**Spectres of Fascism: Anti-Communist Resistance and the Legacy of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1940s Romania**

*Roland Clark*

*University of Liverpool*

The Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român*, PCR) gradually assumed power after the coup of 23 August 1944 ended Ion Antonescu’s military dictatorship. Allied with Adolf Hitler, Antonescu had led his country in an invasion of the Soviet Union that produced roughly 624,000 Romanian casualties (dead, captured, missing or wounded) and during which between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews and over 11,000 Roma were murdered.[[1]](#footnote-1) For the first five months Antonescu had ruled together with the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael (*Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*), also known as the Iron Guard (*Garda de Fier*). While in power, legionaries brutally murdered Jews, communists, and other anti-fascists while enriching themselves. Antonescu suppressed some legionaries during the war, but between 1946 and 1958 the Securitate (secret police) carried out an intense anti-legionary campaign, arresting or murdering individuals who had been associated with the movement. Some legionaries fled to the mountains where they formed or joined armed resistance groups. The most prominent groups involving former legionaries could be found in the Apuseni, Babadag, and Făgăraş Mountains, but small, short-lived groups existed throughout the country.

Relatively few anti-communist resisters were legionaries or former legionaries. Dorin Dobrincu notes that of the 804 partisans arrested early in 1949, 56 percent had no political affiliations, and only 11 percent were legionaries or legionary sympathisers.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was also frequently difficult to distinguish between partisan groups with political goals and regular bandits as both groups stole from locals in order to survive.[[3]](#footnote-3) Nonetheless, legionaries have played a disproportionately large role in memory-making about the resistance because (i) the Securitate consistently portrayed all of their opponents as ‘fascists’, (ii) misinformed historians overemphasized the role of the legionary resistance during the Cold War, and (iii) nationalist groups have sought to revive the legacy of the Legion under post-Socialism by portraying legionaries as anti-communist partisans and as martyrs in the gulags.[[4]](#footnote-4) This chapter examines former legionaries involved in armed resistance against communism, asking why they joined and what impact their political backgrounds had on the resistance. It argues that former legionaries were more often armed fugitives than resistance fighters, that they struggled to form alliances with other partisans who refused to collaborate with legionaries, and that young people who identified themselves with the Legion as an anti-communist force in the late 1940s followed an idea rather than an organization.

Partisans came from a variety of backgrounds and fought for different reasons and in different ways. Many had fought on the Eastern Front during the war, and some were even trained in guerrilla warfare by Romanian and German troops before the war’s end.[[5]](#footnote-5) Partisan groups in Bukovina during 1944 had explicitly military targets, but only a handful of any anti-communist groups carried out offensive actions. Some even explicitly limited their use of weapons to self-defense.[[6]](#footnote-6) British and American secret services attempted to support armed resistance efforts in Romania, but usually with little success.[[7]](#footnote-7) As Monica Ciobanu argues, ‘there is no single master narrative of repression and resistance to Soviet occupation and communization. Instead, we are led to distinguish individual or small group responses and coping strategies to the newly emerging post-World War II political reality’.[[8]](#footnote-8) For this reason, Keith Dickson’s notion of ‘asymmetric warfare’ is not quite appropriate to the Romanian case as it assumes that the partisans were waging an offensive war. Dickson argues that ‘the purpose of asymmetric warfare is to deter, dissuade, discourage, or defeat the efforts of the dominant actor in order to deny the opponent from achieving its goals’.[[9]](#footnote-9) Some of the Romanian partisan groups did aim to ‘resist’, but many, especially former legionaries, just wanted to stay alive.

