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**ROMANIA'S CULTURAL WARS:
Intellectual Debates about the Recent Past**

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Executive Summary

Since the early 1990s a series of debates has been agitating Romanian intellectual circles. Featuring much the same protagonists, they are closely related, having grown out of one another spurred by various stimuli: domestic and overseas publications, echoes of Western debates on the Holocaust and the Gulag, and a range of political developments mainly surrounding Romania's prospects for integration into European and "Western" structures.

Given the common themes, venues, shared style and "cast of characters" of these political/literary debates, they may be usefully viewed as battles in a "cultural war." On this battlefield Romanian intellectuals struggle for the hearts and minds of the reading public, and to win over a new generation of writers and thinkers. As in all battles, a power dimension is salient as well. Some of the protagonists have been involved in politics proper, as elected officials or in advisory or cabinet positions. It is easy to detect their interest in how the broader public perceives them and their positions in the cultural press. But to hold or bequeath positions of authority in the cultural hierarchy—as editors, directors of institutions, department chairs, professors, etc.—is power as well.

These intellectual "wars" have focused on how to view the country's past, especially the last century, a past that was for forty-five years massively misrepresented by the communist establishment. They are at the same time about the present: about how Romania and the Romanians are perceived by intellectuals, politicians and economic aid agencies in "the West" and about the image that the country has or should want to project abroad. Finally, the debates are also about the future: should Romania strive to be accepted into "Europe," and if so at what price?

Introduction

Since the early 1990s a series of debates has been agitating Romanian intellectual circles. Featuring much the same protagonists, they are closely related, having grown out of one another spurred by various stimuli: domestic and overseas publications, echoes of Western debates on the Holocaust and the Gulag, and a range of political developments mainly surrounding Romania's prospects for integration into European and "Western" structures. Some observers early on tied positions taken by the dominant side in the debates to the generalized "difficulties of the transition to procedural democracy" turning "many Romanian intellectuals ... [to] the renewal of an anti-liberal and anti-parliamentary tradition."¹ A common trait of these debates is their broadly essayistic nature. This is to be expected given that they are unfolding not in professional journals but in the much wider circulation cultural press. They have revolved around some highly-reputed personalities and informal groups debating presumptive opinions and stances.

Even though the articles in question are most often about history, best discussed on the basis of factual evidence, they are more often philosophical and literary than historical. Wit and literary value can outweigh historiographic cogency as measures of their worth. This may explain their longevity and periodic recurrence. In arguments that have much to do with the verbal prowess and status of the debaters, it might be difficult to determine who has prevailed. Participants on each side might walk away feeling that their received wisdom continues to be correct. Reputation intact, they may discount the views of their opponents without ever having to confront or provide systematic evidence.

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¹ Vladimir Tismaneanu and Dan Pavel, "Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries: The Generation of Angst and Adventure Revisited," *EEPS* 8, no. 3, Fall 1994, p. 409.

their interest in how the broader public perceives them and their positions in the cultural press. But to hold or bequeath positions of authority in the cultural hierarchy—as editors, directors of institutions, department chairs, professors, etc.—is power as well.

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To opt for European integration involves not only new structures and legislation but also a kind of ideological conformity. The process presupposes some national soul-searching, and an openness to revision of heretofore unexamined assumptions. Romania’s acceptance depends among other things on its ability to meet not only economic but also “political conditions laid down by the European Council in Copenhagen (1993). The Council determined that any country wishing to join the EU had to achieve stability in its institutions, while guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, human rights and minority protection.”² Although NATO is no longer an issue, the candidate countries were expected to make proof of an “irreproachable democratic profile”; evidence had to be shown of the resolution of problems connected to the Holocaust—reparations and the restitution of “aryanized” property—along with the ability to hold democratic elections, and guarantee individual freedoms and the rule of law; and “adherence to OSCE ... principles involving ethnic minorities and social justice.”³

² Catherine Lovatt “Miorița: Romania’s Only Way Ahead,” *Central Europe Review* vol. 1, no. 5, 26 July 1999. http://www.ce-review.org/99/5/eu_lovatt5.html.

³ See “Romania and NATO,” National Defense University Strategic Forum no. 101, February 1997 <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/forum101.html>; and Romulus Căpălescu, “Extinderea NATO pe agenda reuniunii ministeriale de la Reykjavik, ultima înaintea summit-ului de la Praga: Șansele României - mai mari decât oricând. Decizia finală nu va fi adoptată înaintea alegerilor din septembrie din Slovacia,” *Adevărul* no. 3697, May 14, 2002. See also Dumitru Tinu, “Cu cioara vopsită la NATO,” *Adevărul* no. 3666, April 4, 2002.

In March 2002 the Romanian government passed an emergency ordinance outlawing fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations, the cult of Antonescu, and Holocaust denial. Although the measure has been bogged down in Parliament where the debate has focused on whether there even was a Holocaust in Romania, the government has used it to bring down a number of Antonescu statues and renamed several streets that had been named in his honor in different locations since 1989. It has also organized courses for army officers about the Holocaust. Such measures were taken to smooth the country's way into NATO.⁴ While the ideologues on the extreme right of the political spectrum balked at these conditions and at their imposition by foreign powers, the concern with the ideological part of this package among liberal intellectuals is also evident in the debates of the last decade.

These current conditions for European inclusion are reminiscent of the Minority Protection Treaties that accompanied Romania's Great Power-sanctioned territorial expansion in 1920. While the 1920s is beyond the actual recall of most Romanians, that period has turned into a stratified historical impression of past glory and past injustice. Beyond that, they raise the issue of the unresolved and still somewhat taboo legacy of the Holocaust perpetrated in Romania against Jews and Gypsies. Such provisos are perceived as humbling because they put Romania, like all the other candidate states, in the position of knocking at the door of a wealthy and exclusive club, which exhibits signs of moral superiority and self-righteousness, and which has the power to allow Romania, or not, to join "Europe."

Under the circumstances, might it not be preferable to turn one's back on "Europe," declare it undesirable and thus save a lot of effort and self-pride? In fact ordinary Romanians seem wildly, unrealistically enthusiastic about the prospect, while the intelligentsia's doubts have their own reasons, to be discussed below.⁵ This "Euroskepticism" shadows some of the cultural wars of the past twelve years. Some intellectuals in Romania, for instance, have charged Romanian émigrés, and other Romania-watchers, with serving as "monitors" of good behavior and constituting in effect a new censorship. They

⁴ Alexandru Florian, "Antisemitism and Policy." Romania's Jewish Heritage web site: <http://www.romanianjewish.org>. In May 2002 Radu Ioanid of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum taught a course on the Holocaust in Romania.

have bitterly accused the “monitors” of denouncing them to Western foundations on which numerous cultural initiatives depend for funding.⁶ Therefore some have argued against monitorization because it creates suspicion. The “triumph of mistrust” would be the result. But others actually welcome international pressure as essential to the democratization of Romania.⁷

In a previous paper I discussed the “poverty” of the study of contemporary Romanian history since its liberation from the ideological constraints of the communist era. This is an essential contextual element for comprehending the intense—but historically insubstantial—intellectual debates of the transition period. As I argued there, the attempt to rapidly overcome the glaring problems in the field of recent history left behind by the communist era, has involved the promotion of historians from outside the profession or from other subfields of history who have not retrained. Those whose reputations rest on past cultural dissidence, on a privileged connection to the pre-communist era, or on work in other fields of research can ride on their reputation and on what the Romanians have been calling “mediatization.”

For a public whose historical literacy is already weak, these are sometimes the most visible, perhaps only, interpreters of precommunist history. Thus the response to the lifting of ideological constraints has not always resulted in careful historiography, but rather in a quick rethinking that serves the present moment. History now can still be “the handmaiden of politics,” even though the political world is radically changed.

