutionary form of ultra-nationalism that attempts to realize the myth of the regenerated nation' was advanced by Roger Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New

anthropological revolution was conceived both as an end in itself and as a means to create a new socio-political order. Within the fascist imagination, the idea of the New Man was intrinsically linked to manhood and masculinity. In the midst of the Great War, Giovanni Papini had conceived the ideal of human perfection in terms of *maschilità*.⁹ After the war, the abstract notion of *l'uomo nuovo* had found a concrete embodiment in the person of Benito Mussolini, whose biography was narrated in Antonio Beltramelli's 1923 eponymous book. Across the Alps, Ernst Jünger hailed the new breed of man born out of the trench warfare of the Great War.¹⁰ After seizing state power, both Italian Fascism and German National Socialism had set out to make new men through an institutional apparatus specifically designed to fulfil this purpose (e.g., through youth organizations such as *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and *Hitlerjugend*).¹¹ Although their focus privileged the creation of new men, fascists soon extended the purview of their anthropological programmes to include women as well. Female structures such as the *Fasci Femminili* and *Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft* were set up as organizational milieus for fashioning the New Woman as the gender counterpart of the New Man. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Italian Fascist Women's organization incorporated more than three million members, while its German counterpart, the National Socialist Women's League, under the leadership of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, numbered a female membership of eight million, plus another three million girls in Hitler Youth.¹²

Stemming from the violent anti-Semitic students' activism that took Romanian universities by storm in the early 1920s, the Legion of Archangel Michael had integrated itself into the current of European inter-war fascism as it turned into a fully-fledged radical socio-political movement.¹³ Among the family

Consensus to New Wave?' *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012): 1–17, accessed September 6, 2016, doi: 10.1163/221162512X623601. It is my contention that anthropological palingenesis, i.e. the strive towards creating a new man, lies at the very core of this socio-political myth, and thus it should be considered as part and parcel of the new scholarly consensus.

- 9 Giovanni Papini, *Maschilità* (Florence: Libreria della Voce, 1915); Antonio Beltramelli, *L'uomo nuovo (Benito Mussolini)* (Verona: Mondadori, 1923).
- 10 Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) (originally published in German in 1920); Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlags-Anstalt, 1932).
- 11 Alessio Ponzio, *Shaping the New Man: Youth Training Regimes in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).
- 12 De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 265; Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxxiv.
- 13 Armin Heinen, *Legiunea 'Arhanghelul Mihail': O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional* (București: Humanitas, 1999); Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919–1941:*

resemblances it shared with the other fascisms that had sprouted throughout the continent was the idea of *homo novus* along with the yearning for a total rebirth of the nation. This dual palingenetic thrust (anthropological and socio-political) was the driving force behind fascism's quest for total renewal.¹⁴ The Romanian Legionary movement developed a similar program of 'political anthropogenesis' whose ultimate goal was the creation of a New Man as a result of a transfigurative spiritual revolution.

The Legion's quest to create a 'New Man' emerged in an ideological milieu already suffused with similar anthropological programmes.¹⁵ In the wake of the First World War, a highly ambitious eugenic movement developed in Greater Romania, pursuing a biopolitical agenda of regenerating the national body through crafting eugenically engineered new humans.¹⁶ However, although the two movements came to cross paths (e.g., the eugenicist Iordache Făcăoaru who enrolled in the Legion or the Legionary Traian Herseni who endorsed in his writings the eugenic programme), no direct and straightforward link between the Legionary and the eugenics movements can be established.¹⁷ The irreconcilable difference between the political anthropogenesis pursued by the two movements rested on the fact that whereas the eugenicists appealed to objective rationality and scientific reasoning in legitimizing their material programme of bodily regeneration, the Legion developed a spiritual project which aimed at redeeming the soul of the nation. The latter was based not on the canons of scientific objectivity and medical rationality, which they despised as expressions of Western materialistic decadence, but on a soteriology of collective salvation infused with Orthodox mysticism.¹⁸ To be sure, the

Mistica ultranaționalismului (București: Humanitas, 1993); Roland Clark, *Sfântă tinerețe legionară: activism fascist în România interbelică* (Iași: Polirom, 2015).

14 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

15 Valentin Săndulescu, 'Fascism and its Quest for the "New Man": The Case of the Romanian Legionary Movement,' *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004): 349–361.

16 Marius Turda, ed., *Crafting Humans: From Genesis to Eugenics and Beyond* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2013); A survey of eugenics in European societies is provided in Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); On the Romanian eugenic movement, see Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); On the biopolitics of motherhood within the eugenic movement, see Maria Bucur, 'In Praise of Wellborn Mothers: On the Development of Eugenicist Gender Roles in Interwar Romania,' *East European Politics & Societies* 9, no. 1 (1994): 123–142.

17 Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization*, 12.

18 *Ibid.*, 113.

Legion's anthropological revolution, although cast in spiritual terms, included a bodily dimension. However, it was more muscular than physiological, as the Legionary new men had to redeem their bodies through hard work in voluntary labour camps and in the graduation of a heroic school, not through eugenics and biopolitical means.¹⁹

The portrait of the New Man was sketched in the canonical writings of Codreanu and other chief ideologues of the movement. This 'New Man' was a paradoxical breed of an Orthodox *Übermensch*, a heroic martyr embracing the ascetic ethos inspired by the Eastern Christian faith, but at the same time espousing a martial vitalism and will for power that rendered him ruthless, unforgiving, and cruel.²⁰ This ideal of human perfection conceived by the Legionaries' anthropological imagination was not to remain an abstraction for too long. The movement's troubled existence punctuated with political persecution laid the ground for heroic martyrs to emerge out of the fierce struggle with state authorities.²¹ This struggle set the stage for 'concrete' incarnations of New Men to come into the world. In line with the Legion's mystical ideology of thanatic ultranationalism,²² these historical concretizations of the New Men tended to be Legionary martyrs who willingly sacrificed their lives for the sacred cause of the movement. Such was the case with Ion I. Moța and Vasile Marin, who became 'masters of death' by dying for Christ and the Legion in the Spanish Civil War in 1937.²³ A feverish cult of the Captain, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, as the

19 Valentin Săndulescu, "Taming the Body": Preliminary Considerations Regarding the Legionary Work Camps System (1933–1937), *Historical Yearbook* 5 (2008): 85–94.

20 Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Cărticica șefului de cuib* (sine loco: sine nomine, 1937); Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari* (Sibiu: Editura 'Totul pentru țară', 1936); Alexandru Cantacuzino, *Românul de mâine: Românismul nostru* (București: Tiparul Românesc, 1937).

21 A note on language use is necessary here: throughout the paper, the term 'martyr' will be employed emically, i.e., as it was used by the Legionaries themselves, resisting any temptation to challenge its semantics from a *strictu sensu* theological standpoint.

22 By 'thanatic ultranationalism' I designate the radical form of nationalism requiring from the part of its followers a self-sacrificial form of patriotism expressed through a readiness and willingness to undergo martyrdom for the superior cause of the movement. Besides the exhortations to political martyrdom presented as supreme moral duty, another central feature of thanatic ultranationalism is the development of a cult of death along with an elaborate ceremonial of celebrating death as symbolic victory, personal salvation, and vicarious atonement.

23 William Totok, 'Maeștrii morții: Despre încercarea de reînviere a cultului Moța și Marin,' in *Noi perspective în istoriografia evreilor din România*, ed. L. Rotman (București: Hasefer, 2010), 255–269; for the two Legionary leaders' views on Romania's development, see Mircea Platon, 'The Iron Guard and the "Modern State": Iron Guard Leaders Vasile Marin

closest embodiment of the Legionary model of male perfection, was already well established during his lifetime as a direct consequence of the charismatic leader principle in fascist ideology. But this cult of the leader reached epic proportions after Codreanu's assassination in 1938, when he could be fully celebrated as the ultimate embodiment of the New Man, along the lines of the Legion's ideology of martyr-heroism.