**The Myth of the Legion**

Given that the Legion no longer existed as an effective political force in 1946, legionaries, their allies, and their enemies engaged with it more as an idea than a movement. As an idea, the Legion evoked a twenty-five year struggle for power between a fascist social movement led by the charismatic Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and a corrupt political establishment. When violent antisemitic student protests broke out in December 1922, the students drew their inspiration from a similar movement in Germany and romanticized their actions through symbols, speeches, songs, and newspaper articles that portrayed them as national heroes. They allied themselves with the right-wing National Christian Defence League (*Liga Apărării Naţional Creştine*, LANC), and lest the students’ enthusiasm begin to wane some of their leaders revived interest in the cause through high-publicity murder trials. When some of these students broke away from LANC in 1927 to form the Legion of the Archangel Michael, their leaders were associated in the public imagination with a 1923 conspiracy to assassinate prominent politicians and business leaders, Ion Moţa’s 1924 trial for murdering one of their co-conspirators who had betrayed the plot to the police, Codreanu’s 1925 trial for the murder of a police prefect, and Nicolae Totu’s 1927 trial for shooting a Jewish schoolboy. The accused were clearly guilty in every case but were acquitted each time because they had apparently acted with ‘patriotic’ motives.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The founding manifestos of the Legion connected it not with violence, however, but with ‘religion’. They accused LANC of ‘politicianism’, and Ion Moţa wrote that ‘we do not do politics, and we have never done it for a single day in our lives. We have a religion, we are slaves to a faith’.[[11]](#footnote-11) In 1927, legionary propaganda portrayed it as a movement defined by a youthful zeal for the nation expressed through a willingness to break the boundaries of convention and to step outside the law, sacrificing oneself for nationalist and antisemitic causes. In a political culture characterized by corruption, nepotism, and entrenched party networks, the legionaries’ message sounded fresh, idealistic, and honest. Over the next few years legionaries expanded their support-base by winning over the rest of the antisemitic students to their cause, staging intensive campaigns in rural areas by marching from village to village on foot and targeted workers during the Depression with claims that Jews were taking their jobs. The Legion contested two by-elections in 1930-31 and won five seats in the national elections of 1932, after which it formed paramilitary units with the intention of contesting the 1933 elections through violent clashes with police. Legionaries staged publicity stunts such as erecting a cross honouring the Unknown Soldier in a park in Bucharest and building a levee in a Muntenian village prone to flooding. Both projects had been explicitly forbidden by the authorities beforehand and resulted in police repression. These incidents, together with Codreanu’s support for an Aromanian student who had tried to assassinate the Secretary of State in 1930, reinforced the Legion’s reputation in right-wing circles as a movement that opposed a corrupt establishment dominated by Jews, Freemasons, and ‘traitors’.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Afraid of the Legion’s growing popularity, aware of Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, and frustrated with the legionaries’ willingness to flout the law, the government dissolved the movement and arrested leading activists just before the national elections of December 1933. Three legionaries assassinated the Prime Minister in retaliation, and the legionaries had a national reputation by the time most of them had been released from prison in mid-1934. Despite occasional incidents such as threatening to murder a series of prominent politicians during the student congress at Târgu Mureş in 1936, by and large Codreanu toned down the movement’s violence between 1934 and 1937. Instead he focused on recruiting support from village priests, running charity building projects during summer work camps, establishing legionary businesses, developing a robust ideological literature with the help of a handful of brilliant young intellectuals, and cultivating an image of legionaries who had, in the words of one of their songs, ‘iron-clad breasts and lily-white souls’.[[13]](#footnote-13) By the time of the national elections of December 1937, the Legion had a larger membership base than either Mussolini’s Fascists or Hitler’s Nazis before they took power.[[14]](#footnote-14) Two prominent legionaries, Ion Moţa and Vasile Marin, died fighting against ‘Bolshevism’ in the Spanish Civil War, and their funerals attracted enormous crowds. Legionary publicists used the opportunity to encourage legionaries and sympathizers alike to vow to sacrifice themselves for the nation, using a deeply religious vocabulary that was echoed by leading churchmen and in clerical newspapers.[[15]](#footnote-15) Although the nature of legionary activism changed dramatically over the years that followed, it was the image of youthful purity, strength, hard work and personal sacrifice cultivated by Codreanu between 1934 and 1937 that dominated the public imagination from then on. When young people thought about the Legion after the Second World War, it was Codreanu’s Legion of 1937 that they had in mind.

The government once again dissolved the Legion in 1938 and Codreanu was subsequently arrested then murdered by the authorities. His followers responded by assassinating the Minister of the Interior, in turn provoking a repression during which hundreds of prominent legionaries were arrested or killed. The survivors went into hiding or fled to Germany, where they stayed until Romanian politics took a sudden shift and the Legion came to power in September 1940, ruling together with General Antonescu in what was known as the National Legionary State. The legionary regime was characterized by intensive attempts at memory-making. Newspapers published frequent hagiographies of legionaries who had died before or during 1938, printing presses reissued legionary writings from the mid-1930s, and the regime exhumed and reburied legionary ‘martyrs’, including Codreanu himself. Legionaries appointed each other to influential state jobs and used their power to steal and vandalise at will, attacking Jewish property in particular. The relationship between Antonescu and the legionaries was repeatedly strained by legionary violence and their undermining of his efforts to ensure law and order. The power struggle came to a head in January 1941, when legionaries launched a three-day rebellion that was crushed by the military, leaving Antonescu as Romania’s sole ruler. Those legionaries who had taken part in the rebellion were arrested. Some cultivated Orthodox prayer while in prison, earning themselves a reputation as mystics, while others agitated to be released so that they could join the army and fight in the war.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**Legionaries At Large**