⁵ Andrei Cornea, “Zei obezi” *Dilema* 474, 12-18 april, 2002.

⁶ See for example Nicolae Manolescu, “Ce înseamnă să fii rasist,” *România literară* no. 19, May 20, 1998, and “Cum am devenit rinocer,” *România literară* no. 32, August 12, 1998. In the latter piece Manolescu, also the editor of *România literară*, and at the time a member of parliament, ridiculed the notion of “rhinocerization” of liberals like himself. Michael Shafir had used the term following the Ionesco play “Rhinocéros,” that evoked the adoption of fascism through the metaphor of the transformation of humans into rhinoceroses. Manolescu referred to being “reported” to George Soros and the U.S. State Department.

⁷ Andrei Cornea, “Accident sau simptom? Un articol iritant” *22*, no. 25, 19-25 June, 1998, and Dorin Tudoran, “Syncategoremata” *22* no. 27, 7-13 July, 1998. Cornea is a frequent contributor to *22* and *Dilema*, and a member of the Group for Social Dialogue. Tudoran is a poet and former dissident. He works for one of the new democracy and transition institutions in Washington.

In Search of a Usable Past

In the September 1998 supplement to the journal *Sfera Politicii* (The Sphere of Politics), the political scientist George Voicu published an essay entitled “Cronologia unei neînțelegeri: Fascismul și comunismul, Holocaustul și Gulagul în dezbateră publică” (The Chronology of a Misunderstanding: Fascism and Communism, Holocaust and Gulag in the Public Debate).⁸ Voicu, who was also one of the principal participants in the intellectuals’ row he was now chronicling, noted the conflict of ideas that had been unfolding in the periodicals *România literară*, 22, *Cuvântul*, *Orizont*, and the daily *România liberă* during the previous few months.

Most of these publications are sophisticated cultural reviews. Together they represented the views of Romania’s liberal post-communist cultural establishment. Voicu attributed the “outbreak” of these debates, to two events, one political, the other literary: the November 1996 electoral victory of the candidate of the Democratic Convention Emil Constantinescu over Ion Iliescu, and the publication of Mihail Sebastian’s *Jurnal, 1935-1944*.⁹ The massive press commentary on this book, considered the publishing event of the year, and even by some of the “last few years,” contributed, according to Voicu, to a “rapid realignment of intellectual attitudes about a political and intellectual past that had long been inaccessible, secretive, and misrepresented.”¹⁰

It is not clear in what way the 1996 election may have spurred the debates. But there is no question that the victory of Emil Constantinescu, the Democratic Convention candidate, in November 1996 brought “to power” the liberal anti-communists who had been in opposition to Ion Iliescu since 1990. They had viewed his term in office as little other than warmed-over communism.¹¹ Many

⁸ *Sfera: Supliment al revistei Sfera politicii*, no. 1, September 1998: pp. 3-9.

⁹ Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal, 1935-1944*. Preface and notes by Leon Volovici (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996). For the American edition: *Journal, 1935-1944: The Fascist Years*. Preface and notes by Radu Ioanid (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000.)

¹⁰ Voicu, “Cronologia,” p. 3, Z. Ornea, “Opintiri împotriva Jurnalului lui Sebastian” *Dilema* no. 226, 23-29 May, 1997, and Mihai Zamfir, “Jurnal,” *România literară* no. 16, April 1997, reprinted in Jordan Chimet, ed., *Dosar Mihail Sebastian* (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi, 2001), pp. 295-298, and 189.

¹¹ http://www.ici.ro/romania/politics/p_life.html

intellectuals identified with the new regime, and some were even part of it. They saw themselves—and in fact were—in the position of representing the country officially, and of defending its image after years of criticizing its leadership from the sidelines and the safety of opposition.

The polemics described by Voicu, however, focused on the literary event, especially on revelations concerning the politics of interwar intellectuals made in Sebastian's journal. This is a wide-ranging and affecting literary and historical document written (not for publication, but as an intimate diary) over the decade that began in 1935. Its author, an assimilated Jew who considered himself profoundly Romanian though making no secret of his origins, was a particularly credible witness. Until the mid-1930s Sebastian had belonged comfortably to a circle of literati, the "new generation" that eventually veered politically toward the extreme right. Thus his jottings provided, almost from the inside, strong evidence that Romanian society, and particularly many of its most talented young intellectuals, became fascists; and not just after, and because of Romania's alliance with Germany in World War Two, but much earlier and without coercion.

Ranking philosophers, social scientists, actors, and writers had been infatuated with radical nationalist thinkers, with Hitler, and with Romania's own version of a Nazi movement: the Iron Guard. Several notable cultural personalities, forbidden and martyred during the communist era and lionized in its aftermath, emerged tainted out of these pages.¹² Foremost among the figures thus "exposed" was the late University of Chicago philosopher of religions, Mircea Eliade, who had been one of Sebastian's closest friends, and the undisputed leader of the new generation of interwar literati.

The *Journal's* explosive evidence of these interwar intellectuals' complicity with anti-Semitic ideology and a politics of extreme nationalism became a scandal that divided the world of Romanian letters. One observer noted that the diary sparked a veritable "fury" because of the "sentiment that

¹² The issue of the communist regime's policy on non-communist, nationalist and fascist intellectuals is not a simple one, as Katherine Verdery has already shown. See her *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Policies changed gradually and many writers forbidden during the Stalinist period were "rehabilitated." This happened also with regard to Mircea Eliade, some of whose works began again to be published in Romania, along with articles and books about him, in 1967. See Mircea Handoca, *Convorbiri cu și despre Mircea Eliade*. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), pp.150, 195.

important national values had been defiled.”¹³ Because of the reactions the *Journal* elicited, George Voicu detected a fissure spreading within the liberal Romanian intelligentsia. He nominalized the two camps in the article “Reacția de prestigiu: reflecții pe marginea unei polemici” (Prestigious Reactions: Reflections in the Margins of a Polemic). Favoring a tough evaluation of the interwar generation of intellectuals, and thus forcing an assumption of responsibility with regard to the anti-Semitic tradition and the Holocaust in Romania were Vladimir Tismăneanu, Norman Manea, Z. Ornea, Radu Ioanid, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, Michael Shafir, Stelian Tănase, Leon Volovici, Andrei Cornea, Mircea Iorgulescu and Vasile Popovici. On the other side, somehow defending the interwar intelligentsia despite its adherence to the extreme right and xenophobic nationalism, Voicu noted Gabriel Liiceanu, Nicolae Manolescu, Dorin Tudoran, Monica Lovinescu, Alex. Ștefănescu, Constantin Țoiu, and Ioan Buduca. There were also “defectors” who changed their minds during and as a result of the debates, migrating between the two “camps.” Voicu was careful to point out the fluidity of the boundary between these.¹⁴

The reactions to Sebastian’s journal were varied and ample, marking in sheer quantity as well as content the profound impression it made on post-1989 literati. Many of the post-communist intelligentsia, in seeking a “usable past” had in some way or another idealized the pre-communist one. They had sought their own *real* intellectual roots—unlike the fake ones fabricated by communist discourse—in the interwar generation of talented thinkers, writers, social scientists, and artists; at the very least taking for granted—but usually also admiring—the value of their, “golden age” precursors untouched by communism.