Besides these concrete models of male perfection embodied in the persons of Codreanu, Moța, and Marin, the Legionary anthropological imagination also developed three other transpersonal incarnations of the New Man. Struggling to overcome great financial and logistical setbacks, Codreanu devised the idea of organizing 'death squads,' that is, commandos of Legionary men willing to go to any length for the movement's cause. The term *echipele morții* ['death teams'] would be coined in the context of electoral struggle in 1933.²⁴ But the idea behind the term had already emerged in 1923 when Codreanu and Moța devised a plot to assassinate the politico-economic leadership of the country, accused of being in the pay of Jews. The 'Văcărești' – named thus for being incarcerated in Văcărești prison as their conspiracy was circumvented by authorities – were praised by the anti-Semitic ultranationalist press as a 'self-sacrificial group,' ready to embrace and inflict death for the supreme purpose of purifying the nation. According to Codreanu himself, it was in the cell of Văcărești prison that he decided to found a new youth organization that would purge Romania of its evils.²⁵ It was within the prison walls, in the presence of an icon of Saint Michael that the students purportedly experienced an archangelic epiphany out of which the Legion would later emerge.

The Văcărești boys, imprisoned for plotting a series of high profile assassinations, were crucial in the development of the Legionary movement for at least two reasons. First, they formed the hard-core of the Legion of the Archangel Michael that was established in June 1927. Second, they encompassed the Legion's trademark doctrine of martyrdom and vicarious atonement that would reach its mystical climax in Moța and Marin's burial in February 1937. The notion of 'death teams' matched the Legion's tantalizing doctrine of thanatic ultranationalism, i.e. the belief system pillared of the cult of death,

and Ion I. Moța, and the "New European Order", *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012): 65–90, accessed September 6, 2016, doi: 10.1163/22116257-00201002.

24 Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 426.

25 Ibid., 176: On November 8, 1923, the feast of Saints Archangels Michael and Gabriel, inside the Văcărești prison, the student conspirators have decided to name the future youth organization after Archangel Michael.

self-sacrificial patriotism, and heroic martyrdom, where dying for the nation brings personal salvation for the self-sacrificer, as well as vicarious atonement for his community. The notion of 'death squad' was praised in songs extolling political violence and joyful martyrdom: 'In line with the Captain / We will happily sacrifice, / Upon the enemies' corpses, / A new country we shall erect. / Joyful and smiling / We stare death in the face / Because we are the death squad, / We either win or die.'²⁶

Besides the Văcărești boys from which the Legionary movement grew, the most (in) famous death squads were the Nicadors, the Decemvirs, and the Avengers, all of whom achieved notoriety for the particular style in which they fulfilled their killing missions.²⁷ Encouraged by the Romanian justice system, which already acquitted Ion I. Moța and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu for attempted murder and murder respectively (Moța shot fellow Legionary Aurel Ver-nichescu for his act of treason, while Codreanu shot and killed police prefect Constantin Manciu), the death squads were conceived of as performing public rituals of assassination brandished as moral acts of symbolic vindication splattered in blood. The vengeance was to be cruel and brutal. The death *squadristi* followed to the letter Codreanu and others' description of the New Man that the Legion was striving to create: a cold-blooded, merciless avenger. Foreseeing the day when the Legionaries would see their enemies falling on their knees at the Legionaries feet, Codreanu urged his fellow Legionaries not to show any mercy. 'Do not forgive them,' as they do not deserve any mercy.²⁸ And merciless they were, when the Nicadors assassinated the liberal Prime Minister Ion G. Duca at Sinaia on 29 December 1933, twenty days after he had outlawed the Legionary movement. Or, in a similar act of retaliation, when a death squad of

26 Traian Puiu, *Cânticica de cântece* (Salzburg: Colecția 'Omul nou', 1951). Besides the 'Death team' song written by Nicu Iancu, the booklet also included 'The Nicadors' song' written by the Nicadors themselves, 'The Nicadors' doina' by Simion Lefter, as well as 'The Hymn of Miti Dumitrescu's team' [The Avengers] by Ion Tolescu, whose chorus was saying 'We are the team of Legionary revenge / And with the shadow of the saintly martyrs in our chests / To blaze the way for the Guard to the sun / We climb from the Nicadors and the Decemvirs.' Collective singing was a powerful means of forging solidarity, expressing the shared ideological values, and fashioning a pronounced sense of group identity. See Roland Clark, 'Collective Singing in Romanian Fascism,' *Cultural and Social History: The Journal of the Social History Society* 10, no. 2 (2013): 251–271.

27 For the notion of a 'Legionary style,' see Ernest Bernea, *Stil legionar* (București: Tipografia 'Bucovina', 1937).

28 Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 280.

nine, known as the Avengers, executed Prime Minister Armand Călinescu on 21 September 1939.

The most gruesome act of violence, however, was inflicted upon their former comrade, Mihail Stelescu, who had initiated a schism within the movement under the banner of 'The Crusade of Romanianism,' dubbed as 'Stelism,' an act of treason entailing the punishment of death.²⁹ At the Legionary Students' Congress held in April 1936, public blacklists had been spelled out loudly and death squads were established to carry out the assassinations. Among those blacklisted were public figures such as Bucharest police prefect and high profile political figures such as the King's Jewish mistress Elena Lupescu, but also the dissident former commander of the Legion, Mihail Stelescu. On 16 July 1936, ten death *squadristi*, later named as the Decemvirs, went to the hospital where their factious ex-fellow was recovering after an appendectomy. Thirty-eight bullets riddled his convalescent body. After they shot him dead, the Decemvirs chopped his body with an axe, in a macabre orgy of rampant political punishment. After the carnal slaughter, as with the other death squads who murdered high-level political figures, the Decemvirs surrendered peacefully and confessed their crimes.³⁰ It is this sober brutality describing the feral spree of violence followed by a surreal, tantric composure that characterises the Legionary death squads' killing style.

Educated in the heroic school of the 'creative deed,' this was the breed of New Men nurtured in the Legionary nests and work camps who would redeem the sins of the nation through their self- and other-sacrifices. The bodily remains of Moța and Marin, the two 'masters of death' who died in the Spain were buried as sacred relics of martyrs in a mausoleum especially erected for this purpose at the end of a theatrically performed political and religious liturgy. In 1940, after the Legionaries seized power and established the National Legionary State, the new rulers developed and deployed a mass-scale program of commemorations centred on celebrating the movement's political martyrs. It was within this grand commemorative program that the remains of the fourteen Legionary martyrs – Codreanu, the three Nicadors, and the ten Decemvirs, who were all executed on 30 November 1938 while being transferred to Jilava prison – were unearthed and ritually reburied together with those of Moța and Marin's in the Mausoleum.

29 Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, 'Trădarea' issued on September 25, 1934 in *Circulări și manifeste* (München: Colecția 'Europa', 1981): 18.

30 'Mihail Stelescu a fost asasinat...,' *Cruciada Românilor: Săptămânal de luptă politică și spirituală*, no. 81, July 19, 1936, 1.