The Legion fragmented after the Rebellion of January 1941. The two largest factions included ‘Simists’, followers of Horia Sima, who had led the movement after Codreanu’s death, and ‘Codreanists’, who used their personal connections to the former leader to challenge Sima’s authority. Factionalism only increased once the war was over. In addition to various exile groups claiming to be continuing the struggle outside the country, Tiberiu Tănase identifies six major groupings of legionaries inside Romania. These included (1) the ‘opportunists’, led by prominent personalities from the legionary regime of 1940-41, (2) the Simists, led by Nicolae Petraşcu, (3) the Aromanian anti-Simists, led by Dumitru Groza, (4) the ‘moderates’, led by Radu Mironovici, (5) legionaries who joined mainstream, non-communist political parties, the most prominent being the group which followed Horaţiu Comaniciu into the National Peasantist Party, and (6) the group led by George Manu and affiliated with the so-called National Resistance Movement (*Mişcarea Naţională de Rezistenţă*, MNR).[[17]](#footnote-17) To this one might also add the less prominent but also important faction of female legionaries led by Ecaterina (Titi) Gâţa, who repeatedly refused to work with the Simists but gave occasional support to George Manu.[[18]](#footnote-18) With the rise of the Romanian Communist Party to power between 1944 and 1946, each faction took a different attitude towards armed resistance, making it difficult for other anti-communists to take a consistent line when it came to collaborating with legionaries.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Horia Sima attempted to organize resistance efforts from his ‘exile’ in Germany, sending Ion Sadovanu into Romania in October 1944 to establish a network of resistance cells under Petraşcu’s formal leadership. The German military trained and equipped groups of legionaries in late 1944, parachuting them into the country to form armed resistance groups in the mountains, the store up weapons, and to strengthen legionary networks. At the same time, however, Sima told them to avoid sabotaging the Soviet infrastructure because he feared bringing reprisals down on the heads of their local supporters.[[20]](#footnote-20) Based on archival and memoir sources, Dorin Dobrincu estimates that over 100 legionaries and former Romanian soldiers parachuted into the country in 1944-45, including teams sent directly to the mountains around Arad, Timişoara, Alba Iulia, Sibiu, Braşov, Ciucaş, Cluj, Turda, Argestru-Tisa, Bistriţa, and Suceava. The parachutists had limited success and a military report from late 1945 claimed that all of them had been caught by Soviet troops.[[21]](#footnote-21) More legionaries parachuted into the country in the early 1950s, but they too were soon apprehended by the authorities.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the Serbian Banat, legionaries mounted an armed resistance under the leadership of Pavel Onciu during September and October 1944. Fighting alongside German policemen and local Romanian and German volunteers, they were forced to retreat in the face of the Soviet advance. Petraşcu initially supported anti-communist resistance wherever he found it, and between 1944 and 1946 his intermediaries met repeatedly with representatives of the partisan fighter Vladimir Macoveiciuc from Bukovina, supplying him with money but failing to recruit him as a legionary. For their part, Radu Mironovici and the ‘moderate’ legionaries rebuffed German attempts to convince them to join the resistance in 1944 because they were worried about potential reprisals.[[23]](#footnote-23) Gheorghe Gheorgiu and Gavrilă Forţu, on the other hand, completely broke with the Legion in 1948 to form ‘The Cross and the Bayonet’ because they wanted the freedom to resist. Although this is commonly known as a ‘legionary’ group, of the 22 members arrested in 1949 only one was a legionary and two were legionary sympathisers.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Following waves of arrests of legionaries in August and December 1944 and then again in March 1945, the Ministry of the Interior succeeded in negotiating a ‘neutrality pact’ with the Legion on 10 December 1945. The pact was signed by Nicolae Petraşcu and supported by some of the other legionary groups, although most of them immediately accused Petraşcu of ‘treason’ despite having also taken part in the negotiations. Under the terms of the pact, legionaries would cease anti-communist activities and would surrender their weapons. In return the government promised to allow them to return to civilian life by issuing them with new identity cards.[[25]](#footnote-25) Many ‘moderates’ took advantage of the pact, but Titi Gâţa’s group refused to have anything to do with it and the Aromanians used it to actively undermine Petraşcu’s leadership claims.[[26]](#footnote-26) Even before signing the pact, Petraşcu had been emphasizing that legionaries ‘should be peaceful and well behaved’, ‘maintaining a position of respect and honesty together the state’. In doing so, he framed the Legion not as an activist political group intent on overthrowing communism, but as an organization committed to ‘awakening that which is best in each and every person, so that through the practice of Christian virtues it much offer the nation a new man and the state an upright citizen’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Not all legionaries were even capable of fighting. Legionaries at the Orthodox Theological Academy in Arad complained amongst themselves in May 1948 that ‘We are not prepared for armed resistance. We have no guns, we don’t know how to use them, we have no plan. We would just be a burden to those legionaries who are already in the mountains’.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The most vocal opponent of the neutrality pact was a physicist by the name of George Manu, who had joined the Legion in 1937 but kept a low profile until after the war. Between July 1945 and February 1946 he wrote three pamphlets describing the political and military situation in Romania which were smuggled out of the country and published in the United States as Cold War propaganda.[[29]](#footnote-29) According to various confessions from 1948, most probably obtained under torture, Manu broke with Petraşcu in December 1945 and set about organizing his own resistance movement. Those legionaries who joined him did so because of their friendships with Manu and not because they saw him as a representative of the Legion.