Some Landmarks of the Debates

It is worth summarizing this torrent of publicistic activity in the wake of the Sebastian journal publication. Many were deeply touched by this writing and overwhelmed by its obvious significance. They proclaimed its documentary worth, and expressed shock at the unpleasant truths revealed about their

¹³ Petru Creția “Despre antisemitism,” *Realitatea evreiască*, April 1997.

intellectual heroes. An important critic and literary historian characterized the journal as an “x-ray” image of “an absolutely terrifying reality.”¹⁵ Some authors reported being changed by the revelations.¹⁶

One such reaction came from Vasile Popovici, who greeted the journal reverentially, accepting in full Sebastian’s depiction of the moral ruin of the 1930s Romanian intelligentsia. In the literary monthly *Orizont* he wrote that having read the *Journal* it was “impossible to remain the same. The Jewish problem becomes your problem. A huge shame extends over a whole period of [our] national culture and history, and its shadow spreads over you as well. One could not have suspected . . . that the evil was so profound, and that . . . people and writers whom one admired would come out tainted, bearing an air of miserable guilt about which one doesn’t even know that it was fully admitted.” Popovici predicted that apologists would try to “denigrate . . . Sebastian and minimize his testimony.”¹⁷

The critic Alex Ștefănescu was among the apologists, responding with indignation at being held retroactively responsible, as he saw it, for crimes committed during the Holocaust.¹⁸ But in his retort to Ștefănescu, Popovici articulated in very specific terms the real import of the “Sebastian revelations”:

The issue is the participation of some of our great spirits (Eliade, Noica, Cioran) in the extreme right wing movement. If Mr. Ștefănescu has read these authors—and I don’t doubt that he has, if he considers them representative for our culture—and I suspect that he does, if when he read them he identified with them spiritually at least in part, if he admits that they left their mark through their oeuvre upon us, then the shame of which I was speaking . . . “*extends in truth over a whole period our culture and national history, and its shadow casts itself upon you also.*”¹⁹

¹⁴ George Voicu, “Reacția de prestigiu: reflecții pe marginea unei polemici,” *Sfera Politicii* no. 63, October 1998): 57-62.

¹⁵ Z. Ornea, “Un eveniment: Jurnalul lui Sebastian,” *România literară* no. 5, February 5, 1997, reprinted in Chimet, *Dosar*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Among them, Z. Ornea mentions Eugen Negrici, Gabriel Liiceanu, H. R. Patapievici, and Gabriela Adameșteanu. (See previous footnote).

¹⁷ “Evreitatea mea,” *Orizont*, February 15, 1997, reprinted in Geo Șerban, ed., *Sebastian sub vreme: Singurătatea și vulnerabilitatea martorului*. Caiet cultural (6) al revistei *Realitatea evreiască* (Bucharest: Ed. Universal Dalsi, 2000) pp. 72-73.

¹⁸ Alex. Ștefănescu, “Protest” *România literară*, June 17, 1998.

¹⁹ Vasile Popovici, “Nu vorbeam în numele domnului Alex. Ștefănescu,” 22 no. 76, 30 June-6 July, 1998. Emile Cioran and Constantin Noica who are also mentioned here with Eliade, were close generational associates of the latter and had similar political paths. More will be said about them below.

Among historians, Lya Benjamin greeted the *Journal* as an invaluable historical document, without which “it is not possible to have a complete image of the history of Romania during the Second World War.”²⁰ Romania’s most important literary critic, Nicolae Manolescu, declared that he considered Sebastian’s journal “the best [one] in Romanian literature”; as a result of reading it, he had completely revised his idealized view of interwar Romania: “The book shattered the myth of our prewar democracy, he wrote.”²¹

Others also found the book hugely important, less for exposing any new facts than for forcing a new way of seeing a whole set of idealized intellectual precursors. Concerning Mircea Eliade, Florin Ardelean commented that Sebastian had challenged the very lens through which “mummified” interwar intellectuals were perceived in Romania. Ardelean attributed the shock produced by the journal in Romania to the fact that “we ... live in an idolatrous culture. We deify our personalities ... we sanctify them and relate to them only through hymnals,” not engaging with them, but rather “conserving” them in a “pantheon” of “sublime,” “saintly,” figures.²²

In 2000, after the publication of the journal’s American edition, the émigré poet and radio commentator Andrei Codrescu reacted similarly. He too had been a great admirer of Eliade, dating to his first youth in Romania and later meetings with him in Chicago. In the 1950s Eliade’s books had been forbidden, and Codrescu knew little about him first hand. He had thought of him as “that famous exile.” Reading him in the 1960s and 1970s he liked the mysticism of Eliade’s work. Codrescu changed his mind radically upon reading Sebastian’s journal, which opened his eyes to this darker political side, one that had only been hinted at in their conversations in Chicago (in comments about Eliade’s former mentor,

²⁰ Lya Benjamin, “Asumare și verticalitate,” *Realitatea evreiască*, no. 54-55, 1997. Reprinted in *Sebastian sub vremea*, p. 192. Benjamin has been working on the Holocaust and particularly on the Antonescu government’s part in it.

²¹ Cited in Țicu Goldstein, “Testul ‘Sebastian’” *Realitatea evreiască* 52-53, 1997, reprinted in *Sebastian sub vremea*, pp. 230-231.

²² Florin Ardelean, “Defectul de imagine,” *Familia* no. 3, 1997, reprinted in Chimet, ed., *Dosar*, pp. 171-176.

Nae Ionescu). In 2000, however, post-journal, Codrescu concluded that Eliade had been more than “a Sunday radical, ... an active member of the pro-Nazi Iron Guard.”²³

There was also a backlash to the *Journal* and the praise it garnered. Some critics worried about a tragic shattering of intellectual idols in the eyes of young Romanians—not currently in power, generationally speaking—who needed Eliade *et al.* as models.²⁴ One or two critics challenged the journal’s very authenticity. Without any evidence to speak of, they suggested that it could have been “doctored” and thus invalid on technical grounds; but this argument was not very widespread.²⁵

Certain responses to this publication event were ambiguous if no less significant. Perhaps the most important piece about Sebastian’s *Journal* (producing many further debates and moving them to more bitter levels) was that of Gabriel Liiceanu, the director of the publishing house that had brought it out. During the flurry of commentary and excitement that ensued upon its appearance in the stores in early 1997, Liiceanu was invited to address the Jewish Community in Bucharest as part of a panel of speakers. His talk, entitled “Sebastian, mon frère” soon became known beyond that original audience, polarizing the Romanian intellectual community at home and abroad.²⁶

In a rhetorical conceit, Liiceanu likened his own life to that of Sebastian, “placing one upon the other like two palms.” As if anticipating an outcry, he began by saying that he would not worry about audience reactions or about the labels that he might incur. His speech focused as much on Sebastian’s life (as captured by the diary) as on Liiceanu’s own suffering as an intellectual “of bourgeois origin” marked negatively during the communist regime by not belonging to the Communist Party.

²³ *Dilema* no. 390, 4-10 August 2000. (An English language version of this article was also broadcast on NPR and published in *Gambit Weekly*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *Funny Tonus*). Codrescu compared Eliade to Paul de Man, a Yale professor who had also been discovered to have been pro-Nazi in his youth in Belgium.

²⁴ Dan C. Mihăilescu, “Adeverirea unui mit,” 22 no. 4, 5, 6 1997, Reprinted in *Sebastian sub vreme*, pp. 64-65.

²⁵ See Dan Petrescu, “‘E mai bine să ne ținem departe de lumea literară românească: Scrisoare deschisă către Liviu Antonesei,’” *Timpul* no. 4, April 1997, reprinted in Chimet, ed., *Dosar Mihail Sebastian*, p. 292. For a reply to Nicolae Florescu’s attempt to delegitimize the veracity of Sebastian’s testimony, see also Z. Ornea, “Jurnalul lui Sebastian supără rău” *Dilema* no. 440, August 3-9, 2001.