TABLE 1 *The Legionary squadron of New Men*

| # | Agnomen | Names |
|----|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The Captain | Corneliu Zelea Codreanu |
| 2 | The Masters of Death | Ion Moța and Vasile Marin |
| 3 | The Nicadors | Nicolae Constantinescu, Ion Caranica, Doru Belimace |
| 9 | The Avengers | Dumitru (Miti) Dumitrescu, Ion Ionescu, Ovidiu Isaia, Ion Moldoveanu, Gheorghe Paraschivescu, Cezar Popescu, Marin Stănciulescu, Traian Popescu, Ion Vasiliu |
| 10 | The Decemvirs | Ion Caratanase, Iosif Bozântan, Ștefan Curcă, Ion Pele, Grigore Ion State, Ion Atanasiu, Gavrilă Bogdan, Radu Vlad, Ștefan Georgescu, Ion Trandafir |

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S OWN ELABORATION

The Legionary archetype of the New Man, imagined by the movement's ideologues as a paradoxical fusion between Nietzsche's vitalist and merciless Superman and an Orthodox saint undergoing heroic martyrdom, found concrete approximation either in the personal figures of Codreanu, Moța, and Marin, or in the collective personalities of the Nicadors, the Decemvirs, and the Avengers (see Table 1). Within the movement's symbolic system of cultural representations, memory practices and traditions of commemoration, the Legionary incarnations of the New Man form a hierarchically structured and stratified pantheon of hero-martyrs. Hannah Arendt has pointed out that a totalitarian organization follows the principle of 'the hierarchy of radicality'.³¹ The Legion implemented this principle not only in its organizational structure, patterned in stratified layers of power and prestige as revealed by the various grades and honours it had developed for this purpose,³² but also in its canon of martyrs. Within the Legion, the readiness to self-sacrifice – the will to martyrdom – was the sole measure of this radicalism which was the structuring principle of the movement's organizational matrix and as well as its pantheon of martyrs.³³ In line with the movement's militaristic ethos, this pantheon can be conceived

31 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 369.

32 Heinen, *Legiunea 'Arhanghelul Mihail'*, 257.

33 Ion I. Moța, 'Esențialul,' in *Cranii de lemn: Articole 1922–1936* (Sibiu: Editura 'Totul pentru Țară,' 1936), 211–213, 212; Vasile Marin, 'Ce este politica naționalistă,' in *Crez de generație*

of as a squadron of martyrs with a pyramidal organizational structure headed by the Captain Codreanu himself, followed by his two wings, Moța and Marin, while the lower echelons are occupied by the Legion's 'death squads': the three Nicadors, the nine Avengers, and finally the ten Decemvirs.

The Legionary New Woman between Domestic Motherhood and Virile Heroism

In the movement's thriving written culture, the notion of 'death squad' was glorified in the language of martyrdom. The 'death squad' became a paradigmatic model of Legionary virtue, heroic exempla of Legionary New Men. Nevertheless, the death squad model could not be easily transferred across gender lines. Given its muscular, thoroughly masculine trappings,³⁴ the Legion promoted the gendered ideals of male political martyrdom against female domestic motherhood. However, the manly ideal of heroism turned out to be so appealing that it shaped a very different model of the New Woman. This is the reason why the Legionary anthropolitical imagination developed multiple standards of female perfection, as opposed to the singular model of the New Man.

One of these standards was the conservative model of domestic servitude. Stemming directly from its conservative stance on the politics of gender, the Legion's ideological default position concerning women's role and nature was the cult of domesticity and the extolment of motherhood. In his sparse pronouncements on this topic, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu conceived of women in their fundamental role as mothers and wives. What comes out of the fragmentary and incidental references made by the Captain himself is a conservative understanding of gender roles. In his main work, *Pentru legionari*, he remains silent over the entire question. In *Cărticica șefului de cuib*, Codreanu refers to women as future mothers whose main mission lies in nurturing their children. Their political role, while not denied, is confined to helping the Legion with feminine work (knitting, sewing, serving food, selling hand-made artwork, etc.) and to spreading Legionary ideology.³⁵ But a fuller picture comes out of his organizational circulars. In one such circular issued in October 1935, which

(București: I.E. Torouțiu, 1937), 39–44, 39. Both of the Legionary Commanders stress out in their articles that 'The spirit of self-sacrifice is the essential.'

34 'Corneliu Codreanu și naționalismul bărbătesc,' *Porunca Vremii: Tribună zilnică de luptă națională și creștină*, Year VI, no. 620, January 8, 1937, 2. Codreanu's movement was hailed in the right-wing press as espousing a 'masculine nationalism.'

35 Codreanu, *Cărticica șefului de cuib*, 22.

announced the creation of the Legionary Canteen, Codreanu instructed that 'the meal will be cooked every day by the women Legionaries on duty and by the ladies who want to do good.'³⁶ Young ladies working in the kitchen were told to maintain 'exemplary cleanness,' and it was mandatory for them to bath before entering in service. 'Let me not see in the kitchen or serving food careless or dirty girls or madams.' 'I shall not find any hair, flies, or eyebrows in the food,' warned Codreanu.³⁷ He also admonished ladies to hold in check any flirtatious behaviour as well as any kind of intrigue, conflict, and gossip between the workers. 'I shall hear no whisper,' the Captain ordered to his women.³⁸

When called outside of the household to contribute to the movement, women were to perform womanly tasks, such as cooking and serving food at the canteen, cleaning and housekeeping the headquarters, weaving and sewing at the Legionary Cooperative and selling items at the Legionary Commerce. Within the vast system of work camps that spread throughout the country in the mid-1930s, the contribution of women to the Legionary effort was largely restricted to that of cooking and feeding the New Men who were emerging out of the sweat of physical labour, the discipline of paramilitary marches, and the harmony of collective singing.³⁹ Set up in July 1935 on the coast of the Black Sea, the Carmen Sylva work camp was the largest and most ambitious project of its kind. The crown of the Legionary's vast system of work camps, it was devised both as a school of character out of which new men and women would emerge, and as a showcase for the movement's power of creative construction. Led by Codreanu himself, the work camp was supposedly a microcosm of the future Legionary Romania – a counter-model and 'parallel society' to the present one.⁴⁰ The camp was heralded by an enthusiast reporter as 'an ideal city' where there is no class, generational, or gender antagonism, 'a state writ small'

36 Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, 'Cantina legionară,' issued on October 7, 1935, in *Circulări și manifeste: 1927–1938*, 5th edition (München: Colecția 'Europa', 1981): 52–55, 53.

37 Ibid., 55.

38 Ibid.

39 Rebecca Haynes, 'Work Camps, Commerce, and the Education of the "New Man" in the Romanian Legionary Movement,' *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 4 (2008): 943–967, 950, 961; Săndulescu, 'Taming the Body,' 85–94; Rebecca Haynes, 'Saving Greater Romania: The Romanian Legionary Movement and the "New Man",' in *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, ed. Mark Cornwall and John Paul Newman (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 174–196.

40 Haynes, 'Work Camps,' 994.

foreshadowing the Romania of tomorrow.⁴¹ Out of the 842 residents of the work camp, only eighty-two were women, amounting to less than ten percent of the camp's population (710 were men and there were also fifty children). Besides shedding light on the underrepresentation of women in a thoroughly masculine movement, the demographics of Carmen Sylva also reveal the professional status of female Legionaries. There were thirty housewives (43.5 %), twenty-six were university students and graduates of superior schools, and twelve of them were high school students. One of them was registered as a hairdresser, while for the remainder no professional status was recorded.⁴² For sure, a 'domestic skewness' can be observed in this distribution, with housewives outnumbering university female students.

From its very inception, the movement's feminine section was envisioned as a gender 'support group' for the main section of the Legion, the male youth. By 1933, with the publication of the *Booklet of the Nest Chief*, Codreanu had consolidated the organizational structure of the Legion. A Commandment of the *Cetăţui de fete* [the Girls' Fortresses, the feminine section's new name] was established, whose chief was named Mihail Stelescu. That the women's Fortresses were commanded by a man is indicative of the subordination of females within the movement, further pointing to the gender hierarchy characterising the Legion. Excluded from the brotherhood of Legionary men, in their Fortresses women were instructed a) to collectively self-educate themselves in all realms, b) to support the Legion in every means they could, c) to work to elevate the moral standing of women, d) to cultivate the Christian tradition and the national solidarity between Romanian women, and e) to give Romania a new woman, 'a tough and committed soldier as much as the man.'⁴³

Nevertheless, this model of domestic motherhood did not remain uncontested. Inspired by the male model of the heroic soldier embodied in the figures of Codreanu and the Nicadors, a virile model of femalehood emerged at the antipodes of the domestic one. The possibility for such a virile type of the Legionary New Woman was asserted in one of the few pieces of work from the movement's literature that addressed the female question. This is Radu Gyr's booklet on female heroism, which was actually the transcription of a 1935

41 George Macrin, 'Taberele de muncă: Tabăra dela Carmen Sylva,' *Însemnări sociologice* 2, no. 7 (October 1936): 12–23, 23.

