

Crowding Out: Experiences of Difference, Discourses of Identity and Political Mobilization in Interwar Transylvania*

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Abstract: *Parties in opposition in interwar Romania frequently relied on extra-parliamentary action, mainly mass mobilization campaigns to prove their popular support. The National Peasant Party employed a discourse of identity as means of politics of identity bound to negative everyday experiences of its leaders and supporters, delimiting itself from the Old Kingdom and its representatives the liberals. The characteristics of Transylvanians and Old Kingdom Romanians were essential in the concepts of inherently democratic, Transylvanians and oligarchic, despotic, Balkan elite Old Kingdom ones. As a result Transylvanians emerged as the authentic Romanians, whose destiny was to liberate Old Kingdom peasants from foreign rule. Besides, the party used the memory and experience of the revolution of 1918 to legitimize the use of extralegal means against the liberal governments and gradually redefined democracy in this sense. This set of factors generated a self-feeding cycle in which mass mobilization reinforced the necessity for a politics of identity that positioned the party – identical with the nation – in a binary opposition to the “others”, a process that drove NPP farther from parliamentarism, contributing to the fall of the supposedly parliamentary system.*

The mountainous region of the Țara Moșilor on the Western frontier of the historical province of Transylvania occupies a key position in the Romanian national imagery. As the scene of numerous uprisings and of fierce battles led by heroic figures, the home of people who were seen as the essential Romanians, it is treated as one of the most national regions. The inhabitants of Mogoș, a small village surrounded by high mountains in the very region, proved their adherence to the warlike traditions of their forefathers when on 7 May 1928 they attacked the office of the mayor, expelled its occupants, including the mayor and the village notary alike the two gendarmes guarding the post and elevated a new leadership of the village. When the gendarmes returned with reinforcements and most of the rioters were dispersed into the woods they interrogated the captured locals. The officials were obviously interested in the reasons of such an incident and one of the participants readily gave them the answer. The locals were returning from the great assembly of the National Peasant Party (NPP) held the day before at Alba Iulia, under the spell of the heated atmosphere and the oath they took to fight the Government of the National Liberal Party (NLP) with every available means. Or as the informant formulated,

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