²⁶ Gabriel Liiceanu, “Sebastian, mon frère.” The text first read by Liiceanu at the Federation of Romanian Jewish Communities on April 13, 1997, appeared in the weekly 22 no. 17, April 29-May 5, 1997 and has been reprinted in a number of books, among

The essence of his argument was that anti-Semitism ignores the individuality of (Jewish) persons, categorizing them into an abstract and hateful collectivity, much the same way as the class struggle, or the pale shadow of it that functioned in the institutional life of national communist Romania. Liiceanu suffered potentially by not getting an equal chance with party members or children of “healthy [working class] origins.” Later he was fired from a research job for not being a party member.

Later still, an individual against a collective again, he suffered potentially at the hands of the miners sent to Bucharest in June 1990 by the first Iliescu government to suppress the protesters in Piața Universității; the miners attacked people they presumed were intellectuals, identifying them by their beards and eyeglasses. By sheer luck, Liiceanu was not hurt. This retrospective, rhetorical solidarity with Sebastian, who, as a Jew had been excluded progressively from the public sphere but also by his non-Jewish personal friends who adhered to fascism, went so far that Liiceanu *assumed* a Jewish identity referring repeatedly to “my Jewishness.”

This attitude offended those who view the Holocaust as a unique historical tragedy derived from the practice of Nazi (and their allies’) racism, and directed most destructively against European Jews during World War II. If Jewishness is only a metaphorical state that a person takes on if oppressed as part of any group, then historical Jewry loses the concreteness derived from its actual history. By the same logic the Holocaust becomes no worse than the sufferings of people under communism, and in the Gulag.²⁷ Liiceanu also offended people who knew that all in all he had had a pretty good career during the previous regime: he had been permitted to study in West Germany on a Humboldt fellowship, and he had not run any obvious risks as a dissident.²⁸

these *Sebastian sub vremei*. pp. 136–147. Throughout this section I am paraphrasing and analyzing this text.

²⁷ For a comparative discussion of such comparison throughout East Central Europe, see Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and Comparative Trivialization: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe*. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism no. 19 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002).

²⁸ See Mircea Iorgulescu, “Ce să explici?!” *Dilema* no 369, 1-16 March, 2000, p. 3. Iorgulescu recounts with humor a real or imaginary conversation with a French reporter who questions him relentlessly on the suffering he assumed, after reading “Sebastian, mon frère,” Liiceanu had experienced during communism. While explaining to him that there had been no jail, no torture, no persecution, no aborted career, Iorgulescu “defends” Liiceanu with the explanation “This is an essay ... not an autobiography.”

Finally, Liiceanu imagined what Sebastian, who died in a car accident in 1945, *might* have said with respect to the new communist order, focusing, in Liiceanu's imagination, on the much-rehearsed theme of Jewish communism. Sebastian/Liiceanu referred to those that had been "victims" during the war but became "executioners," that is communist functionaries, immediately afterwards. The allusion was to the relatively large Jewish representation in the early Romanian communist establishment; but also to the stereotype of Judeo-communism that had figured in East European anti-Semitism for over a century.

This topos had come up as well a few years earlier in Liiceanu's preface to Leon Volovici's book *Ideologia naționalistă și "problema evreiască"* published in 1995. Liiceanu had evidently agreed to publish Volovici's study of the anti-Semitism of Romanian intellectuals in the 1930s. (These are the same intellectuals exposed in Sebastian's *Journal*, also published by Humanitas.) But judging from the "editor's note" he did not endorse the book. He pointed out that the author of the volume was "not accidentally" Jewish, and it attempted to discount Volovici's findings: "it is hard to imagine that the images of history ("figurile istoriei") can be recreated through the discourse of those who are always ready to speak as victims, but who forget to bear witness about their role as executioners," Liiceanu wrote.²⁹

Other, less known authors had also made such arguments, but their articles were much less visible.³⁰ However the more such arguments were rehearsed in different publications, the more resonance Liiceanu's address to the Bucharest Jewish Community had. He had expressed an idea—now for the second time—that was not completely new, but "in the air."

The imaginary Sebastian locution in the conclusion of Liiceanu's speech was a brilliant solution to the embarrassment brought by Sebastian's diary to contemporary Romanian culture. Popovici's pronouncement that after reading the diary, it was "impossible to remain the same [because] the Jewish

²⁹ Gabriel Liiceanu, "Nota editorului", in Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă și "problema evreiască"* (Humanitas, 1995), p. 7. Volovici's book had first appeared in English as *Nationalist Ideology & Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991).

³⁰ Alexandru George makes a similar argument using almost the same vocabulary: "pariah" instead of "victim" and "executioner" (in Romanian *căldu*). See his articles in *Luceafărul* no. 16, 17, 18, 19 (April-May 1997), excerpted in *Dosar Mihail Sebastian*, pp. 78-89, esp. pp. 85, 88.

problem becomes your problem”—was negated with grace. You *could* embrace this testimony and “remain the same” because Romanian intellectuals under communism—the latter brought upon the Romanians by actual Jews—were metaphorical, but no less real, suffering Jews themselves. The specificity of the moral abjection Sebastian had conjured with his cotidian observations, and which for many readers was the first glimpse at Romania’s wartime history and intellectual history, had been not exactly rejected, but cut down to size, by means of a comparison to a much closer reality that Romanian readers had experienced and needed little imagination to recall. Thus the burden of Sebastian’s revelations was lightened, some might say with Michael Shafir, “trivialized.”³¹ Sebastian was not denied, his statements were accepted as true, but they became so much less bothersome.

It was not long before Liiceanu’s words became a battlefield. In *Realitatea evreiască* an elderly Sandra Segal pointed out that Romanian Jews were saved from persecution by the Red Army, and that Jewish communists who wrought much wrong, did so as communists, not as Jews, hurting Jews equally to Christians on the basis of class. She evoked the post-war mass emigration of Romanian Jews as a result of communist oppression. Segal concluded by asking Liiceanu why, in the face of repeated anti-Semitic attacks since 1989 against the small number of elderly Jews still living in the country, he and other intellectuals like him, “loved, admired, and respected” by this community, had kept silent.³²

In an open letter from Jerusalem Michael Finkenthal criticized Liiceanu for substituting “theories of marginalization” for the historical, real anti-Semitism experienced by Sebastian, and for replacing the Jewish identity imposed on the individual by others, regardless of the identity s/he chose, as it was during Sebastian’s life, with an elective Jewishness.³³ George Voicu argued that, like Liiceanu, the

³¹ Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”*

³² Sandra Segal, “De ce atâta tăcere?” *Realitatea evreiască* no. 54-55, 1997, reprinted in *Dosar Mihail Sebastian*, pp. 221-222.

³³ Michael Finkenthal, “Scrisoare deschisă fratelui Gabriel,” 22 no. 25, 24-30 June, 1997, reprinted in *Dosar Mihail Sebastian*, pp. 11-13.

overwhelming majority of Romanian intellectuals do not acknowledge the specificity and uniqueness of the Holocaust or its irreducible traits. Voicu used the phrase “comparative indecency” to condemn the symmetry suggested in Liiceanu’s speech.³⁴

On the other hand, others, among them several Jewish intellectuals, praised “Sebastian, mon frère.” Andrei Cornea defended Liiceanu’s rhetorical Jewishness on the grounds that “anti-Semites and the racial laws” should not have the last word. If after the Holocaust people can still not choose freely to be or not to be Jewish, then the Nazis will have won a “belated but solid victory.”³⁵ Liiceanu’s Jewishness-by-choice in his address should thus be allowed. Leon Volovici, a critic living in Jerusalem, disagreed with Liiceanu’s “metaphysical paradigms” about the generalized Jew, yet he too found the speech inoffensive.³⁶

Andrei Oișteanu, who talked to the Jewish community on the same occasion as Liiceanu, did not dislike the latter’s text, despite certain reservations. Oișteanu also testified to the warm reception “Sebastian, mon frère” had received live.³⁷ Mircea Iorgulescu discussed the exaggerations and rhetorical excesses of the text, yet did not see in them any masked attack against Sebastian. Iorgulescu was particularly irritated with the “vigilance” of George Voicu who saw potential anti-Semitism in such merely rhetorical errors. Although willing to admit that other issues were lurking in the interstices of the Sebastian controversy, Iorgulescu chose to construe the latter narrowly. To him the problem of comparing the Holocaust and the Gulag, the perceived indifference of liberal Romanian intellectuals to anti-Semitic manifestations, and the fascination of post-communist youth with interwar fascist intellectuals—all generated by the publication and reception of the Sebastian diary—were simply “outside the *Journal*.”³⁸

³⁴ See George Voicu, “13 Îndreptări: Răspuns la articolul domnilor Mihnea Berindei și François Gèze,” *Observator cultural* no. 32, October 3-10, 2000. The article was also published in the French periodical *Esprit* no. 272, February 2001, p. 222.