42 Ibid., 19–21.

43 Mihail Stelescu, 'Frăţiile de cruce şi Cetăţuile legiunii,' *Pământul Strămoşesc: Foaie de educaţie legionară, organizare şi informaţii* 5, no. 3 (March 1, 1933): 9.

conference he held at Jassy University.⁴⁴ The ideas conveyed by Gyr, although biased in a conservative direction, disclose the full scope of the Legion's heterogeneous politics of womanhood. The movement's poet-ideologue is at pains to assert, against the grain of the prevailing masculine consensus, that females do have what it takes to be heroic, just as their fellow males. He then vacillates between very different models of female heroism, ranging in his typology from the spiritual heroism expressed by Christian female saints and martyrs (Virgin Mary, Blandina, Paraskeva, etc.), through the moral heroism embodied by the woman qua sister, wife, and mother, to the national heroism as revealed by viragos such as Joan of Arc and Ecaterina Teodoroiu.⁴⁵ This virago model of womanhood was best approximated in the person of Nicoleta Nicolescu, the first female Commander of the Girls' Fortresses.⁴⁶

In the remainder of this paper, I will explore the facets of this heteronomous politics of womanhood. The argument put forward here is that the Legionary gynopolitical project – i.e., the anthropolitics of womanhood – pendulated between the ideal type of the domestic woman symbolized by females who outperformed their traditional roles of mothers, wives, and sisters and that of the warrior woman embodied by Nicoleta Nicolescu and her 'Nicolettes.' As we shall see, the Legionary politics of womanhood wavered between the two until the movement managed to reconcile the two opposite ideal types into a hybrid model of Legionary femininity. Table 2 below explores this trial typology of the Legionary New Woman, providing concrete examples of each type as well as detailing their very different sets of virtues and features of character.

44 Radu Gyr, *Femeia în eroismul spiritual, moral și național: idei dezvoltate într-o conferință, ținută la 8 decembrie 1935, în aula Universității din Iași* (București: Cetățuia Legionară, 1937).

45 The notion of the 'virago' is used in this paper to designate a type of virile womanhood that goes 'beyond her sex' by expressing a manly ideal of heroism and self-sacrifice. The late medieval writer Christine de Pisan, author of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, was praised by theologian Jean Gerson as *virilis femina*. Caterina Sforza was also considered a 'Renaissance virago' for her manly features, see Ernst Breisach, *Caterina Sforza: A Renaissance Virago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). The term was also used to describe the heroic feats of Joan of Arc.

46 Within the exilic memory of the movement, Nicoleta Nicolescu is remembered as a combination of Ecaterina Teodoroiu and Joan of Arc. See, for instance, Constantin Papanace, 'O mare mucenică legionară: Nicoleta Nicolescu,' in *Evocări: Gând și faptă legionară* (București: Editura Fundației Buna Vestire, 1997) (originally published at Madrin in 1965), 83–88, 88: 'Nicoleta was burned alive just like Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, was burned on the stake. . . . Her executioners turned her to ashes. But just like Phoenix, Nicoleta will rise into thousands of "Nicolettes"'

TABLE 2 *Typology of the Legionary New Woman*

| Models of the Legionary Woman | Concrete personification | Abstract embodiment | Virtues and features of character |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The domestic woman | Eliza Zelea Codreanu/ Elena Zelea Codreanu/ Iridenta Moța [Codreanu]* | The heroic mother/ wife/sister | <i>Womanly virtues:</i> domestic motherhood, heroic widowhood |
| The warrior woman | Nicoleta Nicolescu | The martyr-virgin (the Nicolettes) | <i>Manly virtues:</i> heroic martyrdom, viriloid femininity |
| The hybrid woman | Lucia Trandafir | Mother/wife/sister at home, <i>châtelaine</i> of the Legionary Fortress outside the household | <i>Bigender virtues:</i> androgynous femininity, manly womanhood |

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S OWN ELABORATION

Mothers and Widows: The Domestic Model of Legionary Womanhood

Given the movement's inherent patriarchal inflections, the domestic woman epitomized the ideological default stance on the female question. A mother above everything else, she was to wear the headscarf of housewifery and should practise the cult of domesticity. If heroism was asked of her, it was by mothering future heroes and educating them in the spirit of self-sacrifice. Heroic in her domestic motherhood, she was to remain invisible in political struggles as she was relegated to a supporting role within the confines of the private realm. Prime examples of the domestic model of womanhood come from Codreanu's own family. Eliza Zelea Codreanu symbolizes the paragon of the Legionary mother. Discreet in the public arena, the only time Mrs. Codreanu came in the spotlight was when she heard the news of her son's death. It was in this tragic context that she expressed the supreme virtues of Legionary motherhood. While others hoped Corneliu remained alive, Eliza made a strong impression

on those around her through her chilling composure, resolutely accepting the news of Corneliu's death.⁴⁷

This heroic mourning was emphatically displayed by another bereaved mother. One of the first measures taken by the National Legionary State was to establish the day of 22 September as the Day of the Legion's Heroes and Martyrs, in commemoration of the killing spree unleashed by the King in 1939. Among the 252 Legionaries executed on that day, a central place was held by Miti Dumitrescu's team of nine 'Avengers' who had brought the wrath of Carol II after assassinating the Prime Minister Armand Călinescu. At the end of the ceremony, Horia Sima, the new Commander of the movement, who organized the event, paid his respect to the mothers and sisters of the fallen. He was surprised to find no tears in their eyes, but, as he later recalled, a heroic inner composure. According to his own account, a shiver of awe passed through his body when he spoke with the mother of Cezar and Traian Popescu, both of them members of Miti Dumitrescu's team. The two brothers were executed on the same spot that they had killed the prime minister and their mutilated bodies were left exposed to the public for days. When Sima paid his respects, their mother looked him in the eyes and told him, 'I have another son and, if needed, I will sacrifice him too for the Nation and the Legion!'⁴⁸ It is in these attitudes of bereaved motherhood and heroic mourning, as expressed by Eliza Zelea Codreanu and more blatantly by the mother of Popescu brothers, that the ideal type of Legionary motherhood, deemed to giving birth to fallen martyrs, fully reveals itself.

The embodiment of the New Woman as Legionary wife came in the person of Elena Ilinoiu, who after marrying Corneliu had become Elena Zelea Codreanu. The wedding was organized as a prime 'example of political marketing,' in the city of Focșani, where tens of thousands of people celebrated the couple in a public feast of unprecedented proportions.⁴⁹ Although a member of the Legion, she scarcely appeared in public. When she did come out in public, it was in two roles, both of them traditional, in accordance with the

47 Duiliu T. Sfințescu, *Răspuns la întrebări ale tinerilor care doresc tot adevărul despre mișcarea legionară* (București: Crater, 1996), 23.

