

**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI CLUJ NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE ISTORIE ȘI FILOSOFIE**

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

Antisemitismul în imaginarul colectiv în România în secolul XX

- SUMMARY -

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-2011-

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Key words: Antisemitism; Collective Imagery; Oral History; Jews, National Identity; Modernity; Jewish Mass Grave; Absolute Stranger.

“- Ich bin ein Jude. (I am a Jew.)

- Ein Jude? Grausamer Zufall! (A Jew? Terrible accident)”¹

Strangers, gentiles, or just different, the Jews have always been a ‘terrible accident’ as neighbors, as friends, as Jews. The strangeness of the Jew was not to be found in the construction of the national borders, and still, all of those who sought to be authentic, pure and spiritual feared its power. The Jew remained the absolute stranger in the closest intimacy of the Christian or of the liberal, of the nation or of the Communist. To meet a Jew means for a gentile to know a world. “Jewishness” is part and parcel of the gentiles’ world understanding (*Weltanschauung*). And that was since two thousand years. Baptism, citizenship and friendship have always been, for the gentile, three ways to convert a Jew. But each conversion implies a breaking with the past. And yet, the Jew does not know this conversion: his memory is the memory of Jerusalem, the memory of the exodus from Egypt.

Nevertheless, the story of the Jews in Romania is a different one, indeed a story of not pursuing the conversion. The Jews from Romania who lived in the world of the 19th century were part of the orthodox Jewish living in the world of the ‘Other Europe’. That was a world of the national state creating peasants and wishing for the peasants to become Jews (apoliens to become mercuriens, Yuri Slezkine): the state, the church and the intellectuals did not pursue their citizenship. But the Jews tried to stay the same: the Jews of the shtetls, neither rural nor urban, the orthodox Jews, neither Romanians, nor cosmopolitans - they tried to stay the same amidst falling empires and raising national states, whether immigrating to America, to Western Europe or to Palestine.

¹ Gotthold Lessing, *Nathan der Weise*, 1779;

At that time, another story emerged: the story of the Romanian Jew. In spite of the international pressure, Romania was the last country of Europe to grant citizenship to its Jews. Moses Gaster was not a Romanian citizen but in 1885, when he was expelled, a Romanian passport was handed to him. Norman Manea, a Romanian citizen, was deported in 1941 to Transnistria and a repatriation note was handed to him in 1945. Expelled without a country, and repatriated without patria - that is, literally, the story of the Romanian Jew.

One of the main arguments of this paper is that the image of the Jew was formed in the close intimacy with the image of being Romanian. The discussion over Romanian national identity and the unitary state begins in the second half of the 19th century and continuities of this collective project in the 20th century are monitored throughout the paper. The story of Antisemitism began in Romania by betraying the 1848 dream of becoming a European. Being a Romanian has been seen in the images of flesh and spirit, ethnicity and Christianity; it was then when the metaphor of the body (“trup”) came to represent the unity of the country (“țara”), and the unity of the nation became a metaphor to represent the unity of the individual identity. The search for unity, authenticity and the purity of the body opened the drama of hyphenated identity: the drama of the Romanian Jew. The construction of the national state meant the exclusion of the stranger (Z. Baumann). The Jew did not belong to the country-body and has its own avatar in the image of the absolute stranger; he is as radical as the Gypsy, or a guest as the German, a not-emancipated person as the woman, a stranger for the ethnic Romanian as were their neighbors. The essential core of this strangeness implied that the Jew remained in the intimacy of the Romanian as the one who cannot be converted under any circumstances. Therefore, in the national imagery, the Jew is represented as non-baptized and not-citizen, both expressing the exclusion of „dirtiness” while the body of the country is seen through the metaphor of the cleanliness and authenticity.

Antisemitism is a modern ideology. That is another understanding of the present paper and it is theoretically argued over the last chapter. According to some authors, Antisemitism has always existed, even though in different shapes and

different intensities. (e.g. Leon Poliakov, Jacob Katz, Robert Wistrich, Walter Laqueur, Jerome A. Chanes). Others have stated that Antisemitism is a modern phenomenon, as Christianity never asked for Jewish extermination (Ismar Schorsch). Nevertheless, the mistrusting in the blood conversion in the Spain at the end of 15th century shows that very defined periods, as pre-modernity and modernity, and ideologies that belong to them, as racism, do not exist. A critic of the universal history of the Jews as a historical concept as well as a critic of Antisemitism as an essentialist concept has been recently imposed.