³⁵ Andrei Cornea, “Cine e fratele cui? Scrisoare deschisă către Michael Finkenthal,” 22 no. 25, 24-30 June, 1997, reprinted in *Dosar Mihail Sebastian*, p. 14.

³⁶ Leon Volovici, “Jurnalul lui Mihail Sebastian și ‘teroaarea istoriei’: LV in dialog cu G Adameșteanu,” 22, no. 27, 8-14 June, 1997.

³⁷ Andrei Oișteanu, “Cum a devenit huligan,” 22 no. 7, 16-22 February, 2000.

The *Journal's* profound polarizing effect on contemporary Romanian society can be gauged also from the marked shift in the position of unlimited admiration adopted by certain critics just after its release, to a far more reserved one after the discussion in print had unfolded. Vasile Popovici and Nicolae Manolescu both retreated from their first big enthusiasms. In an article entitled “Vînătoarea de vrăjitoare” (The Witch-Hunt) Manolescu depicted Eliade (and Cioran) as the latest victims of a half-century of witch hunting of literary Nazi sympathizers.

Saying first that “the truth needed to be told even if it was bothersome,” he insisted that the “context and nuances” of the bothersome truths needed to be understood properly; he agreed with Mircea Handoca—Eliade’s foremost editor in Romania, and a great public admirer of his—that Sebastian had simply “exaggerated.” Manolescu argued that Eliade and Cioran should not be “prosecuted” in these discussions for “opinion crimes,” and worried that only right-wing intellectuals, but not those who had sympathized with Stalinism, were ever “on trial” for their pasts.³⁹

When Popovici was serving as Romania’s Consul General in Marseille, he participated in a stage of these debates that focused unrelentingly on George Voicu, who had “pulled the alarm” on the transformation of the liberal Romanian intelligentsia. Although Voicu had listed Popovici among the “good guys,” in his earlier article “Reacția de prestigiu,” Popovici joined the growing number of voices raised against Voicu’s remarks on the schism in the ranks of the Romanian liberal intelligentsia.⁴⁰ This phase of the debate began with the re-publication in the winter of 1999 of Voicu’s original Romanian article, “Reacția de prestigiu” in the French periodical *Les Temps Modernes*.

³⁸ Mircea Iorgulescu, “Peisaj după o batalie care nu a prea avut loc (III),” 22 no. 10, 5-10 March, 2002.

³⁹ *România literară* June 11-17, 1997.

⁴⁰ Vasile Popovici, “George Voicu persistă și semnează,” 22, no. 12, 21-28 March, 2000. This was a reply to George Voicu’s “Indecenta comparativă” a week earlier in 22.

Even more bothersome was a note by Edgar Reichmann in *Le Monde*, January 15, 2000, about the *Temps Modernes* article.⁴¹ Voicu's article in Romanian had first appeared in *Sfera Politicii* in 1998 and was relatively ignored, both because *Sfera* is not a large circulation weekly, but a professional journal, and because Voicu was hardly a recognized name. When a version of it re-appeared in France a year later and was even commented in the daily *Le Monde*, it elicited an enormous reaction from almost all the writers that had appeared on both of the "lists" composed by Voicu and expanded by Reichmann.

The main point of Voicu's adversaries was that he had given a false alarm: there was no anti-Semitic subtext in Liiceanu's "Sebastian, mon frère," nor in the wider Gulag vs. Holocaust debates. Many defended the highly reputed intellectual leaders, Gabriel Liiceanu and Nicolae Manolescu, whom he had named among others, as guilty of "indecent comparativism." The attacks against Voicu grew angrier with time. The most consistent reproach brought to Voicu in this veritable campaign to defend the honor of the Romanian intelligentsia, was that he was unknown, that he did not belong to the caste of intellectuals represented by *22*, *România Literară*, and *Dilema* and thus had no status. Not having the mark of prestige lent by belonging to this in-group, his observations did not deserve to be noticed.

The fact that Voicu had been taken seriously in France, irritated as much as the fact that he dared to criticize or as the content of his critique. Voicu had stepped outside the pervasive system of patronage and power relations reigning in the contemporary cultural world. He had disrespected its rules, and was threatening the image of the liberal arbiters of ethics and taste. The issues of social hierarchy and of an elite entitled to be the unchallenged conveyor of Romania's image to the West emerged as equally important to the substance of Voicu's comments.

⁴¹ *Le Monde* had earlier published another article signed by Radu Ioanid and Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine on "the new wave of historical revisionism in Romania," republished in *22* no 7/417, 17-23 February, 1998. Cited in Voicu, "Cronologia", p. 4.

A Previous Episode: People and Strategies

The publication in full of the Sebastian journal had relaunched a debate that had been going on since 1992.⁴² A previous episode had occurred over disclosures about Eliade's youthful fascist convictions made by Norman Manea, a Romanian writer living since the 1980s in the United States. His article "Happy Guilt," was published in *The New Republic*.⁴³ A writer of fiction as well as essays, Manea had written his piece mainly on the basis of the biography of Eliade by Mac Linscott Ricketts and of Eliade's own autobiographical volumes. Although others had already broached the issue of Eliade's Iron Guard sympathies, these earlier references had reached only a tiny audience.⁴⁴

Now, between Manea's standing as a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" recipient and the most translated living Romanian writer, and the *New Republic's* wide circulation, the issue had really been put on the table. It could no longer be ignored especially as Manea's article had taken the "Eliade question" out of the confines of the Romanian cultural neighborhood, into the international one. "Happy Guilt" was also translated into Romanian and published in the Bucharest weekly 22 in 1992."⁴⁵

Manea's goal was not so much to unmask Eliade, who had died five years earlier without addressing openly in his ample autobiographical writings the question of his fascist past. Rather, he wanted to prevent a new Romanian fascism from emerging naively based on a cult of Eliade, his past notwithstanding."⁴⁶ The essay was concerned with positioning fascism vis-à-vis democracy, not communism.⁴⁷ In view of the nationalist revival after the fall of communism, and the recuperation of

⁴² Excerpts from the journal had appeared already in the Israeli journal *Toladot* and the Romanian journal *Manuscriptum*.

⁴³ Manea, "Happy Guilt: Mircea Eliade, fascism and the unhappy fate of Romania," *The New Republic*, 5 August, 1991. Also published in *On Clowns: the Dictator and the Artist* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992), and in German as "Felix Culpa: Mysterien bei Eliade," *Lettre International* 33, Berlin 1996.

⁴⁴ Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots, 1907-1945* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1988); Theodor Lavi, "Dosarul Mircea Eliade," *Toladot* January-March, 1972; and Irina Livezeanu, "A Jew from the Danube: *Cuvântul*, the Rise of the Right, and Mihail Sebastian," *Shvut: Jewish Problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe* 16, 1993, p. 306.