48 Horia Sima, *Era Libertății: Statul Național Legionar. Volumul I* (Timișoara: Gordian, 1995), 48.

49 Petre Abeaboeru, 'Nunta lui Zelea Codreanu: un exemplu de marketing politic,' *Historia* 10, no. 100 (April 2010): 36–39; Ion Cristoiu, 'Nunta, în vizorul Siguranței,' *Historia* 10, no. 100 (April 2010): 40–43; Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, estimates the crowd between 80,000 and 100,000 people, a number confirmed by eyewitnesses, see Liviu Vălenaș and Mircea Dumitriu, *Mișcarea legionară – între adevăr și mistificare* (Timișoara: Editura Marineasa, 2000), 14.

ideology of female domesticity. First as a bride, in the heavily politicized wedding of 14 June 1925, in which she was displayed as an icon of virginal beauty and submissive consort. Her domestic submission to her husband's authority is revealed by one anecdote she herself had related to a fellow Legionary inmate while held in Mislea prison. Elena Zelea (Lilica) recounted an episode that took place during their stay in Grenoble, where Codreanu and Moța went to study in September 1925. One day, while Corneliu was out, Lilica had cut two of her thin strands in order to regenerate her hair. Codreanu, unsatisfied with half-measures, finished the job by shaving her hair off with a clipper.⁵⁰ She had to wear a headscarf, but it was all worth it, as she was later proud of her thickly-grown hair. The second time her name came out in public was as bereaved wife, after Corneliu's death, when Lilica was deemed the epitome of heroic widowhood. Wearing black garments, at the disinterring of the Captain, the Nicadors, and the Decemvirs in November 1940 the unconsolated widow had to identify her husband. She recognized him, despite the damages done to his mutilated face by the vitriol acid thrown over their bodies. He was still wearing the ring with her name – Lilica – engraved on it when the cement was cast over their buried corpses.⁵¹

Codreanu's wife shared the fate of heroic widowhood with two other wives of Legionary martyrs, Iridenta Moța and Ana Maria Marin (the wives of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin). Of the two, Iridenta Moța deserves special consideration as she was simultaneously Ion Moța's wife and Corneliu Codreanu's sister. Iridenta was the protagonist of an embarrassing episode that brought to full light the mystical mind-set of the Legionary worldview. In a letter addressed to Corneliu, Ion Moța breaks to his future brother-in-law some sensational news. Seized by the thrill of the miraculous event, Moța shares to Corneliu 'a thing that will possibly have a huge importance not only for our lives, but also for

50 Sofia Cristescu Dinescu, 'Cu Corneliu nu era de glumit,' in *Lacrima prigoanei*, Vol. II (București: Gama, 1997): 193–194, 193.

51 Ana Maria Marin, 'Elena, soția Căpitanului,' in *Lacrima prigoanei*, Vol. II (București: Gama, 1997): 22–49, 33. Another Legionary, who eye-witnessed the procession, later wrote that 'the Captain did not rot. Whereas all the other bodies were decayed, his was untouched by corruption. . . . The Captain was a saint. He has not decayed and he will never decay.' See Vasile Posteuca, *Desgroparea Căpitanului* (Madrid: Editura Mișcării Legionare, 1977). Indeed, in the aftermath of the reburial, a request has been made to Patriarch Nicodim to canonized Codreanu as an Orthodox Saint. Nicodim declined the request and consequently stepped down from the Patriarchal See. It was only at general Ion Antonescu's insistence that he changed his decision of resignation. See Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 322.

the entire world.⁵² He went on to say that although he lived with his fiancée a life of angelic purity and 'Iridenta is the most innocent of virgins, it seems to us that she presents the signs of pregnancy! We are not yet sure. It is possible to be some other disease. In a few days we shall know. 98%, or even downright, 100% I am certain she is pregnant.' Excluding any other natural explanation (such as contamination or infidelity), Moța was overwhelmed by 'the existence of something entirely supernatural. . . . A great miracle will happen, Corneliu, I tell you with the deepest, firmest, and surest consciousness.'⁵³ The prophecy was soon fulfilled, as Iridenta gave birth to Mihai, named after the Legion's patron archangel.

Nicadors and Nicolettes: The Virago Model of Legionary Womanhood

Yet besides the conservative model of domestic motherhood, a second, conflicting, model of womanhood emerged, patterned on the heroic example provided by Codreanu and the Nicadors. Caught on the one hand in the revolutionary trappings of 'palingenetic ultranationalism', which strove towards a total rupture with the old order, and on the other hand deeply entangled in the anti-modern thrust and craving after a conservative utopianism,⁵⁴ Legionary

52 Ioan Crăcăoanu and Ioan Piperiu, *Uciagașii neamului românesc: fapte și documente* (București: sine nomine, 1937), 23–24. Crăcăoanu and Piperiu were two law student from Bucharest and Jassy respectively, associated with Mihail Stelescu's schismatic faction, *Cruciada Românismului*. They published this booklet in which they reproduced various documents meant to discredit the Legion's leadership and to expose them as 'murderers of the Romanian nation.' For instance, Corneliu Zelea [born Zelinski] Codreanu's certificate of baptism reveals him as a 'German-Polish-Magyar mongrel' (*corcitură*). Similarly, General Gheorghe 'Zizi' Cantacuzino is designated as a 'Fanariot fleecer' (*ciocoi fanariot*), a 'rascal predator' of the country (1).

53 The letter, handwritten by Moța and dated December 31st, 1925, is reproduced in Ioan Crăcăoanu and Ioan Piperiu, *Uciagașii neamului românesc*. The sensational second part of the letter, breaking the news of the 'immaculate conception' is also reproduced in the historical indictment of the Legionary movement sponsored by the Communist party, Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, *Garda de fier: Organizație teroristă de tip fascist* (București: Editura Politică, 1980), 44.

54 The term 'palingenetic ultranationalism' as a synthetic characterization of the essence of fascism was advanced by Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 44. The notion of palingenesis was articulated at length more recently, underpinning Griffin's major work, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

thought developed an alternative model of womanhood. This alternative model challenged the domesticity of the conservative one. Significantly, the virago model of militant womanhood emerged from the pressure of the hyperbolic rhetoric of self-sacrifice that thoroughly pervaded the movement's discourse. To be sure, these exhortations to heroic martyrdom were addressed to the men of the Legion. Nevertheless, the self-sacrificial discourse and the injunctions to martyric death reached such proportions that they could not be contained to male exclusivity anymore. Striking a heroic chord in their hearts, some of the Legion's women reacted to these exhortations to manly martyrdom by contesting the secondary roles to which they were relegated – by ideological default – and by transgressing the gender boundary, much to the men's wonder and disquiet.

Driven by the ever-escalating rhetoric of heroism, martiality, and martyrdom, Legionary male ideologues lost hold of the conventional gender division as exhortations to sacrificial death spiralled out of their control to include women as well as men. Time and again, the Romanian woman was summoned to join arms with the Legionary men in their fight to redeem the nation. The Legionary sister, says a female contributor in the columns of *Buna Vestire*, should embrace her role as a fighter. Enrolled in the Iron Guard, wearing the green shirt strapped with the diagonal belt (the Legion's paramilitary uniform), sisters of the Legion were to emulate their male comrades. She is not an 'ordinary woman'; she will aspire to a greater purpose, 'to belong to an elite whose sole aim is martyrdom, integral martyrdom for the Resurrection of the Nation.'⁵⁵ This will have to be, as Constantin Noica, one of the most prominent ideologues of the movement, put it, an 'ascetic elite.' 'Is this a ruthless thought for