[[30]](#footnote-30) Manu formed wide-ranging ties with opposition figures across the political spectrum. In particular, Manu met with General Aurel Aldea, who the Securitate claimed was the head of a country-wide terrorist network known as the National Resistance Movement (MNR). It seems likely that Aldea and Manu were genuinely involved in resistance activities, but certainly not on the scale assumed by the secret police, who used MNR as an umbrella term under which they incorporated anyone they wished to arrest.[[31]](#footnote-31) Petraşcu tried using Manu to build connections with MNR, but the latter refused to cooperate and Petraşcu’s circle had no formal relationship with MNR.[[32]](#footnote-32) Moreover, Manu’s association with the Legion alienated potential collaborators, such as a Captain Enculescu and the Greek-Catholic bishop Ioan Suciu, who explicitly cited the Legion’s reputation for violence as a reason for not working with Manu.[[33]](#footnote-33) General Aldea, for his part, was a well-known opponent of the Legion, having criticized Antonescu in 1941 for failing to control legionary violence more strictly.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The spectre of the Legion sometimes alienated other resistance fighters. Anti-Soviet partisan groups established in Bukovina during spring 1944 prohibited former legionaries from participating.[[35]](#footnote-35) Radu Ionescu said of his partner Ionel Robu, who led the National Peasantist resistance in Alba County in 1948, that ‘he saw black whenever anyone mentioned the legionaries’ and excluded anyone who collaborated with them from his group.[[36]](#footnote-36) On the other hand, the legionary Petre Baicu reports that representatives of most major political parties in Braşov County were willing to cooperate with his resistance efforts to a certain extent, but that it was men who had fought with him on the Eastern Front who promised him the most support. Their loyalty to Baicu was personal and not based on any political affiliations.[[37]](#footnote-37) Similarly, the legionary Ion (Dudău) Lazăr played a leading role in ‘The Guards of Decebal’, a movement formed by Gheorghe Vasilache in 1948. Not particular about his politics, at various times Vasilache had represented the Liberal Party, A. C. Cuza, King Carol II’s National Renaissance Front (*Frontul Renaşterii Naţionale*, FNR), and Antonescu, so it is not surprising that he was also willing to collaborate with former legionaries such as Lazăr.[[38]](#footnote-38) Other legionaries, such as Liviu Emilian Vuc, joined the National Peasantists in 1946 only to reassert their legionary identities once they became partisans.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The relationship of partisans in the Făgăraş Mountains, known as ‘the group from Nucşoara’, with the Legion was complicated. After six days of discussions between a groups of legionaries led by Dumitru Apostol and other partisans under the leadership of Gheorghe Arsenescu they decided that they could not work together. Apostol collaborated with legionaries in Bucharest and in the Arnota mountains before being executed by the Securitate. Arsenescu, on the other hand, had fought against legionaries during the Rebellion of January 1941, and past conflicts made life difficult even in the mountains.[[40]](#footnote-40) He was nonetheless willing to work with other former legionaries once his colleagues spoke on their behalf.[[41]](#footnote-41) Especially once their situation became more dire, Arsenescu embraced them as individuals and fugitives, not as legionaries. Describing a meeting between one of the group’s leaders, Gheorghe Arsenescu, and several other potential partisans in January 1949, Iosif Vişoianu told his interrogators ten years later that ‘everyone present [at the meeting] was being followed by the authorities for economic crimes or sabotage’.[[42]](#footnote-42) Even those who were not personally fleeing the Securitate were worried about their loved ones. Arsenescu claimed that ‘the priest Ion Drăgoi … told me that he and others decided to form a group of fugitives. He explained that he was interested in this activity in the first instance because of his son, Cornel Drăgoi, then a student and wanted by the authorities for subversive activities in the university, and in the second instance for his own safety; he said that he would join us in the mountains if the authorities began searching for him’.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The ‘Arnota’ group led by Gheorghe Pele, Ion Martin, and Ion Opriţescu was one of the most explicitly legionary of the partisan groups of the late 1940s. Its leaders began organizing in Bucharest during spring 1948 as an attempt to reestablish the Legionary Workers’ Corps of the interwar period, but from the beginning the student Ion Jijie had begun making preparations for an armed struggle in the Arnota mountains, where they were supported by monks from the nearby monasteries. The group withdrew to the mountains in February 1949, when Securitate raids made staying in Bucharest impossible. They nonetheless retained connections with legionaries in the city and it was while trying to meet with new recruits from Bucharest that they were captured. One of the survivors, Gheorghe Gherbezean, later emphasized that the group embodied Codreanu’s ideals: ‘We were convinced that we were doing our duty. … We were completely united as brothers. … There was true humanity and great comradery. We lived prayerfully, obviously during the quiet times, convinced that we were protected by a divine power’.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Legionary and non-legionary groups alike drew on a common vocabulary uniting God, nation, sacrifice, loyalty, and justice. In Vrancea County the Liberals and Peasantists who followed the legionary Ion Paragină into the forests in 1948 spoke of themselves as ‘outlaws’ (*haiduci*), and peasants in village of Bârseşti rang the church bells and armed themselves ‘as for an uprising (*răscoala*)’.[[45]](#footnote-45) Both groups drew on a common language of peasant rebellion. Those who joined the group from Nucşoara took an oath on a pistol and a cross, expressing clearly the religious language of Romanian nationalism:

In the name of God the Almighty and on the holy cross, I [Name]

Swear to become an outlaw (*haiduc*), of my own free will and without pressure from anyone, to fight for the salvation and liberation of Fatherland and nation, from the claws of the Communist-Bolshevik beasts and under the heavy Russian yoke.

Swear faith in His Majesty King Mihai I, King of all Romanians;

Swear faith in the free Government of the Fatherland;

Swear submission and obedience, without complaining or hesitating, the leader of the outlaws;

Swear to kill without mercy all foreigners and knaves who have betrayed and sold the Fatherland and nation and brought disaster upon the country;

Swear not to abandon my brothers in the struggle until the final victory;

May I and my whole family be killed should I betray or break this oath.

So help me God,

SS/Arsenescu [1949][[46]](#footnote-46)

**The Securitate Creates Outlaws**

Many former legionaries who became outlaws felt that they had no choice in the matter. In addition to the waves of arrests of legionaries in 1944 and 1945, the Securitate pursued individuals with legionary pasts again in May 1948, driving those who escaped into hiding.[[47]](#footnote-47) As soon as legionaries learned that the Securitate was hunting them they immediately tried to join resistance groups in the mountains, often being arrested before they managed to do so.[[48]](#footnote-48) The Securitate’s definition of ‘legionary’ was notoriously vague, and frequently partisans were labelled as legionaries despite never having had any affiliation with the movement.[[49]](#footnote-49) As the theologian Teodor M. Popescu told his interrogators, ‘you’re a legionary because you’re a theologian, and being a theologian you’re anti-communist, and to be anti-communist means to be a legionary’. Popescu had opposed the Legion throughout his career but nonetheless ended up in Aiud prison as a ‘legionary’.[[50]](#footnote-50) Frequently partisan groups were betrayed by Securitate agents who had infiltrated their ranks.[[51]](#footnote-51) In 1949 Alexandru Georgescu, who had joined the Legion briefly in 1940, met two old friends for a drink. They provoked him to speak negatively about the Romanian army’s performance during the Second World War and he soon found himself under arrest.[[52]](#footnote-52) Two years earlier Nicolae Robu, a former ally of the antisemitic politician A. C. Cuza, had established an armed resistance movement known as The Salvation of the People (*Salvarea Neamului*), which relied on secret oaths and promises to murder traitors in rituals reminiscent of the interwar right-wing paramilitary groups. One of the earliest individuals Robu recruited was a Securitate informer known by the code name ‘Sixt’. Sixt helped Robu recruit at least 28 others, including important former cuzists and legionaries, then betrayed all of them to the authorities.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Some former legionaries became fugitives after escaping from prison. The resistance fighter Radu Avram took to the mountains around Braşov in late 1944 after a local priest helped him escape from prison. He hid temporarily in his mother’s barn before fleeing to the mountains together with other escapees. They built themselves two large shelters and obtained a radio, which they used to transmit information about their fight and conditions in prison. Avram and his colleagues quickly established communication with nearby villages, and became a focus of resistance efforts in the region, being joined not only by former legionaries concerned about being arrested, but also by resistance fighters parachuted into the country by the CIA and by local Saxons who were under surveillance because they had aided German soldiers during the war.[[54]](#footnote-54) Similarly, Ioan Lupeş had joined a Blood Brotherhood while a high school student in 1940 and then reconnected with the Legion in 1947, organizing a Blood Brotherhood in Târgu Ocnă. Arrested in 1948, he escaped in 1950, hiding in the Tărcu Mountains for four years and surviving on food he stole from nearby villages or on aid from his family. In 1954 he shot a policeman who asked to see his identity card, triggering an investigation that ended not only in his arrest but with the closure of a large convent which had given him aid.[[55]](#footnote-55) For his part, the student Mircea Dobre joined a legionary group at university in 1946 and took to the Ţibleş Mountains when the Securitate began searching for him two years later. Dobre did not think of the Legion in terms of ‘spirituality’ and eventually broke from the rest of his partisan group because the erotic poetry he wrote about the group’s only female member offended their leader, Nicolae Pop. He survived the following winter alone and very cold before being captured in 1952.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The communist repression of legionaries was less comprehensive in rural areas, and in Mehedinți County former legionaries Ion Tâmbăluță, the brothers Ilie and Nicolae Ceadir, and others continued holding legionary meetings well into 1946, when they threw stones at a voting booth and assaulted people who voted for the Communist Party. According to their police files, all three were also well-known as thieves and thugs. The Ceadir brothers were arrested after shooting a Communist Party member with whom they had a personal feud. The Securitate began searching for Tâmbăluță in 1950, but he remained at large for four more years hiding in a tunnel under his barn.[[57]](#footnote-57) Vasile Corduneanu, Ioan Acatrinei and Neculai Aioanei from a village near Târgu Neamţ fled to the mountains after the Securitate decimated legionary groups in their region and they narrowly escaped arrest. They apparently made no attempt to attack the communist regime.[[58]](#footnote-58) Legionary peasants from Caraș-Severin County attacked a rural gendarmerie post in 1949 before fleeing to the mountains in the face of brutal repression.[[59]](#footnote-59) Despite their strong anti-communist sentiments, none of these men thought of their struggle in military terms; after initial acts of resistance they dedicated most of their energies just to staying alive.

One of the most successful fugitive groups were the ‘Outlaws of Dobruja’ (*Haiducii Dobrogei*) in the Babadag Mountains. The Legion was particularly strong among Aromanian migrants in Durostor County during the 1930s. After Romania ceded Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria in 1940 they resettled as privileged refugees in Northern Dobruja as well as in parts of Moldavia, but felt that the National Legionary State had failed to give them the rights they deserved.[[60]](#footnote-60) Hardened legionaries such as Nicolae Ciolacu, who had already survived the persecutions of 1933 and 1938 and were used to clandestinity, began organizing illegal legionary cells immediately after the Rebellion of January 1941. Close-knit Aromanian communities made it much easier for them to escape discovery by Romanian policemen, who were viewed with suspicion by Aromanians because of frequent abuses during the 1920s and 1930s and following the mismanaged resettlement of 1940. Ciolacu was nonetheless captured in 1942 and spent most of the war in prison, only being released in May 1945. As soon as he was a free man he joined a resistance group of former legionaries organized by the Aromanian student Gheorghe Costea. They were joined by other former legionaries over the next three years, all men, including Costea Sicu, Gogu Puiu, Stere Mişa, and the brothers Dumitru and Nicolae Fudulea, many of whom had military experience fighting on the Eastern front. The group styled themselves the ‘Outlaws of Dobruja’, taking inspiration from the Aromanian outlaws of nineteenth century Macedonia whose stories were well entrenched within the community’s mythology by this time.[[61]](#footnote-61) Drawing on an image of legionaries as religious crusaders, Nicolae Fudulea told the group in December 1948 that ‘not only because we are Romanians and legionaries, but also because we are Christians, we have the duty to fight against Godless, atheistic communism’.[[62]](#footnote-62) Eager to memorialize their own struggle, they wrote ballads about their exploits:

From the Danube to the sea,

From Măcin to Babadag,

He passes like a vision,

Blood enflamed, a restless spirit.

Black eyes below his brows,

Like those of a frenzied Armatol

Sweep the hot Dobrujan horizon,

Like two hawks circling above.

The absurd and merciless times

Incite him like a goad

To take a gun in his hand

And cold grenades at his hips.

He sets off to fill the trenches

With his feverish blood,

For his people suffering in chains,

For his nation enslaved.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Ciolacu writes that partisan activity was punishable by death in Dobruja during 1949-51, and the group moved frequently, relying on sympathetic Aromanian locals and taking advantage of the widespread rural violence against communist attempts at collectivization.[[64]](#footnote-64) They attacked and captured a group of gendarmes who had harassed their families, disarmed and threatened woodsmen who tried to capture them, and stockpiled weapons for a future uprising, but most of their efforts were focused on remaining alive, not on taking the battle to the communists.[[65]](#footnote-65) In 1949 the Securitate began torturing and killing individuals suspected of harbouring the partisans, and disease took its toll on the group’s ability to survive the bitterly cold winters. One by one key members of the group were arrested or killed until they were completely wiped out by 1952.[[66]](#footnote-66)