⁴⁵ "Culpa fericită" 22 no. 6, 7, 8, 1992.

⁴⁶ Michael Shafir, "The Man They Love to Hate: Norman Manea's 'Snail's House' Between Holocaust and Gulag," *East European Jewish Affairs* 30/1 2000 pp. 60-81.

⁴⁷ Manea, "Happy Guilt."

Eliade and his group, Manea wanted to highlight the calamity to which the nationalist option had led in the 1930s, while making some comparisons with “the more recent communist catastrophe.”⁴⁸

This comparative dimension presents an ironic aspect, since so much bitterness was later strewn over the question of whether there had been a “red Holocaust” *comparable* to the Holocaust, in its common acception as the systematic murder of approximately 6 million Jews. Most of Romania’s liberal intellectuals were to come down on the side of the red Holocaust, defending its comparability to the “other” Holocaust. In certain cases the Jews, generically, were implicitly or explicitly accused of attempting to confiscate “the right to victimhood” from those victimized by communism, through the Holocaust industry.⁴⁹ Yet initially, in 1992, some Romanian intellectuals objected to the comparison between the horrors of communism that most Romanians had experienced in the flesh and wanted unmasked, and the terror and brutalities of Nazism—and by extension of (extreme) nationalism—because the comparison tainted figures such as Eliade.⁵⁰

After “Happy Guilt,” Manea came under attack for daring to “blaspheme” against a cultural hero whose stature was enhanced by his wide recognition in the West, his militant anticommunism, and his status as *persona non grata* in Romania during the communist period.⁵¹ Mircea Iorgulescu observed that it was as if “a general mobilization had been sounded, as a result of which Norman Manea was represented almost unanimously as a monster making an attempt on the ‘great values’ of Romanian culture.”⁵² Some liberal publications characterized him derisively as “an American leaning on the White House,” and “a policeman of the spirit.”⁵³

⁴⁸ “Blasfemie și carnaval,” *Despre clovni: dictatorul și artistul* (Cluj: Apostrof, 1997), p. 208.

⁴⁹ See for example Nicolae Manolescu, “Precizări necesare: pe marginea unei polemici,” *România literară* no. 12, March 29-April 4, 2000.

⁵⁰ Such a comparison was seen as a “luxury of memory” that the Romanians could not then afford. See Manea, “Blasfemie,” p. 209.

⁵¹ Some of Eliade’s works began to be published again in Romania in the late 1960s, but he never set foot in the country after the war despite very much wishing to do so. The reasons are not completely clear. In the summer of 1970, he seems to have changed his mind about a visit because of flooding that year. See Mircea Handoca, *Viața lui Mircea Eliade* 2nd ed. (Cluj: Dacia, 2000), p. 136.

Nevertheless, some authors wrote in agreement with Manea. As the debates continued and rekindled over various literary pretexts, more and more persons became involved. “Against Eliade” and “for Manea,” (much as later for Sebastian), were Leon Volovici, Adrian Marino, Matei Călinescu, Ion Negoitescu, Virgil Nemoianu, Marta Petreu, Andrei Cornea, Michael Shafir, Mircea Mihăieș, Nicolae Balotă, George Voicu, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Zigu Ornea, and Al. Vlad.⁵⁴ “For Eliade” and against his detractors wrote an equally distinguished list, among whom were Monica Lovinescu, Gabriela Adameșteanu, Ionuț Jugureanu, and George Carpat-Focke.⁵⁵

In the debates against Manea, as in the later ones discussed above, there were certain key figures. Among these Monica Lovinescu held an important place. The daughter of a famous interwar critic, Lovinescu had been living in Parisian exile since the 1940s. As a former producer of cultural programs for Radio France and Radio Free Europe, she had kept Romanians alive culturally during the black decades of the 1990s. Many had listened avidly on short-wave radios to her broadcasts.⁵⁶

In her March 1992 article, “Cîteva confuzii” (A Few Confusions), and again in 1998 in “Nu e momentul” (This is Not the Right Moment) Lovinescu argued that Eliade’s political mistakes, although regrettable, were limited to a couple of years out of a long career. She defended his decision not to admit openly to his earlier fascist views while living in exile in France and the United States. Westerners—who easily forgave a communist, even a Stalinist past—were merciless, Lovinescu wrote, toward anyone who had erred in the other direction, embracing fascism. In her view, complete honesty on Eliade’s part would have prevented him from pursuing an exceptional intellectual career. In this case the end justified the means. Her vindication of Eliade was categorical. She did not address his failure to reflect upon his political past in the long period after Eliade’s achievement of Western prominence at the University of

⁵² *Dilema*, May 21-27, 1993, cited in Manea, p. 210.

⁵³ Cited in Manea, “Blasfemie,” p. 222, note 19.

⁵⁴ “Norman Manea către Alexandru Vlad” *Vatra* 8, 2001, p. 94.

⁵⁵ George Carpat-Focke, “Mircea Eliade, cultura și inchizițiile,” 22, 3, no. 12, March 27- April 2, 1992; Ionuț Jugureanu, “Dizertație asupra unei acuze: Culpă fericită,” 22, 3, no. 11, March 20 – 26, 1992

Chicago. Finally, her defense became also an offensive against other Romanian intellectuals who had suppressed the truth about *their* communist pasts, and closed the circle by exposing the collaborationism of such writers with the dictatorial regime toppled in 1989.

Lovinescu distinguished her defense of Eliade and other fascist Romanian intellectuals from the vulgar anti-Semitism of *Europa, România Mare* and other such xenophobic publications convincingly. Her point overall was that communism had lasted so much longer in Romania, wreaking so much more damage, that communist collaborators ought to be the ones under investigation and attack, and not the classy interwar intelligentsia known as the new generation, whose members had been ideological supporters of the Iron Guard only briefly; in Romania at least communism had been a much greater, longer-lasting evil than the brief fascist phenomenon.⁵⁷ This line of argument, exonerating those with a fascist past by invoking those with a communist one—recurred in the Romanian debates later on. It was used not only in Eliade's defense, but also to justify retroactively Emile Cioran's past enthusiasm for fascism.⁵⁸

Many of the articles in the Manea debate appeared in the weekly *22*, which had also run the Romanian version of his *New Republic* essay in three installments. The periodical itself did not maintain neutrality. At first the editors appeared open to Manea's ideas. An editor of the publication, Dan Pavel, had prefaced the first installment of the article positively, finding it "nuanced and subtle."⁵⁹ But midstream, *22* had a change of heart perhaps owing to the pressure exercised by public opinion, including hate mail and threats they received. The important element in this shift of position, were the more measured criticisms expressed by ranking cultural personalities. Having been criticized along with Manea, Pavel recanted his initial appreciation, specifying that Manea's views differed from those of *22*,

⁵⁶ See Vasile Popovici, "Monica Lovinescu despre sine," *România literară* no. 19, May 17 2000.

⁵⁷ Monica Lovinescu, "Cîteva confuzii," *22*, no. 10, March 13-19, 1992, and "Nu e momentul," *România literară* no. 9, March 11-17, 1998.

⁵⁸ See for example Gheorghe Grigurcu's article "Cât de cioranieni au fost extremiștii," *România literară* no. 51-52 (1996). Grigurcu accused N. Tertulian, who had written about Cioran's youthful right-wing radicalism, of not renouncing his own (left-wing) radicalism as quickly as Cioran had his.