55 Doina Peteanu, 'Sora legionară ca luptătoare,' *Buna Vestire: Ziar liber de luptă și doctrină românească*, no. 53, November 15, 1940. Similar callings to fighting, heroic death, and martyrdom are made in the 'Women's Word' column from *Cuvântul* newspaper: see, for instance, Cornelia Novacu, 'Nicoleta/O circulară a Nicoletei Niculescu,' *Cuvântul: Ziar al Mișcării Legionare*, no. 7, October 20, 1940; Lucia Trandafir, 'Legionara și discipulina,' *Cuvântul*, no. 34, November 16, 1940; Liliana Protopopescu, '...Și arhanghelul din cer,' *Cuvântul*, no. 17, November 9, 1940. The latter includes a story in which a six-year-old girl, accompanied by her two brothers, sings 'Imnul tinereții legionare' [hymn of the Legionary Youth] a song notorious for celebrating death as wedding. It runs as 'Death, only Legionary death / Is a gladsome wedding for us.' Before women finally took it upon themselves to mobilize their fellows to transgress their gender, it was the male of the Legion who called upon women to assume a manly stance. See, for instance, Haralambie Popescu-Fitionești, 'Femeia legionară,' *Garda Moldovei: Organ de propagandă al Gărzii de Fer din Moldova* 3, no. 5, October 15, 1933, 4 ('The new woman, the Legionary woman, abandons the drowsy calmness of the hearth for the tumultuous life of the fighter').

women?' ponders the philosopher? 'It may be,' he continues. But it is only by being ruthless and showing no mercy that 'the Legionary woman could repair some of the weakness affecting her.'⁵⁶

The ideal type of the virile woman found its most faithful incarnation in the flesh and bones of Nicoleta Nicolescu, the first female Commander of the Women's Fortresses.⁵⁷ Nicoleta was to provide one of the two competing models of Legionary womanhood. Unhappy with the passive roles to which they were relegated, Nicoleta contested Codreanu's conservative view on the position of women within the movement.⁵⁸ By instilling to her female fellow Legionaries a martial ethos, conducting paramilitary instruction and physical exercises followed by marches in the green uniform, Nicoleta assumed a more masculine role for the Legion's sisters. Once she assumed charge of the feminine section, the Legionary sisters were entrusted with establishing a communication channel within the movement, especially with the Legionary leaders imprisoned in various detention centres.⁵⁹ Nicoleta's girls were also responsible for the personal safety of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, acting as the Captain's personal bodyguards by keeping a watch over those who came close of their leader.⁶⁰ In times of unrest, when rumours were spread of a possible attack on the Legion's headquarters, female students joined their male counterparts in defending the building. Nicoleta organized her girls in shifts and armed them with handguns in order to guard the headquarters day and night.⁶¹

During the short-lived National Legionary State (14 September 1940–15 February 1941) – scornfully dubbed by its deriders as the 'National Funerary State' for its massive program of funeral feasts and reburials as well as national mournings decreed by the authorities⁶² – the urn containing Nicoleta's ashes, saved by a vigilant employee of the crematorium, benefited from a grand

56 Constantin Noica, 'Electra sau femeia legionară,' *Buna Vestire: Ziar liber de luptă și doctrină românească*, no. 21, October 2, 1940, 1.

57 Maria Bucur, 'Romania,' in *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe, 1919–45*, ed. Kevin Passmore (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 57–78.

58 Ibid., 69.

59 Sofia Cristescu Dinescu, 'Cetățui sfărâmate,' in *Lacrima prigoanei: Din lupta legionarelor române* (Timișoara: Gordian, 1994), 7–16, 9.

60 Sfințescu, *Răspuns*, 344–345.

61 Ion Dumitrescu-Borșa, *Cal troian intra muros. Memorii legionare* (București: Blassco, 2002), 157.

62 Veiga, *Istora Gărzii de Fier*, 287; in a similar vein, Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, who witnessed firsthand the National Legionary State, characterized it as a 'regime of funeral processions.' See Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 318.

reburial on 27 October 1940 at Predeal.⁶³ Shortly after her violent death on 10 July 1939, a legend cropped up around her figure, as she was made the subject of a hero cult in the Legionary movement. Memorial services (*parastase*) were officiated to commemorate her martyrdom, while, similar to sanctified Christian martyrs, at the place of her death, a shrine (*troiță*) was erected to which pilgrimages were made. Simultaneously, the Legionary press mentioned her name with cultic reverence.⁶⁴

The woman martyr of the movement, Nicoleta Nicolescu was established as the exceptional heroic paragon of the Legionary militant woman. Her martyric persona was abstracted into a heroic class of warrior women named as *Nicoletele* [the Nicolettes]. This collective category included the other warrior women who followed Nicoleta, Codreanu, and the Legion to death. The term Nicolettes was coined by the Legionary Cristofor Dancu in an article bearing the same title published in *Buna Vestire*.⁶⁵ In a mystical language imbued with metaphorical inflections, the Nicolettes were described as 'those children of the Nation who have received their spirit of resurrection from the Captain, through Nicoleta's embered soul.' Gathered at the shrine erected at the site of her death, Legionary young women swore allegiance to death to Nicoleta, the Captain, and the Legion: 'Nicoleta, we swear to you that in our hearts there is no place except for you, and through you, for the Captain. Nicoleta, we swear to you not to have other road in our lives other than the path of your footsteps. Nicoleta, we swear to you that we desire to die like you!'⁶⁶

Other Nicolettes who died a martyr's death in the light of the political religion developed by the Legion were young women such as Olimpia Zeana, Lucia-Constanța Grecu, and Elena Bagdad. Born in Thessaloniki into a family of Aromanians who was in the front line of colonizing the Southern Dobruja,

63 'Programul transportării la Predeal a urnelor cu cenușa camarazilor uciși la București,' *Buna Vestire: Ziar ziar liber luptă și doctrină românească*, no. 38, October 27, 1940; 'Predealul Cetatea Martirilor,' *Cuvântul: Ziar al Mișcării Legionare*, no. 16, October 29, 1940.

64 Only in *Cuvântul: Ziar al Mișcării Legionare* have appeared the following articles: Cornelia Novacu, 'Nicoleta,' no. 7, October 20, 1940, 2; Uluitoarele descoperiri făcute eri, în subteranele crematoriului,' no. 14, October 27, 1940, 7; Cornelia Novacu, 'Scrisoare Nicoletei, de ziua ei,' no. 55, December 7, 1940, 3; 'Parastas pentru pomenirea camaradei Nicoleta Nicolescu la Predeal,' no. 56, December 8, 1940, 3; 'Sfințirea Troiței ridicată în memoria martirei Nicoleta Nicolescu,' no. 60, December 12, 1940, 3; 'Locul unde a fost ucisă o sfântă: Nicoleta Nicolescu,' no. 64, December 16, 1940, 7; Cornelia Novacu, 'Să ne ridicăm cu gândul la Camarada Nicoleta,' no. 86, January 11, 1941, 3.

65 Cristofor Dancu, 'Nicoletele...', *Buna Vestire: Ziar ziar liber luptă și doctrină românească*, no. 78, December 14, 1940, 3.

66 Ibid.

Olimpia Zeana was the first woman to receive the revered status of Legionary martyr.⁶⁷ She passed away in 1936 due to a tuberculous meningitis which she caught while on a mission to follow suspected traitors from within the movement's ranks. Another, Lucia-Constanța Grecu, died on 29 January 1939 after falling from the building where she was arrested (the Legionaries claimed that Security agents tortured her to death and afterwards threw her dead body over the window in order to frame her suicide).⁶⁸ Elena Bagdad, Nicoleta's errand girl, was also among those who followed on the path of martyrdom. Arrested and taken, like many of her female comrades, to the Sadaclia concentration camp set up in a monastery transformed to accommodate Legionary women in 1939, she fell seriously ill with tuberculosis. Her condition forced the camp authorities to transfer her to a sanatorium. Awaiting her end, she allegedly said to her mother who was watching over her deathbed, 'I do not regret dying, what I do regret is dying on a hospital bed, instead of dying in battle.'⁶⁹ Yet she was to have her way of dying a Legionary martyr's death. She miraculously recovered, only to be executed on 22 September 1939, after her name was written on the list of Legionaries to be murdered as a retaliation for the assassination of Prime Minister Armand Călinescu. Elena Bagdad was the only female murdered. In her case, death came not by choice, but by chance, in a curious form of stochastic martyrdom.⁷⁰

The last to command the Women Fortresses, Ecaterina (Titi) Gâță, also met a violent death. Her brother found her hanged body dangling from a cord in a cell in Bucharest's Malmaison prison. Within the Legionary literature, she is remembered as the martyr-virgin with blond hair and green eyes who spat the feared Soviet Komissar Ana Pauker in the face during her criminal interrogation. She reportedly died after some gruesome torture was inflicted on her body over eight days of agony, during which time she was said to be bestially

67 Ilie I. Imbrescu, 'Olimpia Zeană,' *Porunca Vremii: Tribună zilnică de luptă națională și creștină* 5, no. 328, February 15, 1936, 2.