**Blood Brothers**

The mythology of Codreanu’s Legion proved to be particularly powerful from 1946 onwards. People who had been too young to have known Codreanu now affiliated themselves with the Legion, engaging in minor acts of sabotage before their almost inevitable arrests. Some, who had been involved in Blood Brotherhoods during the National Legionary State, now turned to the Legion as an anti-communist movement.[[67]](#footnote-67) High school students from Focşani, Panciu, and Tecuci formed their own groups in 1947, passing information on to other partisan groups and readying themselves to fight in the forests when the time came.[[68]](#footnote-68) The resistance in Bacău County during 1948 led by the students Petru C. Baciu and Gheorghe Unguraşu recruited heavily from among former Blood Brothers, but organized independently and maintained only tenuous connections with legionaries in Bucharest.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Blood Brotherhoods (*Frăţie de cruce*) were the Legion’s youth sections during the interwar period and were organized primarily through schools. Members were aged between 14 and 20 years old, and were required to study legionary writings, to vow to serve the movement, and to undertake tasks on behalf of the Legion.[[70]](#footnote-70) Whereas under Codreanu the Blood Brotherhoods had recruited clandestinely, during the National Legionary State they had had the support of the schools and were able to introduce young people to the Legion’s pantheon of heroes and virtues while also promising them lucrative careers if they joined the Legion when they graduated.[[71]](#footnote-71) The movement’s leadership lost contact with most Blood Brotherhoods during 1943, but their first priorities once the war was over were (1) organizing armed resistance in the mountains and (2) establishing new Blood Brotherhoods in the schools. Activists took young people for walks through the countryside and to museums, while also talking about their duties to their families and the nation. Whenever they were able they tried to send members of the Blood Brotherhoods to join armed groups in the mountains, but desisted after two boys died of illness in the mountains near Sibiu.[[72]](#footnote-72) One arrested legionary, the teacher Simion Toma, told police in 1948 that organizers were focusing on schools because these were logistically easier places to recruit when the Legion had a limited number of activists.[[73]](#footnote-73) It is also possible that school children who had been too young to have witnessed legionary crimes of the 1930s were more easily impressed by the movement’s rhetoric about purity, faith, and patriotism.

Students who had been Blood Brothers in 1940-41 wrote speeches and pamphlets and circulated them at the Politechnic University in Iaşi during 1947 trying to create a ‘legionary spirit’ of the type they had learned about as teenagers. They collected subscriptions from each other and ran their meetings according to legionary patterns.[[74]](#footnote-74) In the words of the legionary Petre Baicu, ‘the links among students who were former Blood Brothers had one thing in common: that the [legionary] virtues must be continually cultivated both individually and collectively’.[[75]](#footnote-75) Another legionary partisan from this period later wrote that the Blood Brotherhoods of 1946-48 ‘did not participate in political activities because … [their] goal was patriotic education, Christian moral development, and internalizing knowledge learned in school to the highest possible extent’.[[76]](#footnote-76) The legionary Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu, who had been a Blood Brother during his high school days and became a national organizer for the Brotherhoods in March 1947, writes that ‘the basis of the Brotherhood’s education was belief in God and Christian morality. It was a duty to go to church every Sunday’.[[77]](#footnote-77) He claims that when he was invited to become an organizer, he refused because he did not feel ‘spiritually prepared’ to live as a fitting example for his younger colleagues.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Gavrilă claims that more than half of the members of the anti-communist organization that sprung up in Cluj in the immediate aftermath of the 1946 elections had been Blood Brothers in the past, but not all young anti-communists were legionaries.[[79]](#footnote-79) In her oral history interviews with members of twelve anti-communist groups comprised primarily of high school students between 1947 and 1959, Lăcrămioara Stoenescu did not find one person who had been influenced by the Legion. These students mobilized around Liberal or Peasantist politics, out of fear of their privileged class backgrounds, or out of hatred for the Soviets. One of Stoenescu’s informants mentioned that all the Blood Brothers from his school were already in prison by the time he became an activist in 1947.[[80]](#footnote-80) Similarly, the students arrested in association with the young poet Nicolae Labiş in 1956 were inspired by the uprising in Hungary, not by an indigenous Romanian tradition.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Nonetheless, Blood Brothers played a prominent role in Gavrilă’s experience of the resistance. He learned in the summer of 1947 that Blood Brotherhoods had been stockpiling weapons and had formed connections with other resistance groups, including with Petraşcu’s legionary faction. The Securitate wiped out the Blood Brotherhoods in northern Moldavia in spring 1948 then attempted to arrest Gavrilă in Cluj that May. He fled south and found a job as a security guard on Saxon farms near Braşov. Narrowly avoiding capture once again, he and other fugitives established a camp in the Făgăraş Mountains, where they held out for the next seven years, becoming one of the most celebrated partisan groups of the era. Some of the high school students took their textbooks with them and studied them while in hiding, others dreamed about future careers as teachers or mechanics, while Baciu Haşiu spent his time grafting trees that he found in the forest. Based on Gavrilă’s extensive memoirs, it seems that few of them thought of themselves as ‘soldiers’. Gavrilă’s group was also willing to receive assistance from Jews, who provided them with medicine, clothes, and food. Ideology had given way to survival for most of them.[[82]](#footnote-82)

**The Legion through Cold War optics**

The idea of ‘active resistance’ was crucial legionaries living outside the country, who insisted that they too were resisting communism through their writings and actions and that anti-communism had always *the* core legionary value.[[83]](#footnote-83) Celebrating legionary participation in armed resistance allowed them to assert their belonging within an exile community that was sometimes hostile to former legionaries and to situate themselves on the American side of the Cold War.[[84]](#footnote-84) A similar rewriting of history was taking place inside Romania, as young people upset with communism selectively appropriated the Legion as a vehicle through which they could channel their anger. For those who had been involved in the Legion before 1944, and especially for those who continued to maintain legionary networks once the communists were in power, the past was a ghost that pursued them into the forests, where it determined which other partisan groups they were able to collaborate with and who they could rely on for support.