⁵⁹ Dan Pavel, "Cît de tolerantă este societatea deschisă?" *22* no. 6, 1992. See also Manea, p. 210.

and from his own. In an article entitled “Mircea Eliade: A Hero of Our Time,” a review of Eliade’s memoirs, Pavel presented Eliade’s adherence to the Iron Guard sympathetically.⁶⁰

In her introduction to Lovinescu’s “A Few Confusions” in the issue of March 13-19, 1992, Gabriela Adameșteanu, the editor-in-chief of *22*, assumed responsibility for choosing to publish Manea’s article. Adameșteanu was asking “if not now, when?” might be the right moment to examine and recuperate our history such as it is? At the same time, she thanked Lovinescu for her way of treating the topic; Lovinescu’s views were, Adameșteanu wrote, “just as so many of us had expected [and hoped for].”⁶¹

A solution to the Eliade dilemma had emerged. Picking up on Lovinescu’s exoneration of intellectual fascism by recourse to the communist comparison, Adameșteanu pointed out later that the right wing nationalist model in Romanian culture exemplified by Eliade was not alone in derailing Romania from democratic politics. She meant, of course, communism, and she illustrated the point by listing the names of Stalinist communists, all of them of Jewish extraction. The ethnic dimension added yet another theme to these debates, one that was to recur often enough.⁶²

Discussions about intellectuals’ guilt and responsibility during the interwar and communist periods have been occurring during the entire transition period up to the present moment; and authors have engaged in different discursive strategies. The article “Mircea Eliade, cultura și inchizițiile” (Mircea Eliade, Culture, and the Inquisitions) (1992) represents another tack that came to be used in Eliade’s defense—and against his detractors.⁶³ Here George Carpat-Focke accused Norman Manea of being a communist-style censor, by tying political analysis to the scientific and literary one. One of the few

⁶⁰ See Dan Pavel, “Cîteva precizări,” *22* no. 8, 1992, and “Mircea Eliade: Un erou al timpului nostru,” *22* no. 11, 1992. For criticism of Dan Pavel see Ionuț Jugureanu, “Dizertații asupra unei acuze: culpa fericită,” *22*, no 11, March 20-26, 1992. Jugureanu considered it an insult to Eliade, the creator of a “philosophical-religious and metaphysical oeuvre,” that Pavel had dared to compare him with Karl Marx, “at most a good economist who had penned [merely] writings with political connotations.”

⁶¹ *22*, no.10, March 13-19, 1992, p. 13.

⁶² See Manea

⁶³ George Carpat-Focke, “Mircea Eliade, cultura și inchizițiile” *22* no. 12, March 27-April 2, 1992.

modes of resistance that writers, academics, and literary critics had attempted during the communist era was based on the claim that professional lives and creativity functioned autonomously, thus allowing an escape through professionalism from the coercive system in which everyone's life unfolded. This idea was a version of the "ketman," articulated by Czeslaw Milosz."⁶⁴

Forced to comply politically, communist intellectuals claimed to do so in transparently meaningless rituals that anyone but the authorities could identify as superficial and a mere necessity of survival; their real selves and opinions were expressed in their (apolitical) literary or scientific work. The best literary critics pursued this project by judging works solely on their artistic merits and not on the ideological background of their authors—as in the earlier, Stalinist, model. The charge of reviving a value system, in which an author's political biography mattered, was equated with perpetrating "new spiritual purges." This, just after the end of communism with its real purges, and heavy handed constraints could easily disgrace a writer such as Norman Manea, and by extension exonerate Eliade, his youthful fascism and subsequent silence notwithstanding.

Somewhat later, the charge of judging a work according to the politics of its writer grew heavier. Thinking independently and against the grain of Western opinion amounted, some Romanians thought, to running the risk of being called fascists and apologists for unsavory right-wing ideas and movements. Eventually, this line of argument crystallized into an angry critique of imported standards of "political correctness." Florin Constantiniu, a historian of the 20th century, recalling the Voicu episode, warned in 2001 against a new "inquisitorial Stalinist spirit" emerging in the post-1989 period, and against "the gradual establishment in our cultural and scientific life of a climate of 'vigilant political correctness,' 'witch-hunting,' [and] of seeing all kinds of political subtexts where they don't exist." This kind of suspicious atmosphere, he cautioned, harmed both scientific research and Romania's image.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*

⁶⁵ "O manifestare țirzie a spiritului inchizitorial Stalinist: răspuns D-lui. Dr. Ioan Constantinescu." *Adevărul literar și artistic* (ALA) no. 577, 24 July, 2001 p. 2.

In the daily *Adevărul*, Cristian Tudor Popescu raised the issue of “political correctness” in a travel article after a trip to the United States, with a much broader audience. He had understood only there that “Westerners’ disproportionate interest in various categories of marginals” was applied not only to Romania so as to denigrate its image; this attitude prevailed in American society itself within a set of Stalinist regulations regarding women, Jews, and blacks. It was impossible to criticize the work of one of these protected groups, just as it was illegal in France to claim, like the Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy, that the Holocaust had not occurred.⁶⁶ (The presence of Garaudy in these debates is symptomatic of the historiographic problems discussed in an earlier working paper. These certainly extend to knowledge about the Holocaust and Holocaust denial.)⁶⁷ There are huge differences between Constantiniu’s worries about changes in the intellectual climate and Popescu’s perceptions of American practices and norms of public behavior. Nevertheless, they represent nuances within a representation of democracy as the right to argue anything at all; the right of a the majority to dominate regardless of minorities’ rights; and the right of consecrated cultural elites to shape public opinion without challenge or alternative.

Post-Communist Intellectual Identity

Although the controversies I have discussed in most detail have focused on Mircea Eliade, there have been similar ones about other intellectuals who belonged to the same interwar “new generation.” Particularly important in this sense are the philosophers Nae Ionescu, Emil Cioran and Constantin Noica. Their pasts and anti-democratic ideas would best be left forgotten, the argument went, and discussing them openly would turn into an attack on Romania’s precious identity myths.⁶⁸ Some have posited, just as in the case of Eliade, that their brilliant philosophy, even if associated with the unsavory fascist right, was in no way as disastrous as the culture of the left with its puny intellectual tradition.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Cristian Tudor Popescu, “Americii i s-a urît cu binele,” *Adevărul* no. 2471, May 11, 1998.

⁶⁷ See for example, Nicolae Manolescu, “Holocaustul și gulagul” *România literară* no. 9, 11-17 March, 1998.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209, and Marta Petreu, “Laignel-Lavastine: metoda ‘franceză’ (I),” 22, no. 26, 25 June-July 1, 2002.

Who were these three exactly, and why have they become so fashionable and so crucial to post communist Romanian intellectuals' identity? Nae Ionescu was professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of Bucharest in the interwar years. He also directed the opposition newspaper *Cuvântul*. Under his direction, the paper metamorphosed in the mid-1930s into an Iron Guard mouthpiece. Ionescu was by all accounts a charismatic, hypnotic, even seductive figure. In the 1920s and 30s he trained many Romanian university students—including Cioran, Eliade, and Noica—in philosophy. He also hired some of them as columnists for *Cuvântul*. Thus philosophical concerns and politics overlapped in their interactions; Ionescu was not just an academic mentor, but widely considered the mentor of the “new generation,” in an all-encompassing way. His turn toward the Iron Guard decisively influenced many of his disciples.

Cioran who was like Eliade one of Ionescu's philosophy students, left Romania as a diplomat of the Sima-Antonescu government to Vichy in early 1941, never to return. He remained in France, and became famous, even a classic of French letters. He is studied in France and in American departments of Romance Languages not only as a philosopher, but also as a stylist of the French language. Cioran's Romanian popularity after 1990 is beyond any doubt, and perhaps equals that of Eliade. As Michael Finkenthal has put it, “in Romania everybody seems to write about ... [Cioran] these days.”⁷⁰ In his youth Cioran, studying in Germany in 1933, became wildly enthusiastic about Hitler and saw in Nazism a possible model for Romania's emergence out of its “smallness” or backwardness.