68 Sfințescu, *Răspuns*, 358.

69 Sofia Cristescu Dinescu, 'Cetățui sfărâmate,' 14; Sfințescu, *Răspuns*, 359.

70 Elena Bagdad was buried on October 27, 1940 at Predeal alongside the unearthed corpses of the 32 'martyrs of Vaslui' killed on the night of September 21/22, 1939 and the the ash urns of those killed in Bucharest and then burned at the Crematorium (including that of Nicoleta Nicolescu). It was the second wave of reburials at Predeal, after the first procession of this kind was organized for the 46 'martyrs of Miercurea Ciuc' on September 12, 1940. September 22 was declared the Day of Legionary Martyrs and Heroes, occasioning grandiose funeral solemnities. These serial funeral processions so central to the Legion's thanatic culture transformed the city of Predeal into a destination of pilgrimage and site of martyric memory.

beaten and raped, her breasts mutilated with pliers, and an iron inserted into her maiden womb. Her virginal youth along with her monastic calling, commitment to the Legionary movement, and violent death made her a Nicolette through and through, worshipped as a *muceniță fecioară* [martyr-virgin].⁷¹ Indeed, virginity was a mandatory prerequisite for the virago type, expressing not only sexual asceticism but also moral purity. Maidenhood was so cherished among the Girls' Fortresses that Nicoleta Nicolescu expelled her best comrade from the movement, a fellow Legionary from Craiova, after she caught her one night making love with a man.⁷² Nicoleta's strictness in matters of sexual purity was so conspicuous that she demanded that all girls in her Fortress were virgins. She went so far as to examine herself the virginity of every one of the girls she was in charge of.⁷³

Mothers and Fighters: The Hybrid Model of Legionary Womanhood

The virago model was the natural outcome of the heroic thrust so central to the Legionary discourse. This disrupted the traditional gender order founded upon the asymmetrical hierarchy between virile martial masculinity and domestic womanhood. Holding tight to its trademark rhetoric of heroism that it was unwilling to abandon, the Legion tried to restore the conventional gender order by promoting a hybrid model. A 'gender gymnastics' was thus performed to mix and match an adjusted formula of virility and domesticity into a heroic femininity that would retain its motherhood but it will nonetheless contribute its share of heroism to the battle for redeeming the Romanian nation.

Although she had not followed Nicoleta on the path to martyrdom, Lucia Trandafir embodies dual features shared by both the Nicolettes and the domestic housewife. She did follow Nicoleta in command, as she took over the charge of the Commandment of Women Fortresses from 1936 to 1938. But Lucia Trandafir stands 'in betwixt' the two models of Legionary womanhood – warrior and domestic respectively –, thus providing a hybrid type by combining features pertaining to both models. During her command of the Fortresses (1936–1938), women were more actively enrolled into Legionary 'battles,' such

71 Alexandrina Teglaru Voinea, 'Un suflet mare,' in *Lacrima prigoanei: Din lupta legionarelor române* (Timișoara: Gordian, 1994), 22–26; Cezarina Bârzoii and Ionuț Băiaș, 'Ecaterina Gâță – Pentru că a scuipat-o pe Ana Pauker i-au smuls sânii cu cleștele, au violat-o și omorât-o,' Serial 'Sfinții închisorilor,' *Hotnews*, March 3, 2008.

72 Dumitrescu-Borșa, *Cal troian intra muros*, 163.

73 Ibid., 167.

as was the case with them marching as part of the movement's electioneering activities. Moreover, she was responsible for re-organizing the feminine section of the Legion in the wake of the movement's socio-political success. After she took command, confronted with an influx of new members, she had to restructure the feminine section in divisions for female schoolers, students, and workers. These new recruits had to be disciplined in the Legionary ethos. Following Codreanu's instruction spelled out in his *Booklet*, that in each 'Sunday and holiday all types of nests – Brotherhoods of Blood, Fortresses, etc. – have to go on marching' in military order and 'manly pace,' Lucia instilled to the female recruits the military values prized by the Legion by organizing boot camps every Sunday morning before participating in the religious service.⁷⁴ Within the soldier-like instruction, they would perform marches, military drills, and learn the Legionary salute. But these manly operations were overshadowed by a myriad of womanish activities. At the Fortresses level, Legionary women were responsible for creating various handmade artisan works that they would sell to contribute to the Legion's finances. They were also engaged in propaganda activities, selling Legionary press, posting electoral posters, canvassing, and distributing political leaflets. Women of the Legion would take care of the graves of the fallen comrades, while they provided help to families in need. At the central level, the Fortresses' Commandment was responsible for the Legionary Commerce, and they ran the Legion's restaurants and canteens, for which they had to prepare the food and handle the cleaning. Since their headquarters was in the same building as the Legion's, it fell to women to clean up the offices, including the bureau of the Captain himself.

In Lucia Trandafir's person, the two models of Legionary womanhood came together most closely. A fighter herself, wearing the green shirt in which she commanded paramilitary marches, Lucia was also the sister of Ion Trandafir, one of the Decemvirs who assassinated Mihail Stelescu. A fighter and a sister of an acclaimed hero, she was also the spouse of a Legionary martyr. Lucia lost her brother on the night of 30 November 1938, when the Decemvirs were murdered together with Codreanu and their fellows Nicadors. A year later, she lost her husband, burned while presumably still alive, just like Nicoleta Nicolescu, in Cenușa Crematorium.⁷⁵ In commanding the Women's Fortresses, Lucia Trandafir echoes Nicoleta Nicolescu's feminine manliness, although in a slightly domesticated rendition of the virgin-virago. At the same time, she also

74 Codreanu, *Cărticica șefului de cuib*, Point 16 bis.

75 Nicolae Niță, *Martirii ne veghează din ceruri* (Jacksonville: Libertatea, 1996), 86–98; Fabian Seiche, *Martiri și mărturisitori români ai secolului xx: Închisorile comuniste din România* (Făgăraș: Agaton, 2010), 79–80.

resonates powerfully with the other widows of the Legion – Elena Codreanu, Iridenta Moța, Ana Maria Marin – with whom she shared the same bereaved widowhood, a grief sharpened by the loss of her brother.