**Summary**

Scores of armed resistance groups formed in the wake of General Ion Antonescu’s resignation as the ruler of Romania on 23 August 1944 and the gradual establishment of Communist rule. Although the most famous of these groups were tightly coordinated bands firmly ensconced in the mountains under the leadership of charismatic individuals such as Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu and Toma Arnăuțoiu, the majority were small, loosely-organized networks of people who took up arms for a variety of reasons, including out of fear that they would be targeted by the communists because of their fascist pasts. National Liberals and Peasantists were reluctant to join forces with former legionaries even though they were happy to cooperate with antisemites who had been affiliated with other extremist right-wing parties such as the National Christian Party. For others, being a legionary was the epitome of what it meant to be anti-communist. This chapter examines how the myth of the Legion shaped armed resistance to the Romanian Communist Party during the late 1940s and early 1950s. It argues that reframing memories of the Legion for a Cold War audience shaped armed resistance in significant ways, from alienating potential collaborators to forcing people into resistance out of fear of reprisals for their past affiliations and motiving young people who needed an ideology they could appropriate.

**Rezumat (in Romanian)**

Zeci de grupări de rezistenţă armată s-au format în preajma demisiei Generalului Ion Antonescu în calitate de conducator al României în data de 23 august 1944 şi a întemeierii graduale a orânduirii Comuniste. Deşi majoritatea acestor grupări erau strâns coordonate de găşti refugiate în munţi sub conducerea unor indivizi caristmatici precum Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu şi Toma Arnăuțoiu, majoritatea erau reţele mici de oameni superficial organizate care s-au ridicat la arme din diverse motive, inclusiv de frică că ar putea fi ţinta comuiştilor din cauza trecutului lor fascist. Naţional Liberalii şi Ţaraniştii erau reticenţi să-şi unească forţele cu foştii legionari chiar dacă erau bucuroşi să coopereze cu antisemiţii, care la rândul lor fuseseră afiliaţi cu alte partide de extremă dreapta ca şi Partidul Naţional Creştin. Pentru alţii, a fi legionar întruchipa chintesenţa a ceea ce înseamna să fi anti-comunist. Acest capitol examinează în ce fel mitul Legiunii a format rezistenţa armată împotriva Partidului Comunist Român spre sfârşitul anilor ’40 şi începutul anilor ’50. Capitolul argumentează că reîncadrarea memorillor despre Legiune într-o mentalitate a războiului rece a format rezistenţa armată în diverse feluri semnificative, de la alienarea potenţialilor colaboratori până la a forţa oamenii în rezistenţă de frica represaliilor din cauza apartenenţelor lor trecute şi până la a motiva tineretul care avea nevoie de o ideologie de care să se ataşeze.

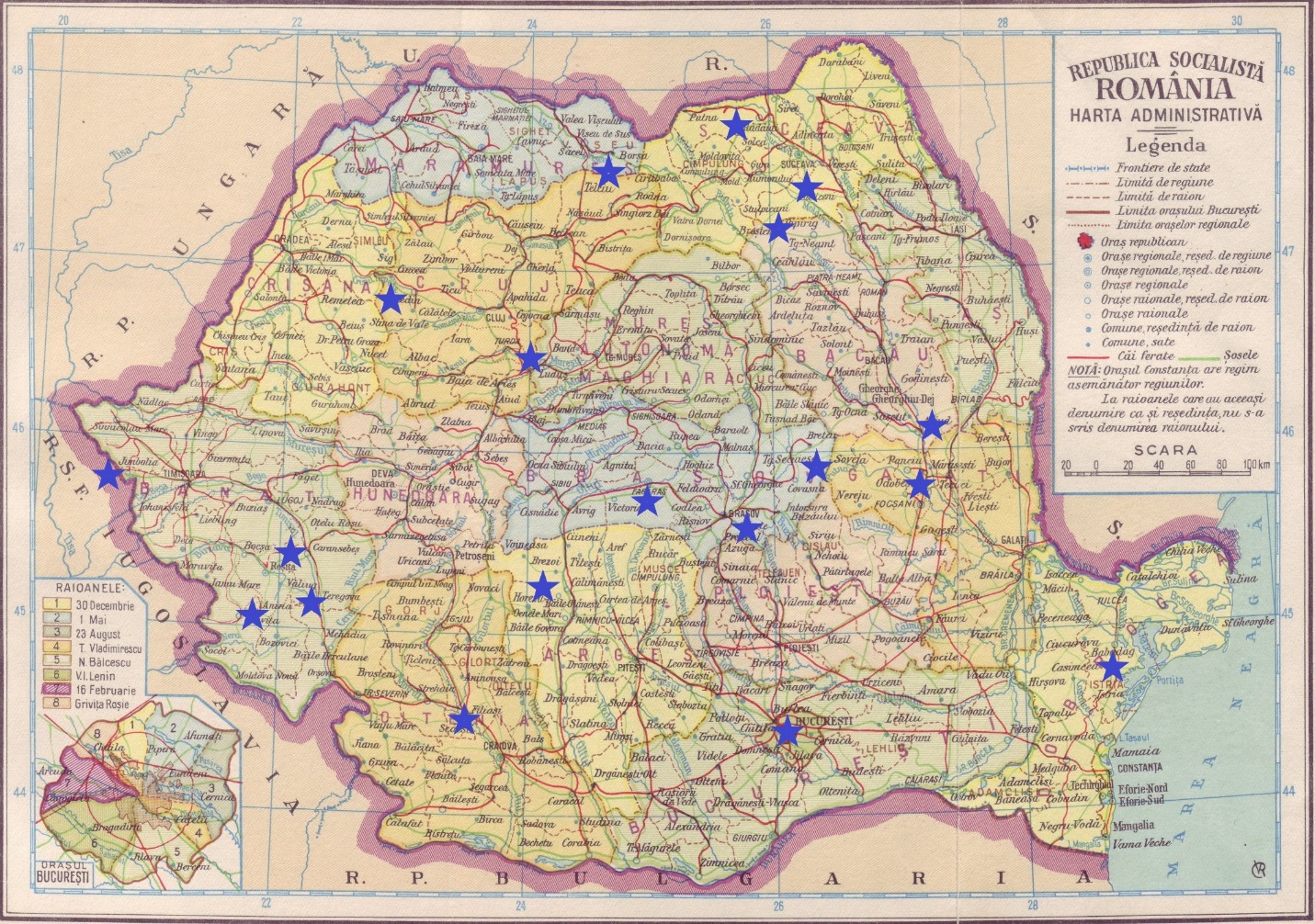
**Archival Access and State of Research**