„Identifying ‘antisemitism’ as a timeless ‘spirit’ possessing an ‘essence’ that was a fairly permanent feature of human social behavior implied that that spirit could exist independently of what any particular ‘antisemite’ said or did.[...] In other words, whereas initially ‘antisemitism’ had been understood as the product of actions undertaken by ‘antisemites’, now cause and effect are reversed: the actions of ‘antisemitism’, a quality that had existed long before it had been given its current name.”²

Remarkable studies of Antisemitism in Romania followed general historical frameworks, resonating with methodologies and concepts from all over the Central-Eastern European space. Therefore, the present paper is partially inspired and based upon such historical studies, as the Romanian Holocaust (Radu Ioanid, Jean Ancel), the particularities of the Romanian intellectual construction of Antisemitism (Armin Heinen, Leon Volovici, Carol Iancu), the Romanian extreme right (Zigu Ornea, Marius Bucur, Gabriel Andreescu, Geroge Voicu) and the public discourse (Michael Schafir). The paper completes the understanding of Antisemitism in Romania as a consequence of Romanian collective identity constructions, either concomitant or concurrent, both successive and dissonant.

Each historical thesis builds its own chronology, and so does the present one. Initially limited to the 20th century, the project found its starting point in the 19th century. Using a meta-analysis of the literature on Antisemitism and an in-depth lecture of the literary texts, I have nuanced the image of the Jew. None of the chosen themes of the present study looks into the Holocaust from Romania and, the

² David Engel, “Away from a definition of Antisemitism. An Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description” in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010; p.45.

understanding of Antisemitism does not place Holocaust as an apologetic moment in a diachronically crescendo. Even the arguments on the extreme right are sporadic. Because I have used images in the long term perspective, the timeframes and the pretexts that I used are symptomatic for introducing more ample themes and concepts, and therefore, the years of 1930 and the first years of 40, appear mostly under-represented. When, in the historian's atelier the long-term perspective is used, the possibility of explaining change is put into question, as the work implies monolithically and atemporal structures; that would be one of the shortcomings of the present paper. Indeed, I looked to the imaginary Jew and to the imaginary Romanian as pivotal constructions (Reinhart Koselleck) that appear in the second half of the 19th century and are still to be found in the Romanian collective imaginary of the late 20th century, along with other constructions such as country and exile, rooting and reburies, ("The Politics of the Dead bodies", Katherine Verdery, 1999), each of them as different ways to imagine belonging and loyalty.

The present topic has an interdisciplinary approach; social and cultural history concepts are discussed in the first two parts and oral history studies are to be found in the last two parts. The uncovering of the Jewish mass grave where the Jews were shot dead in April 1945 is by itself a case study of oral history, through the corroboration of oral with archival sources, all to be placed in the history of the Holocaust of the Other Europe. Generally speaking, the present paper aims at focusing more on authenticity than events, more on the understandings rather than facts and more on the metaphors of the truth rather than on truths.

I dealt with Antisemitism in Romania not as a topic to be added to the Romanian national history landscape, but rather as a perspective of the past that needs to be dramatically changed. This turning is made once we understand that the tension of cohabitation between Jews and Romanians is central to the project of collective identity construction. I share the understanding of Antisemitism as circumscribed by modernity, without being always the same; the present historical study emphasizes relevant distinctions between Romania and the Occidental countries, even the Central-European countries, from the perspective of contingent understandings of

Antisemitism. The history of the Jews from Romania is also a story of auto-emancipation as integration, but it is at the same time a story of Zionism, emigration and constant expulsion, materialized through denying of citizenship, pogroms, deportations to Transnistria, the barging of the Jews to Israel after 1948 until 1970. This is not a story of emancipation, of liberalism and of the integration of the Jews. Romania was the last European country which grants citizenship to its Jews and it has a belated debate on its participation to the Holocaust in comparison to the other countries of Central Europe. Additionally, it was a country which used Holocaust as a counter-argument to Gulag, very similar to other Eastern European countries: „If Romania has hardly begun to think about its role in the Holocaust, this is not just because the country is a few years behind the rest of Europe in confronting the past. It is also because it really is a little bit different. The project to get rid of the Jews was intimately tied to the longstanding urge to "Romanianize" the country in a way that was not true of anti-Semitism anywhere else in the region. For many Romanians the Jews were the key to the country's all-consuming identity problem, for which history and geography were equally to blame.” (Tony Judt)