Lucia Trandafir's hybrid view on the Legionary woman question was spelled out in the micro-manifesto she authored as the first article published in the permanent column 'The Woman's Word' of the newspaper *Cuvântul*.⁷⁶ In describing the Legionary New Woman, she turns to Codreanu's definition, 'A woman, but with a character of great manhood (*bărbăție*).'⁷⁷ She quotes Codreanu once more, for whom 'the greatest glory to which a woman can aspire to is the glory of being a Mother.' The commander of the Fortresses concludes her article by emphasizing the heroic dimension of motherhood: the 'Romanian nation, in this decisive hour for its destiny, needs mothers. Mothers of Romanians. With our firm proclivity of making mothers of Romanian heroes. They, these mothers, at times of need, could also even die with the arms in their hands.'⁷⁸ Unlike the Nicolettes, who died themselves as hero-martyrs for the Legion without first birthing heroes for the nation, the hybrid model espoused by Lucia Trandafir is first of all a mother, and, only in exceptional circumstances, could she become a mother-martyr. The hybrid model of Legionary womanhood personified by Lucia Trandafir is an improvised reconciliation of the two antagonistic types that tensioned the Legionary politics of womanhood. It bids to accommodate the traditional, private status of domestic womanhood with the public one of being a committed fighter in the women's section of the Legion. Considering her commanding status in the women's organization as well as her conservative view regarding women's role in society, Lucia Trandafir could be viewed as the counterpart, though on a smaller scale, of Hitler's *Reichsfrauenführerin*, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink.⁷⁹

Conclusion: The Legion's Heterogeneous Politics of Womanhood

Despite some worthy efforts, there is no global quantitative research on the social makeup of the Legionary movement.⁷⁹ In terms of gender composition, the available data is scanty and incomplete. Nonetheless, we can establish an approximate picture of the movement's gender demographics. In 1933, female

76 Lucia Trandafir, 'Tineretea arde,' *Cuvântul: Ziar al Mișcării Legionare*, no. 1, October 14, 1940, 2.

77 Ibid.

78 Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxxiv.

79 Heinen, *Legiunea 'Arhangelul Mihail'*, 355–387.

Legionaries amounted to only eight percent of the total number of members enrolled in the movement. However underrepresented, the feminine section of the Legion was relatively larger than its counterpart from the NSDAP, in which in late 1930 women membership was less than six percent.⁸⁰ In the same year of 1933, out of the thirty-four nests existing in Panciu-Movilița (Putna county), only three were women Fortresses (less than nine percent).⁸¹ Women's representation at Carmen Sylva is consistent with their overall presence in the movement. In the largest work camp designed as a Legionary micro-society, there were only 82 women to 710 men and 50 children. Within the women's section itself, the domestic model prevailed over its virile counterpart. As already shown, at Carmen Sylva work camp, housewives outnumbered university students, the latter forming the social base out of which 'Nicolettes' were more prone to emerge. The minority of the virago model of militant womanhood in comparison to the domestic model of home-keeping womanhood is also revealed by the gender composition of Legionaries condemned by the Military Court for the Rebellion of 21–23 January 1941. Out of the 2,707 people that were sentenced, only twenty-four were women, amounting to less than one percent.⁸² Moreover, no woman was ever part of the Legion's Senate, the consultative body constituted by prominent public figures of over fifty years of age.

Moreover, it was indicative of the organizational patriarchy deep-seated in the Legion's ranks and structure that the first commander of the Fortresses was a man, Mihail Stelescu. However, notwithstanding this male tutelage, as the feminine section increasingly recruited more sisters, under the pressure of the virile rhetoric of sacrificial heroism, the fortresses claimed a larger degree of autonomy, until they managed to be commanded by one of their own (Nicoleta Nicolescu). With this concession won, the leadership would never be ceded from the sisters' hands. The reorganization of the Fortresses as paramilitary formations under the command of Nicoleta Nicolescu strengthened the tendency towards masculinization. Now, with the sisters wearing the green uniform, there was the risk of undermining the traditional vision embraced by the men of the Legion, who preferred to see their sisters married and their wives at home, mothering future martyrs and handling the cradle and the ladle.

Michael Mann has made the point that Codreanu's political creed had proclaimed 'a kind of fascist feminism.'⁸³ Based on selective readings of

80 Durham, *Women and Fascism*, 15.

81 Ibid., 360.

82 Ibid., 427.

83 Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 273. Indeed, 'The Creed of National-Christian Socialism,' which student Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and worker Constantin Pancu wrote in 1920 as a manifesto of The Guard of the National

secondary sources, he then draws the conclusion that the Legion was a less-gendered movement that its fascist counterparts, speculating that the reason for this could lie in the Orthodox mysticism that ‘probably restrained [its] machismo.’⁸⁴ Our research points into a different direction. As soon as the men of the Legion sensed their sisters’ struggle to emancipate themselves from the confines of domestic patriarchy, they pursued an agenda to dissuade them from transgressing the gender boundary that was tantamount to a project of domesticating the viragos. The male elite strove to defuse the essential tension brought about by their heroic rhetoric between virile femalehood and maternal womanhood by developing a reconciled model of Legionary femininity, heroic in her commitment to the movement, but simultaneously domestic and submissive towards men’s higher authority, as symbolized by Lucia Trandafir, the second female commander of the Fortresses.

In contrast to the unambiguous ‘New Man,’ imagined along the lines of heroic martyrdom to resemble the Captain and the Nicadors, the project of creating a ‘New Woman’ turned out to be much more inconclusive. In this study, I have identified three patterns of Legionary femininity, ranging from the domestic model of motherhood, through the virago model of militant womanhood, to the hybrid type. This reveals the heterogeneous politics of womanhood characteristic of the Romanian Legionary movement. That said, the essential contradictions inherent in the Legionary politics of womanhood was not a Romanian idiosyncrasy. A similar dynamic of gender politics operated across the fascist spectrum. In the Croatian Ustasha movement, for instance, as in the Romanian case, Rory Yeomans has identified ‘a paradox’ at the heart of the Ustasha ideology that reflected into how the regime envisioned women’s role in society. ‘In spite of its emphasis on the natural maternal role of women,’ argues Yeomans, ‘the Ustasha regime simultaneously aspired to the incarnation of a new kind of warrior woman.’ Moreover, further extending the similarities between the Romanian Legion and the Croatian Ustasha, ‘female members of the [*Ustaše*] movement demonstrated that they were not content to live their lives on the sidelines of the national revolution and demanded the right to take an active part in it.’⁸⁵

Conscience, professed the faith in one God, ‘giver of equal rights, both civil and political, to men and to women,’ see Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, 25. However, this has to be assessed in the post-war context, when Jassy was the center of a powerful communist propaganda. After the Legion of the Archangel Michael was founded in 1927, nowhere to be found in the movement’s writings are similar assertions proclaiming gender equality.

84 Mann, *Fascists*, 273.

85 Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945* (Pittsburg, PA: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 127. See especially

The debates surrounding the scholarly quest for a 'generic fascism' have emphasized what was already widely acknowledged as the mercurial nature of fascism.⁸⁶ 'If we can accept a diversity of fascism,' Martin Durham asks in the concluding lines of his monograph on *Women and Fascism*, 'why then should we still believe that there is only one possible relationship between fascism and women?'⁸⁷ Delving further into this question, our inroads into the multifaceted nature of the relationship between women and the Legionary movement adds the Romanian fascist experience to the catalogue of case studies examined by Durham. Although essentially misogynistic, conservative, and patriarchal, the Romanian fascist movement entertained, just as with the other case studies covered by Durham's analysis – Italian Fascism, German National Socialism, and the British Union of Fascists – a rather inconsistent and sometimes quite an uneasy relationship with women, in terms of its straightforwardly dualistic gender ideology. The Legion's gynopolitical project did not remain restricted to the expectedly domestic model of womanhood. A virile type of femalehood, patterned upon the male hero-martyr celebrated by the movement's political literature, sprang into life as a consequence of the Legion's doctrine of martyr heroism. Faced with this outcome, problematic in the doctrinal light of gender dualism espoused by the movement, the men of the Legion struggled to domesticate the viragos without abandoning their commitment to an all-demanding ideology of heroism. The result was a reconciliation of the two opposite if not antagonistic models into a hybrid type of womanhood who kept her heroic features but subordinated them to her domestic destiny.

chapter 3, 'Merciless Warriors and Militant Heroines: Making a New Ustasha Man and Woman,' 126–167.

86 Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 1; Roger Eatwell, "The Nature of "Generic Fascism": The "Fascist Minimum" and the "Fascist Matrix," in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 134–161.

87 Durham, *Women and Fascism*, 121.