Unlike Eliade and Cioran, the third of Nae Ionescu's famous disciples, Constantin Noica, remained and lived out his life in Romania. He was imprisoned by the communist regime for his fascist past, but was freed in 1964. After his release, he was able to practice philosophy again due to the relaxation of Stalinist standards of cultural control and to the nationalist turn that the Ceaușescu regime

⁶⁹ Gheorghe Grigurcu, “POLEMICI: Cum putem fi Europeni” *România literară* no. 47 (1996). He was referring to Eliade, Ionescu, and Cioran in a critique of Adrian Marino's book *Intrarea în Europa?*

⁷⁰ Michael Finkenthal, “Adding Shades to the Cioran Portrait,” in William Kluback and Michael Finkenthal, *The Temptation of Emile Cioran* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 27.

was taking.⁷¹ Like Nae Ionescu a generation before, Noica became mentor to a group of young disciples whom he trained in a course of non-Marxist philosophy. Members of the “Păltiniș group,” named after the location of the mountain cabin where Noica lived modestly and held informal seminars, saw themselves as descendents of the interwar “new generation” even before the events of December 1989. After that date, however, they became quite powerful. Their intellectual genealogy could be asserted publicly and used to establish their credentials and new institutions.⁷² The two most important personalities of the Păltiniș group, Andrei Pleșu and Gabriel Liiceanu, were also trained in philosophy, continuing in the tradition of the interwar “new generation.”

Pleșu, a specialist in aesthetics, became Minister of Culture in the first post-communist government, and later Foreign Minister under Constantinescu; he resigned from this post in 1999 and returned to the directorship of New Europe College, the prestigious institute for advanced studies of which he is the founder. He is also the founding editor of the weekly *Dilema*. Gabriel Liiceanu founded Humanitas Publishing House just days after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. Humanitas took over the headquarters of the old communist party press, Editura Politică, and became one of the most influential presses in post-communist Romania. It quickly developed a rich non-fiction list of original books and translations in the humanities and social sciences, among other series. The profile of Humanitas bears a close resemblance to parts of the Noicans’ cultural project of the 1980s. They envisioned translations of philosophy classics and contemporary western texts to supplement and hopefully replace the canned patriotard Marxism practiced in the Romanian social sciences and humanities of those years.

Humanitas has made its most spectacular mark with new editions of Romanian classics from the interwar period. These had been largely forbidden after the communists came to power. Among them are, as stated on the Humanitas web site, “five great interwar authors”: the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, Eugen Ionescu (Eugène Ionesco), Eliade, Noica and Cioran—to which Humanitas has exclusive

⁷¹ Verdery discusses Noica’s opportunities during the Ceaușescu regime, which also encouraged the rise of the vulgar nationalism of the “protochronists.” p. 204

publication rights.⁷³ All these authors had begun their brilliant careers as young rebels against a Romanian establishment which, at the time, was dominated by a previous generation of thinkers, writers, and politicians. Except for Eugène Ionesco, in their youth all these authors were concerned with issues of Romanian spirituality and with ways in which Romania could break onto the European cultural scene on an equal footing with the dominant cultures. Three of them took these concerns into the political arena, writing and acting in sympathy with fascism, Nazism, and the Romanian Iron Guard.

Liiceanu has been criticized for republishing these authors' politically controversial texts without much, or any, prefatory contextualizing material thus creating the impression of their unquestionable "classicism" and inviting an uncritical reading of their work and of their politics.⁷⁴ He has also been accused of skillfully manipulating and publicizing his privileged relationship to Noica, thus "exploiting" it to advance his position in post-communist Romania. One critic noted Liiceanu's "ambitious discourse of self-legitimation" based on the position of "disciple-in-chief" (of Constantin Noica).⁷⁵

Liiceanu, Pleșu, and other participants in the "Păltiniș seminars" at Noica's mountain retreat are undoubtedly among the most talented, well-educated, and accomplished men of their generation. Moreover, they had ideas about how to challenge and eventually replace the bankrupt cultural practices and institutions of the grim Ceaușescu years. At odds with the harsher interpretation of Tismăneanu and Pavel, Katherine Verdery has argued that during the last decade of communism the Noicans attempted to confront political power through culture, providing "the possibility for articulating "an alternative vision ..., and, through this, of transforming society from within."⁷⁶

⁷² On the Păltiniș group during and after communism see Tismăneanu and Pavel, "Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries," pp. 428-431.

⁷³ See the Humanitas web site: <http://www.humanitas.ro/desprenoi.html>

⁷⁴ See for example Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, "Reveniri," *Observator Cultural*, no. 10, May 2-8, 2000, and Tismăneanu and Pavel, "Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries," p. 428.

⁷⁵ Caius Dobrescu, "Cu Walter Benjamin despre 'fascismul' d-lui Gabriel Liiceanu (I)" *Observator Cultural* no. 8, April 18-24, 2000, p. 8.

⁷⁶ See Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, p. 259. She points out that Romanian authorities harassed the Noicans who "engaged in actions ... very rare in 'passive' Romania." p. 293.

The group's training and charisma, but also the widely held perception—matching their self-perception—that they were the direct and rightful heirs to the legacy of the 1930s new generation intellectuals, eased their way into positions of power—both cultural and political—after 1989. Lacking a substantial dissident movement, and a “Havel” or “Michnih” of its own, the Romanian public embraced the group's exceptional intelligence and their privileged relationship to the pre-communist world of ideas (through Noica, their mentor). Marginal philosophers to begin with, the Noicans, and some other intellectuals, were almost expected to become “philosopher kings” and were encouraged to lead from the beginning of the transition period. This filiation, and their resistance-through-culture during the Ceaușescu regime, explains in large part the trust they still enjoy from the high-brow reading public.

Genealogy is also responsible, at least in part, for the defensive reactions of members of this group to the disclosure of the fascization of Romanian intellectual life in the interwar years. Eliade, Cioran, Noica, and Nae Ionescu had been seen as European world-class intellectuals, only temporarily defeated by communism, but succeeding in the long run by fleeing from it or outsmarting it. Many contemporary Romanian intellectuals have also displayed ambivalence toward examinations of the Holocaust, seeing these as inextricably tied to a “Holocaust lobby.” They have insisted on a symmetrical assessment of Nazism and Communism, Gulag and Holocaust, and in a sense excused Romanian anti-Semitism by recourse to the idea of Judeo-communism.

An open discussion of the fascist politics of Romanian interwar intellectuals could only begin during the present uncensored publishing conditions. Yet uneasy revelations about intellectual forefathers such as Eliade, Cioran and Noica could also be construed as endangering the credibility and symbolic power of the intellectuals who are their heirs. The overwhelming counter-attack against George Voicu's critique was only partially based on its content: he had noted an anti-Semitic undercurrent in contemporary intellectual life based on the defensive reactions elicited by disclosures of Eliade's early fascism. The backlash to Voicu seemed to be also a reaction of the powerful to a challenge brought by an isolated disempowered critical voice.

But honest perplexity is another important factor in the culture wars: how can those who had been highly critical of the nationalism and “hooliganism” of the Ceaușescu regime and of its official intellectuals, now be accused of a subtle hooliganism of their own? Their audience largely agrees and stands up for them. The liberal cultural dissidents of the 1980s, having successfully cultivated the trust of their readers based on claims to sincerity (by contrast to the plain insincerity of official communist discourse) during the previous period, continue to enjoy the somewhat uncritical acceptance of the educated public. The spokesmen of Romanian liberalism and their audience are engaged in an ardent search for a useable past. This draws them together in solidarity. It also draws them toward a tabooization of criticism of intellectual figures reviled by the communists, who have come to be seen as precious and necessary ancestors that must remain above reproach.