The paper opens with a discussion over the Romanian modernity which is understood as a history of time lag and which introduces a relevant distinction in the cleavage between Antisemitism and anti-Judaism. If the last concept is the expression of a wishful ghettoized living by Christians and Jews as well, – both trying to keep the purity of the body and of the spirit – the modernity imagines a way of coming together (H. Arendt). The modernity envisages one community where liberalism and Enlightenment bring together the Jews and the Gentiles. But the Romanian case is different. I argue that modernity is an ideology and that iliberalism and anti-modernity are essential in defining the Romanian national state. Up to the World War I, one does not talk about neo-traditionalism in Romania or modernization. Indeed, the changes that have occurred during the 19th century are dramatic. I draw upon the thesis of Daniel Chirot with respect to the economic politics in the 19th century which show that Romania enters the sphere of influence of the Occident through the Adrianopol Treaty of 1829. Hence, the country did not follow a pattern of modernization but

became an agricultural colony of the West; its survival is dependent on its agricultural capacity, and immobility and iliberalism contribute to constructing the nation as the image of the Romanian peasant. Therefore, I argue that the time lag and the diffusion process from West to East fail in understanding the specific difference and the comparison is meant not to explain the time lag but to explain a difference. There are cleavages in the nationalist intellectual construction and, nevertheless, they are important, but they do exist among large tendencies, on which the present paper emphasize. All in all, the cleavages in the intellectual sphere, such as the thoughts of Moses Gaster or Eugen Lovinescu or later Norman Manea, Matei Călinescu or Adrian Marino, were options for 'a larger identity', a European one, and options for liberalism; they all carried their loneliness and their non-likeliness.

I go back to old stories in order to tell them again in a different key. The story of „The Down Pillow” (Vasile Voiculescu), the play „Take, Ianke and Cadîr” (Victor Ioan Popa), the short stories “A Torch for Easter” (Ion Luca Caragiale) or „Îțic Ștrul, the Deserter” (Liviu Rebreanu) are all old images, images of conversion, betraying and sublimating Judaism thorough Christian love. They are all old Christian obsessions with an unconvertible Jew and with the impossibility of this conversion. Later, during the 19th century, the stories would talk about the impossibility of blood conversion and the 20th century about the impossibility of flesh conversion. The image of the Jew agony is actually to be found in the Christian agony.

The apex of my field-research is the discovery of a Jewish mass murder in northern Romania, (Maramures) which took place in April of 1945. 14 young Jewish men, who had returned from labor camps on the Ukrainian front, were assembled in the center of the village. They were then escorted near to the Ukrainian border and all but one was shot dead. My article documents their story through oral accounts of the villagers that were corroborated with archival sources. The story has similar features to other stories of collective anti-Semitic violence throughout Eastern Europe during and shortly after the Second World War. The field-research was supported by the international grant awards of The Rothschild Foundation (2009) and The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (2008) and gave me the

opportunity to continue my work and to envision new research directions. Therefore, they contributed to vision of the present study as key to understanding the interrelation between Romanian Antisemitism and national identity.

Each chapter of the present paper has a different relevance for the discussion over Antisemitism in Romania. The uncovering of Jewish mass grave that took place in the spring of 1945, adds to the understanding of the anti-Semitic collective violence in the 'Other Europe'. It is a crime of the neighbors against the Jews part of the history of the mass graves in the nearby of the villages. The story of the Meadowers Jews is a pretext for a discussion "of the other Holocaust" but at the same time is a pretext for the discussion of the politics of memory in Romania after 1945. The politics of memory have been driven the story into non-history. Auschwitz is a central representation of the European Holocaust has been recently reconsidered. (T. Snyder). The research contributes to the understanding of Holocaust in Eastern Europe, effort in which Jan T. Gross, Timothy Snyder or priest Dubois are innovative.

The last part has been constructed based on the question: "Is there something like a Romanian Jew?", similar to the German Jew, the Polish Jew or the Hungarian Jew. The inspiration comes from an interview I conducted with Norman Manea during the summer of 2009 and also from his memorial works. In the novel „The Return of the Hooligan” (2003), three major themes are embodied: Transnistria, Communism and exile. Generally speaking, I explored comparatively the memory of the 1960s generation in Western Europe and the same in Romania. The chanting of the students from Paris in March 1968 „We are all German Jews!” implies an appropriation of the Jewish drama. The same was the case Romania of the 1960s, when the Holocaust began to be known through the drama of the Transylvanian Jewry and the crimes of Hungary and, therefore, Transnistria entered non-history. But it is not only that. The misappropriation of the Jewish suffering can be found in the representation of Romania as savior of the Jews as well as in the slogan „We have all suffered” largely present after 1989. Looking to the „imaginary Jew” as Alain Fienkelkraut has, and to the Western generation of postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), Romania founds itself in an belated effort of “normalizing” its past, trying to assume

the Jewish suffering in a history of cohabitation, and the history of cohabitation in the national history. Once that the nation was defined as being of Romanian ethnicity of Orthodox faith, the Jew did not belong to the 'body of the country.' However, Norman Manea said that *inevitably* one should speak about the Romanian Jew.