The richest archives for information on anti-communist resistance movements are the archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS). The Romanian government made the archives of the communist-era secret police, known as the Securitate, available to researchers in 1999. Access to the CNSAS archives follows a stringent accreditation process because of the sensitive information these archives contain about people who still play an active role in public life. The archive contains ‘Documentary’ files, which are collections on thematic topics, as well as personal files from court cases or surveillance. To request a personal file you need to know that person’s full name, date and place of birth, and parents’ names. Sometimes the Securitate may simply not have been interested in specific individuals, but researchers might still not receive files they request if they contain information that is still considered classified, or that the archivists are unable to locate.

Researching in the CSNAS archives often takes several months between requesting accreditation and receiving files, so researchers might also prefer to work in the National Archives in Bucharest. These contain files from the Romanian Communist Party, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of War, the gendarmerie and the police. One can also supplement the National Archives by consulting regional archives held in forty-two locations around the country. Regional archives contain records from city councils and from local gendarmerie and police units. The Military Archives in Piteşti might also be consulted but these have been heavily under-utilized to date.

Outside of the archives, researchers of the anti-communist resistance in Romania have access to a significant number of memoir accounts written by resistance fighters. Most were published by minor publishing houses in small print runs during the 1990s and can be hard to track down because the major research libraries in Bucharest did not always buy them. A persistent researcher can nonetheless find them by looking through regional libraries or second-hand bookstores. There are also a large number of secondary studies of individual resistance groups. Although the majority of these studies fail to develop broad arguments about the nature of the resistance, they are nonetheless often meticulously researched and frequently reproduce unedited archival sources in their entirety. In contrast to the majority of micro-histories of individual groups, Dorin Dobrincu’s unpublished PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Iaşi in 2006 represents an unequalled synthetic treatment of armed resistance in Romania between 1944 and the early 1960s. In over 800 pages Dobrincu analyses almost all of the known resistance movements, providing critical readings of the sources and incorporating the stories of individual groups into an overall treatment of the phenomenon. Any future research on the Romanian case needs to take Dobrincu’s findings as its logical starting point.

**Map**

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66. Ciolacu, *Haiducii Dobrogei*, 222-307. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Fond Informativ, Dosar 160, vol. 1, f. 8-9, 12; Dobrincu, Rezistenţa armată anticomunistă, 508. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Dobrincu, Rezistenţa armată anticomunistă, 328-329. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid., 319-320. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Gheorghe Gh. Istrate, *Frăţia de cruce* (Bucharest: Fundaţiei Culturale “Buna Vestire,” 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Valeriu Anania, *Memorii* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2008), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. CNSAS, Fond Penal, Dosar 14005, vol. 1, f. 109; Baicu and Salcă, *Rezistenţa în munţi*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. CNSAS, Fond Penal, Dosar 14005, vol. 1, f. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid., vol. 2, f. 262-273, 392; vol. 3, f. 364-368. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Petre Baicu, in: Baicu and Salcă, *Rezistenţa în munţi*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Alexandru Salcă, in: Ibid., 72-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu, *Brazii se frâng, dar nu se îndoiesc: Rezistenţa anticomunistă în Munţii Făgăraşului*, vol. 1 (Baia Mare: Marist, 2009), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid., 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid., 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Lăcrămioara Stoenescu, *De pe băncile şcolii în închisorile comuniste* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2010), 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Stela Covaci, *Persecuţia: Mişcarea studenţească anticomunistă: Bucureşti, Iaşi (1956-1958): Nume de cod “Frăţia Paleolitică”: Documente din Arhiva Securităţii* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ogoranu, *Brazii se frâng,* 56-58, 61-63, 74, 79, 89, 97, 103, 109-110, 148. On Gavrilă’s group, see also Dobrincu, Rezistenţa armată anticomunistă, 643-701. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Faust Brădescu, *Mişcarea legionară în studii şi articole*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Majadahonda, 2000), esp. 40-43; Traian Popescu and Flor Strejnicu, *Din lupta exilului românesc din Spania împotriva comunismului* (Sibiu: Imago, 1994); Traian Golea, *Amintiri şi acţiuni din exil* (Norcross, GA: Criterion, 2005), esp. 94-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Horia Sima, *Antologie legionară*, vol. 1 (Miami Beach, FL: Colecţia Omul Nou, 1994), 131; Faust Brădescu, *Opinii: Un deceniu de lupta în exil în slujbă neamului şi legiunii (1978-1988)* (Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1997), 45-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)